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QUEER SCAPES  
PATTERNS AND PROCESSES OF GAY MALE AND LESBIAN  
SPATIALISATION IN VANCOUVER, B.C.

by

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## Abstract

While gay male and lesbian spatialisation has been historicised in some of the literature, and it has been determined that distinct gay male and lesbian neighbourhoods do exist in our inner cities, the processes that are at work in each case have seldom been compared. In the case of Vancouver, British Columbia, the two neighbourhoods in question are the West End (for men) and Grandview-Woodland, or 'The Drive' (for women). Such a comparative analysis yields a number of useful insights, particularly as concerns cultural differences between gay men and lesbians. For instance, historical gay male sexual marketplaces form the kernel of gay male ghettoisation, while lesbians' feminist politics (an early lesbian cultural signifier) orient them more towards countercultural enclaves. Similarities are also encountered, especially with respect to the central role of housing availability in determining permanent gay identification. Specifically, the presence of a large number of single-occupancy apartments is a determining factor in gay male spatialisation, while gay women typically need low-rent, family-oriented housing.

A longitudinal perspective on the production of these gay-identified spaces reveals that their reinscription on Vancouver's landscape is also determined by different processes. The gay West End emerges as a landscape that reflects much more openly a gay presence, with gay-specific institutions and businesses, events, and several visual, cultural cues that inform passers-by of its gay identity. By contrast, The Drive is more subtly gay, and spaces are more likely to be lesbian-friendly or semi-lesbian: unable to support lesbian-only institutions, the women carve their own (sometimes fleeting) spaces out of the existing landscape.

Changes are perceived, however, that indicate that boundaries — both between these two districts, and between these and 'straight' spaces more generally — are shifting and even blurring. Gay male and lesbian politics and culture are being transformed, and the spaces with which they have historically identified may no longer reflect these changes. Consequently, not only is there increasing fluidity between the West End and The Drive (with men and women moving from one to the other), but many gay households are openly foregoing these spaces altogether, opting instead for traditionally straight-identified spaces such as the suburbs. These spatial changes are seen as being indicative of the emergence of a 'queer' politics, which seeks to expose the constructedness of sexuality, and thus de-privilege heteronormativity.

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Last but not least, to my two readers, Dr. David Ley and Dr. Gerry Pratt, thank you for being so helpful in your feedback, and so understanding in allowing me to finish this during this busy time of year.

## 1.1 Introduction

That gays and lesbians are urban-based communities is by now a near-platitude. Homosexual men and women have long known that they are more likely to find one another in high-density inner-city settings; that they are more likely to lead a ‘peaceful’ existence in what is traditionally felt to be more open-minded, urbane, and even anonymous surroundings (eg. Harry 1974; Humphreys 1970; Levine 1979; Lyod & Rowntree 1978). Similarly, social scientists have come to realise this fact: much like turn-of-the-century ethnic minorities, gay male and lesbian communities have developed solid roots and identifiable neighbourhoods in the inner cities of large metropolitan areas, especially in the post-Stonewall era. These neighbourhoods have served many purposes, from being ‘safe’ places for gay men and lesbians, where they are less likely to be harassed, to constituting stable territorial bases from which rich gay cultures and ‘institutionally complete’ gay communities can develop. Furthermore, newer research (and casual observation) has concluded that many large cities harbour spaces that are more closely identified with gay men, and others that are known as lesbian-identified. Yet while both types of neighbourhoods have been studied, the two have rarely been compared, in terms of the processes that lead to their developments, and the landscapes they create.

‘Classic’ writings on the geography of sexual minorities (including those cited above, and others such as Castells (1983), Adler and Brenner (1992), Wolf (1979), and Lauria and

Knopp (1985)) have come under increasing scrutiny by the latest generation of ‘queer geographers’. At the forefront of such criticism are a group of geographers, led by Bell and Valentine (1995), whose edited volume addresses the ‘queering’ of space from a critical gay perspective. Yet, while the study of ‘queer space’ has shifted, from a study in marginality, to a centering of sexuality as a spatial issue, one must not lose sight of the historical processes that have shaped today’s gay-identified neighbourhoods. For it is these histories — and their respective, time-specific *contexts* — that can allow one to discover the differences in the spatialisation of gay men and lesbians. And while they might not reflect the reality of queer spaces today, these (contextualised) neighbourhoods reflect a set of values that reveal much about the construction of (homo)sexualised ‘others’, and their spatial marginalisation by a dominant (heterosexual) society. Furthermore, by comparing and contrasting these processes, for gay men and for lesbians, one can raise (and hopefully answer) interesting questions about the nature and culture of gayness, the forging of gay identities, and the emergence of a ‘queer’ identity.

## 1.2 Purpose of the Study

Vancouver is an ideal city in which to conduct a comparative study of gay male and lesbian neighbourhoods because, unlike many North American (and especially *Canadian*) cities, Vancouver accommodates two distinct and identifiable gay enclaves — one primarily male, the other female. These neighbourhoods are both residential bases and cultural foci for many of the city’s gay men and women. Yet, as I hope to show in the following pages, they evolved — and now function — in quite distinctive ways: ways that not only

reflect the inherent (socio-economic, cultural, and political) differences both between gay men and women themselves, but also in the physical neighbourhoods in question.

The two neighbourhoods are the West End and Grandview-Woodland. The former, gay-male-identified area, is located at the heart of Vancouver's downtown, nestled between Stanley Park, English Bay and the city's central commercial and office districts (see Figure 1.1). Lesbian-identified Grandview-Woodland, also known as 'The Drive' (named after its main artery and cultural hub, Commercial Drive), is a large area located east of downtown Vancouver, beyond Chinatown. Much less densely-populated and metropolitan than the West End, The Drive symbolizes grounded multi-culturalism and family-living, in inner-city Vancouver, and it has been said that "living in Grandview is like living in...a small town" (White 1980: 108).

What I propose to document, is that the development of gay enclaves (or the sexualisation of place) has been rooted in the local context of these two neighbourhoods, in terms of two important variables: the inherent materiality of a place, as well as its cultural history and symbolism. First, the physical characteristics of an area, such as housing type and affordability, and neighbourhood amenities, play an important role in attracting, or in being accessible to, either men or women. Second, cultural factors related to the social construction of a place — more intangible factors, such as political and/or social climate — whether potential or realised, are also significant in determining the predisposition of a place to being (homo)sexualised. I contend that both these variables need to be present in certain combinations in a certain place in order for a gay — male in the one case, female in the other — neighbourhood to emerge.

# Gay Male and Lesbian Neighbourhoods in Vancouver: Study Areas

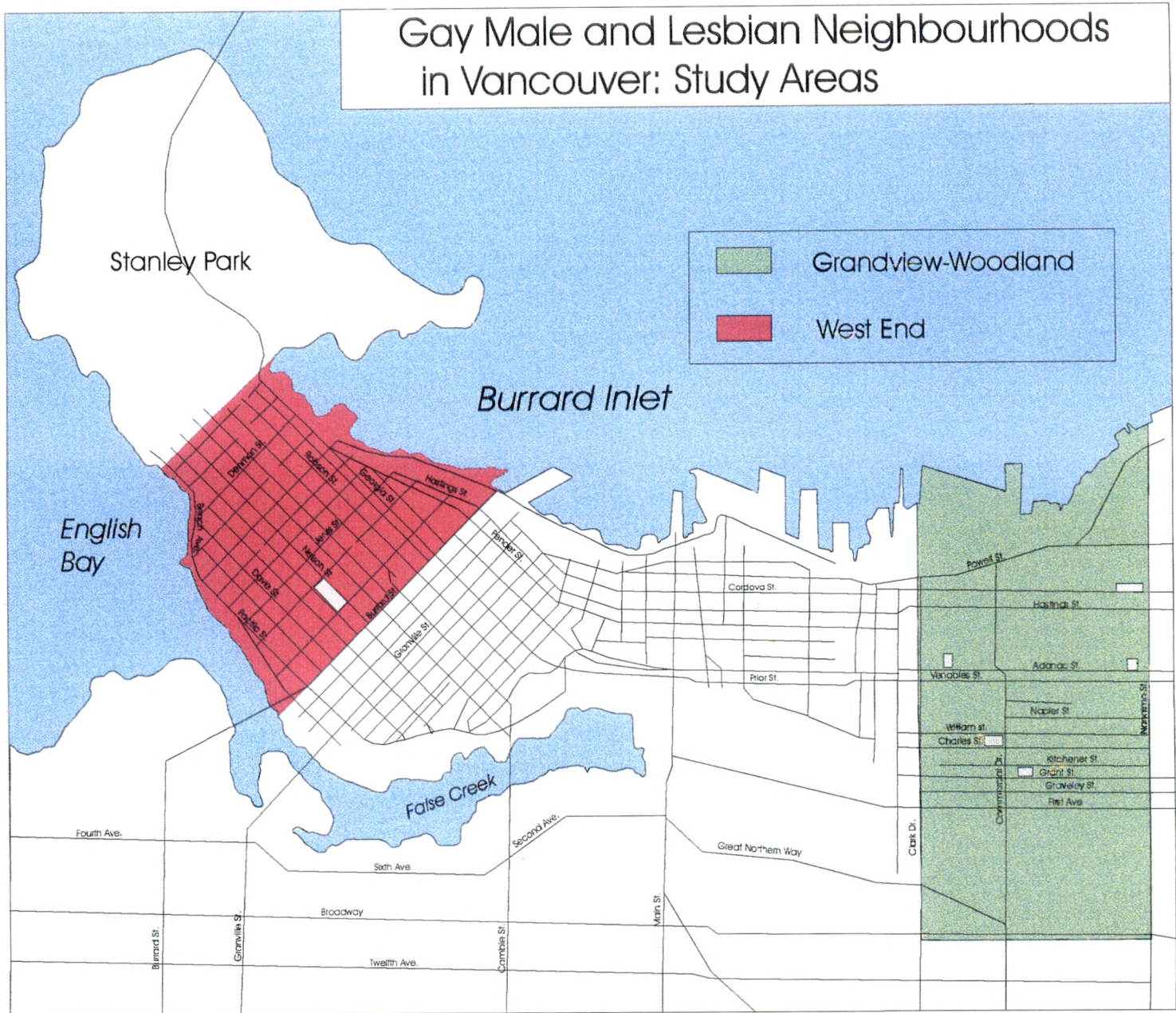


Figure 1.1: Map of Vancouver's gay male and lesbian neighbourhoods

What is in question is the extent to which both of these variables are significant in the development of localised gay communities, and how the interplay between the two changes as the communities mature. For instance, it becomes evident that structural factors, such as housing availability and affordability, are key in determining a neighbourhood's accessibility and initial attraction to men or women. Cultural elements facilitate (or hinder) this process, and become more significant as a district's gayness develops (in terms of attributing it with a gay identity). However, these same structural considerations can resurface when, as a result of increasing demand for housing in these areas, or due to the inevitable rise in the cost of living, they may prohibit some gay households from remaining there. Similarly, cultural elements presumably exist in these neighbourhoods to attract gay men or women to them, at least on a part-time basis. Yet, is further development possible when suitable housing is unavailable for settlement? This dynamic is part of what I wish to explore in this study: of the two variables isolated here, does one prevail over the other? is one more likely to lose hold should the other become too unworkable or hostile? To what extent can a gay-identified neighbourhood evolve if one variable is missing, or weak?

A basic assumption underlies this study: that gay men and lesbians interact with space in very different ways. This occurs primarily through two processes. First, gender privilege has meant that women have been, in several ways, constrained as compared to men. This has been true, most obviously, in terms of economic opportunities, but also in terms of family responsibilities, public safety, and political effectiveness. Second, political and subcultural differences between gay men and lesbians have also had a significant impact

on their relative spatial expression. This incorporates the second set of factors identified earlier, and is manifested in the landscapes that result from gay identification, as well as in the inherent characteristics of a community that gay men or women might be drawn to. These differences, I contend, play a large part in the way gay men and lesbians choose and/or are restricted to a certain place. They also help explain how the space, once appropriated, is used.

Several questions emerge from these problems and assumptions that may be summarised as follows. First, what were the processes that allowed the two sexualised neighbourhoods to emerge? Second, and more generally, what *is* the relationship between sex/sexuality and space? And third, what is the relationship, if any, between the two spaces? A central concern of human geography is the relationship between people and the landscape. In other words, how do specific landscapes accommodate certain social groups? And, in turn, how do people shape their environments and appropriate them? The questions specific to this research, then, are really no different from these: only in this case, the people in question are gay men and women.

### **1.3 Why This? Why Now? Rationalising Research**

There are several good reasons as to why these questions constitute a timely research problem or focus. First, as alluded to earlier, sexuality is a critical issue on the geographical agenda. The topic now appears on conference programs, and current literature contains a growing proportion of articles dealing with issues of sexuality. Moreover, judging from the overwhelming (and varied) attendance at the sessions

sponsored by the Gay, Lesbian and Bisexual Caucus of the Association of American Geographers in San Francisco in 1994, it is a field that has piqued the interest of a wide audience of geographers. Even the funding that has made this research possible, from the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC), suggests that sexuality is indeed on the agenda on many levels — in academia, yes, but also in geographical and planning practice.

Second, and despite all the work that is surfacing, relatively little is known about the relationship between sexuality and space. Empirical research is scarce, particularly in relation to comparing the ways in which gay men and women have historically related to space materially: what is it about a certain *place* that attracts gay men or women? Why do certain *places* seemingly attract gay men, while others attract lesbians? And is there in fact a difference? Have these relationships changed over time? If so, how? These kinds of questions remain largely unanswered, and so are the focus of this research.

Third, the traditional nuclear family is no longer the dominant household form in Western cities. Yet housing and neighbourhoods, for instance, among other social benefits and infrastructures, continue to be designed primarily with their needs in mind. Gay households — male and female — form an increasingly visible proportion of so-called ‘non-traditional’ households in our cities, and studying the way in which they interact with the landscape as well as with other communities could have significant implications for wider social issues and the provision of adequate social services.

Finally, my own research background has, in many ways, been leading me to this study. In 1992, I completed a study of Toronto’s gay ghetto and one of its adjacent

neighbourhoods, Cabbagetown, in the context of gentrification. Given that the 'ghetto' was primarily a *male* gay space (as opposed to female), I hypothesised — correctly — that gay men were the main players in the initial stages of gentrification in Cabbagetown. This research generated many questions, and one question that has persistently returned is: "What about 'the lesbians'? How did *they* figure in all this?". Based on what most other geographers at that time had concluded in other cities (eg. Castells 1983; Lauria & Knopp 1985; and Wolf 1979), I too had assumed that lesbians did not form territorially-based communities. But my research suggested rather that lesbians did not *start* forming visible communities as *early* as gay men, and that they formed communities that were not as materially evident as gay men's. I was (along with other geographers (Adler & Brenner 1992; Rothenberg 1995; Valentine 1995)) increasingly reluctant to argue that spatialised lesbian-identified communities did not exist — as noted by David Bell and Gill Valentine (1995), one just had to know what to look for. This possibility was confirmed in Vancouver, where an elaborate lesbian community exists in the East Side. This afforded an opportunity to study this community: how it was formed, and how it compared with the gay male neighbourhood in the West End. I could explore more closely through these two distinct communities how the spatialisation process differed for gay men and for lesbians, as well as examine the motivations behind each community's respective locational choice. This, hopefully, would lead to a fairer representation of lesbians' efforts and achievements in this regard — to set the record straight, so to speak, with respect to this group's social geography — without however homogenising the experiences of men and women. I suspected that the dynamics behind gay men's and lesbians' spatialisation were based on

very different factors, and, as such, intended to ensure that each narrative be sensitive to its agents' respective characteristics.

#### 1.4 Structure of the Research

In Chapter Two, I address the body of literature that has informed my reading of sexuality and space. Broader and more indirect interpretations of the relationship between sexuality and space originate from disciplines such as sociology, anthropology and (urban) geography, as well as more general feminist theoretical writing. The more directly relevant writings, published more recently, form the body of work known as 'gay' or 'queer geography'. While, as pointed out by Bell and Valentine (1995), it has become apparent that some older writings about gay space were misinformed or stereotypical in their treatment of gay communities, some portions remain useful, at least in drawing historical references to early social constructions of 'gay space'.

In Chapter Three, I discuss methodology, in terms of outlining my perspective on both the research *community* as well as the research *process*. First, I position myself *vis-à-vis* this project, in terms of my personal politics and stance with respect to queer geography. Then, I describe my approach to fieldwork and other issues surrounding data gathering and manipulation.

With Chapter Four, I begin the empirical analysis, and discuss the two neighbourhoods more fully. Using census data as well as newspaper articles, I draw a more complete picture of the way in which the two have evolved in the last twenty-five years, outside of their gay components, in an effort to contextualise the homosexualisation of the

districts. The following three chapters deal directly with the relationship between the two sexual communities (male and female) and the neighbourhoods in question.

In Chapter Five I address the **production of sexualised places** in the West End and Grandview-Woodland. The main focus of this chapter is the historical development of these neighbourhoods as gay-identified, giving special attention to the characteristics of the areas and of the sexual communities that made the initial attraction, in certain respects, less-than-accidental. Chapter Six deals with the **reproduction of these sexualised spaces**. It addresses those elements that have reinforced the gayness of the two neighbourhoods. This, for instance, includes the commodification of gayness on the streets, as well as the ways in which everyday gay life is carried out in these landscapes, and how gay identities are negotiated based on these local contexts. Finally, Chapter Seven looks beyond the boundaries of these separate regions, and raises an issue arising out of changing gay lives and politics that has important spatial implications, and discusses the blurring of boundaries between gay (male and female) spaces, as well as between gay and mainstream/straight spaces. Such cultural and spatial changes suggest changing dynamics between sexual identities — between gay men and women, and between gay people and straight people — that could, in turn, be indicative of changing (ie. more inclusive) social values and sexual politics.

These three chapters, then, trace a historical (past, present and future) narrative of the evolution of the West End and The Drive as gay spaces, as spaces that not only accommodate gay individuals and practices, but also shape and define them — at least in the Vancouver context. While it is difficult to reach any kind of conclusion when one is

documenting a set of evolving cultures, spaces, and norms, it is possible to suggest implications to these findings, looking beyond the theoretical developments to the practicalities. There are real ramifications for housing issues (as I said, especially as they pertain to non-traditional families or households), as well as for planning that is sensitive to a community's needs.

### 1.5 About Words

Before I embark on this analysis, though, a word about words. Let me share with you a conversation that I had with one of my informants, Donna<sup>1</sup>:

D: *You know what, first thing? We're all gay. [encircling hand gesture] We're all gay.*

AM: You mean, [gay] men and women.

D: *Yeah. I think a lot of lesbians really resent saying "gays and lesbians", cause we're gay as well, you know what I mean? I don't know what the equivalent term for lesbian is, maybe it's 'faggot', I don't know.*

AM: Wouldn't that be 'dyke'?

D: *No, faggot and dyke, right. So I don't know, men maybe don't have a term, you know a formal term, for a male homosexual, but you know, I say I'm gay and I'm not a man. So there's something for ya!*

While I recognise that not everyone (for instance, lesbian separatists) would agree with Donna, her words made an impression on me. They taught me that I often take words for granted. They also taught me a lesson in identity politics. Like those identified by Donna,

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<sup>1</sup> To protect the informants' identities, all names used are fictitious.

I too have used 'gays' to mean men only, not really realising that I was alienating lesbians or gay women. I also was not realising that I was reinforcing, for one, the primacy of gay *men* in the gay world. But what seems like perhaps a negligible nuance says a lot: about gay self-identification, yes, but also about straight people's misconceptions around gayness.

Referring to themselves *as* 'gay people' gives gay men and lesbians some sense of political unity: faced with a heterosexual majority, they share an identity as a same-sex sexual minority, and thus pursue similar social goals — not the least of which being acceptance and social equality. Introducing the different gender labels, in addition, allows for the idea of distinct cultural attributes: some relating to gay *men* and some to gay *women*. This gives each (gender-specified) sub-group a more defined sense of identity, a more personalised set of cultural identifiers. The political possibilities of viewing the community as being made up of gay men and gay women, or gay men and lesbians (as opposed to 'gays and lesbians') seem much more powerful and useful.

The phrase 'gays and lesbians' also bears certain connotations when used by straight people. First, by verbally segregating the male from the female parts of the community, we fail to recognise (albeit unintentionally) the political alliances described above. Second, and somewhat paradoxically, it seems that 'gays-and-lesbians' has become, in essence, a word (and not a phrase), used to describe the ensemble of gay men and women. In other words, we do not tend to distinguish between the two, and therefore do not see the significant cultural and spatial differences that exist (at least, historically) between the two (male and female) communities. The processes described in this study intend to show how

different gay men's and lesbians' experiences of urban space are from each other, despite their shared resistance to straightness.

Donna's comment, then, has helped me to not only recognise and rectify my own misuse of these terms, but also to put some perspective on the issues that I am seeking to address in this research. Ironically, more than teaching me about gayness, it has taught me about straightness, and about its blindness to gayness. More importantly, the subtle dynamic it has exposed between political alliance and sexual (gender-based) difference has helped frame the study I have undertaken. Furthermore, addressing my own ignorance, and that of most heterosexuals, has served to, hopefully, better contextualise this project for my straight audience, as well as opening them up to revising their own use of these words.

So, 'something for us' indeed. Words may, once, have seemed transparent, but not so now. The words I have compiled and inscribed in this text are as clear a reflection of those expressed to me by my informants — Vancouver's gay men and women — as I've been able to produce. Donna's suggestion, implicitly or explicitly supported by most of my informants, is therefore one that I have adopted throughout this text. That is, I have refrained from using the phrase 'gays and lesbians', in favour of 'gay men and lesbians', or 'gay men and (gay) women'. Despite the often strong political undertones of the word 'queer', I have also chosen to use it, to refer to the collective of gay men and gay women, as well as to describe their shared places, politics and culture. The word is useful, in that it allows for referring to gay men and women inclusively, without however denying their differences — 'queer' or different not only from non-gay perspectives, but also from each

others' perspectives. Although the word 'queer', ideally, also includes other marginalised sexual orientations — like the transgendered, transsexuals and bisexuals — in the case of this study it may not<sup>2</sup>. Since I was not specifically interviewing such persons (and, to my knowledge, have not received any input from anyone other than gay men and women), transsexuals, bisexuals and transgendered men and women are not generally included in my use of the term 'queer'. Such restricted use of the word has taken place before, especially in the context of sexuality and space, in particular when geographers have referred to the study of 'queer geography(ies)' (for instance, Almgren 1994; Binnie 1995; Davis 1995; Ingram et al. (forthcoming)), and it is in this sense that I also use the word myself. 'Queer geography', as a term and a concept, effectively links geography and sexuality, while it also implies marginality — a spatial marginality *based* on marginal sexualities.

Gay, straight, lesbian, queer, homo, het — words. Labels — some of them used more liberally than others. As a researcher of queer people and spaces, it would seem easy for me to label *myself* 'queer'. I certainly would not be the first straight person to do so. An inherently nebulous label, some straight people have successfully manipulated queerness and made it fit them. Eve Sedgwick (1990), a straight-acting woman who self-identifies strongly with the queer community, is a prime example of this. Her argument, based on her particular sexual practices with men, is quite convincing. Yet it remains highly controversial within the gay community: can straight people claim to be queer? Within

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<sup>2</sup> And I must apologize to David Bell for doing so. Indeed, he is right when he so sharply notes that 'queer' has "just become a postmodern, poststructuralist, post-most-things recast of 'lesbian and gay'" (1994: 133), and thus is felt to have failed other sexual minorities. However, for the sake of style, 'queer' offers a good alternative to 'gay men and women' or 'gay men and lesbians', and I hope that by defining my use of the term I have avoided any misunderstandings — not to mention insulting or alienating anyone.

the queer academy, a very distinct line is drawn between heterosexuals and gays/lesbians/bisexuals. While many in the field agree that queer theory is open for debate and development by anyone — straight or gay — it is still considered a field concerned primarily with queer people. That sexual boundary remains, despite attempts by some to remove ‘queerness’ from the ground level and elevate it to the cultural/ideological realm. Resistance to widespread queer identification definitely persists. Given my own research interests, I agree that one’s sexuality should not preclude them from engaging in queer theory. But I do not want to deny my heterosexual identity in order to pursue this research. Rather, my project is this: to deconstruct the privilege inherent in my own (named) identity by exploring the ways in which it has constructed and spatialised these other sexual identities; by exposing how heterosexual dominance has (socially and spatially) marginalised gayness, and discovering how gay men and women have resisted these processes.

## Chapter Two — Marginalising People, Marginalising Space: A Review of Queer Geography Literature

The rubric 'sexuality and space' has evolved from fields in geography that have concerned themselves with marginal social groups. Early empirical studies have taken significant sociological perspectives (in the *genre* of human ecology, for instance), but recent writing owes much of its theoretical underpinnings to feminist geography. Tim Davis (1995) traces the evolution of 'queer geography' as follows:

"a decade ago...mapping gay spaces relied primarily on accepted sociological and geographical methodologies and understandings used to investigate ethnic and minority groups. These methodologies relied on inflexible notions of identity, did little to investigate culture, and could not take into account the way in which all spaces are sexed. Much of the current work interfaces with 'queer theory' and the growing field of gay and lesbian studies, and takes feminist theory and notions of the social construction of space and identity as starting points to study the relationship between sexuality and the creation of identity, community and citizenship." (286-7)

In most circles, 'queer geography' is still considered a sub-set of feminist geography — if only to grant it legitimacy in a rather unsympathetic academy. This section, then, will trace this evolution more fully, to finally focus in on the framework that informs this particular study.

### 2.1 Spaces of Marginality and Marginal Space

Winchester and White (1988) define marginality as based on three elements: economic standards, social norms and legal norms. A marginal person (and consequently a marginal *group*) is defined as someone who goes against one or more of these socially-

produced standards. By definition, then, social marginality is not an absolute state, but rather is "essentially a socially constructed concept in which the most important attitudes are those of the political and economic elite groups" (38). Among the social groups singled out by the two authors as being marginal in contemporary Western society are the impoverished elderly, students, single-parent families, ethnic minorities, participants in the drug culture, criminals, prostitutes, and homosexuals. Of all these, homosexuals are seen as the one group whose "social marginality has been most fluid in recent years", based on the fact that (male) homosexuality has been gaining legal acceptance in most Western countries and "has become less socially ostracised, although retaining an element of stigma" (41). Spatially, the authors see it as being logical that these marginalised groups would also be found in our cities' marginal spaces.

Here, we can begin to draw some parallels with Anderson's (1991) work in Vancouver's Chinatown. As in the case of the city's Chinese population, these so-called 'marginalised' communities are marginal only insofar as they are defined as such by the ruling or hegemonic majority. Just as the category 'Chinese' was constructed as 'other' by Europeans in the late nineteenth century, the category 'homosexual' exists only when opposed to the (dominant) category 'heterosexual'<sup>3</sup>. Both are relative categories, and in more ways than this, as *self*-identities like 'homosexual' or 'gay' or 'lesbian' (or 'Chinese') can also vary spatially. For instance, gay men in rural communities identify themselves much differently than gay men in the inner city, much the same way that Chinese people

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<sup>3</sup> And if, as Katz (1995) has suggested, 'heterosexuality' was invented, rather than a given, then what? If 'heterosexuality', as a category and an identity, can no longer be considered a norm, then how can *homosexuality* be defined as *abnormal* or *marginal*?

in China at the turn of the century presumably defined themselves quite differently than those in Vancouver at the same time. As Anderson has so ably demonstrated, the local cultural context is far from a passive agent in the construction (and reproduction) of such identities: "in an important and neglected sense," she writes, "'Chinatown' belongs as much to the society with the power to define and shape it as it does to its residents" (10). And as also becomes evident in Anderson's work, this local context is not static. As a result, spaces that were once considered (physically or culturally) marginal may become accepted — and in some cases *sought after* — by the dominant class. Winchester and White are keen to point to gentrification as a clear manifestation of this change in the valuing of the inner city: for as Ley (1987), Caulfield (1994), Jager (1986) and others have seen, even the definition of 'marginal space' changes as the needs and desires of a ruling hegemonic class change. Consequently, "[j]ust as the suburbs were desirable locations in the 1960s, so the young upwardly mobile professional generation now demands the accessibility and flexibility of the inner city" (Winchester & White 1988: 44). Thus, not only are marginal *identities* relatively-defined, so are marginal *spaces*. And in the case of gay communities, these processes of de-marginalisation go hand-in-hand: as (gay-identified) marginalised spaces become accepted and sought after, so do gay identities become 'mainstreamed' and, in some cases, appropriated. However, the process does go both ways, and gay people are increasingly seeking to achieve social tolerance and acceptance by openly settling in mainstream (ie. straight-identified) spaces, such as suburbs. This is an indication of the new 'queer politics', which uses spatial de-marginalisation to efface social marginalisation.

Also drawing on Anderson's work, Davis (1995) sees many parallels between the formation of an urban race-based identity politics, and that of a sexuality-based one. Race and (homo)sexuality being both socially-marginalised categories, it is then useful to look to the experience of urban racial minorities:

"Work by Kay Anderson has provided important contributions to this field by investigating *how* groups and neighbourhoods become racialised, and thus points to an understanding of how gay territories play a role in gay/lesbian/bisexual identity formation." (288 — original emphasis)

More specifically, he continues,

"gay territories have played a profound role in increasing the power and visibility of gay and lesbian politics, and it is likely that the movement to a new form of 'Queer' politics could not have happened without the groundwork laid by the builders of these gay territories." (285)

Like racial identity formation, then, the process of forming a gay identity must also unfold in the context of evolving social norms.

Consequently, studies of gay spaces must go beyond the construction of queerscapes as inherently marginal. As previously mentioned, the field of queer geography has derived partly from studies in feminist geography, and it is there that more positive constructions of gay spaces — based on more useful analyses of *gender* and space — have been developed. For, like women in general, gay men and lesbians form a social group whose influence on, and stake in, urban space had scarcely been considered until quite recently because, also like women, gay men and lesbians were not the dominant voice in the study of urban change, nor were they consciously perceived to be significant agents in the development of cities; like women, gay men and lesbians inhabit(ed) the sexual margins.

## 2.2 Creating Sexual Margins: the Geography of Gender

When Rose (1984) called for a "rethinking" of gentrification, she argued for a more textured analysis of the phenomenon that would take into consideration the various levels at which this process operated. She believed that 'gentrification' is a household-led phenomenon that occurs for as many different reasons as there are different households. She was intrigued by what she terms 'marginal gentrifiers', primarily female-led households whom she perceived as 'gentrifying' for reasons almost entirely unrelated to those typically cited by gentrification theorists (such as Gale [1979], Holcomb [1981], Ley [1980, 1981, 1983] and Smith [1979]). Her introduction of women as differently motivated agents in this urban process was highly significant, and is an argument that sparked other investigations into how non-hegemonic social groups perceive and use urban space.

Not only have we seen increasing amounts of work on the valuing of the places and spaces used and experienced daily by women (eg. the family home, the suburbs, the workplace), but we have also seen evidence of the various roles women have played in shaping these and other spaces. For instance, Susan Mackenzie's (1988) work has uncovered links between women's political and economic activities and the development of urban space. Similarly, Rose and Villeneuve (1988), following Rose's earlier work, examine more closely the extent to which female-led households have shaped the inner city. Again, the authors find strong evidence to this effect, and suggest that women's reasons for gentrifying are indeed so different from the (more upper-middle-class) 'typical' gentrifiers, that they often find themselves competing — often unsuccessfully — with these other gentrifiers for community resources. Seemingly, then, women's needs with respect to cities

are quite different from what were once perceived by urbanists to be (dominant) 'society's' needs. Evidently, 'society' is made up of different people and subgroups, each with different concerns, requirements, and powers of agency.

To this effect, Beth Moore Milroy (1991a) has articulated a need, also voiced by Rose (1989), for more gender-sensitive theories in urban planning and geography. Her critique culminates in a set of workable recommendations, that she feels should be integrated into planning thought and practice, including the following:

*"Variable versus category.* A gender-sensitive theory would begin from the position that introducing sex as a variable is simply not what is at stake; but that recognising sex as the basis upon which a major social practice, engendering, is built is the fundamental issue.

*"Power setting.* A gender-sensitive theory would recognise that engendering, like any other social practice, occurs in a setting of already-existing power relations that influence how women and men (and other gender divisions) understand themselves. These power relations are not fixed in time or space.

*"Families.* Rather than treating families exclusively as a private institution (apparently focussed on marriage, childbirth, and socialisation), a gender-sensitive theory would recognise them as a social construct. The size of families, their composition, and the financial, physical, and mental well-being of their members become the housing and social services issues of planning...A family would not be treated as a unit with inevitably common interests.

*"Dynamic, change-oriented theory.* A gender-sensitive theory of spatial development would reject the management and regulation concept underpinned by functionalist and positivist theories... Its epistemological position, in part, would be that facts depend on values and value-informed theories, and that objectivity is contextually and historically shaped. It would recognise resistance as integral to the process of renewal and transformation rather than as deviant and outside the theory of spatial development." (12)

A gender-sensitive spatial theory, then, proposes to do a lot more than just privilege the forgotten female agent. Instead, it seeks to redress the gender-imbalanced bias of traditional theory by inserting gender — male *or* female — into processes of spatial development and change. Also, such a theory would not take for granted the meaning of a given space, but instead would strive to contextualise it and be sensitive to the characteristics of those who actually use the space. In other words, it is very much a grass-roots-oriented theory that gives voice to planning's 'clients' — men and women — recognising all the while that one's gender impacts significantly the way in which we experience space.

Moore Milroy's framework, then, is concerned with those who *use* the space, and places agency for change clearly in the hands of all who stand to benefit from the spaces in question. Ideological change, in this view, can only come from material (environmental) change. In this respect, Moore Milroy's framework has a lot in common with those suggested by queer geographers. Notable among these is Larry Knopp, whose most recent work (1995) traces how sexuality, in the form of gender relations, has been a significant force in producing the urban forms we know today.

### 2.3 Sexuality and Space

Writing in the field of gay geographies has followed a parallel trajectory to that outlined above. From treating gay men and women and their spaces as inherently deviant and marginal, theorists have increasingly become more sensitive to the relative (physical and cultural) positionings of these communities in our cities, and have sought to understand the meanings of these spaces *to gay men and lesbians*, as opposed to mainstream

society. The roles of these enclaves in changing cities have also been investigated, uncovering an increasingly complex set of actors in their development.

### 2.3.1 Understanding Gayness

*"I have always been bothered by the definition of homosexuality as a behaviour. Scratching is a behaviour. Homosexuality is a way of being, one that can completely influence a person's life and shape its meaning and direction."*  
(Grahn 1984: xii)

Like the category of identity more generally, the status of sexual identity has been hotly contested in recent theoretical and political writing. Bell and Valentine (1995) signal a contemporary move beyond dualisms, when they note that a balance needs to be struck between essentialist and constructionist views of homosexuality. Certainly, homosexuality as a sexual orientation is a state that most gay people cannot recall *not* being in: most gay people will tell you they have 'always' been attracted to same-sex individuals (or at least for as long as it has mattered — usually since puberty). As such, it is difficult to contest such a claim: how can one be what one, fundamentally, is not? Yet there is much to be said for gayness being a *constructed* identity. All identities, it is currently (and increasingly) argued, are constructed (Judith Butler's discussion (1990) is a particularly good example of this contention), whether they be based on gender, sexuality, race, or whatever. Both aspects of sexual identity, then, are not only valid, they also provide necessary means by which gayness is politicised, as well as interpreted and acted out in daily life. Bell and Valentine's (1995) use of 'strategic essentialism', blending the political power of each position, offers a practical alternative as well as "a potentially radical location for identity politics" (23). Such a position also explains how marginal sexuality *itself* — as an identity completely foreign to the heterosexual hegemony — can become a political statement. Essentialism

renders gay displays of affection 'natural', while constructionism exposes heterosexuality as just another construction or 'performance' (Bell et al. 1994; Butler 1990) — both politically powerful assertions.

With regards to another standard duality, behaviour vs. culture, Castells and Murphy (1982) have noted that

"gayness is more than a sexual orientation. It is an element of a broader culture aimed at posing an alternative way of life, characterized by the domination of expressiveness over instrumentalism, and by human interaction over impersonal competition" (256)

Despite being somewhat romanticised, this definition is one that is echoed by other theorists. Indeed, most contemporary theorists would argue that gayness is more than clinical homosexuality; for example, Altman (1982) writes that "homosexuality is far more than a matter of whom one goes to bed with; it is rather something that affects the whole fabric of everyday life" (viii). This is where the introduction of 'gayness', with its allusion to culture, becomes especially useful: as Edwards (1993) maintains, "gay liberation ... signified the birth of 'being gay' as the word 'gay' was used as a blatant assertion of positive self-evaluation over the medical, pathologised label of homosexual" (26). 'Gayness' therefore has definite implications of a political consciousness, and it is seen as no coincidence that the Stonewall Riots (and therefore gay liberation) occurred concurrently with significant political upheaval in the Western world (particularly in the United States): black activism, women's liberation, antiwar protests, student movements — the counterculture (D'Emilio 1983; Edwards 1993).

Sexual orientation, then, is but a part of gayness: as Kramer (1995) so aptly shows, 'being' gay and 'doing' gay are entirely different states, and one must be exposed to a complex set of positive, readily available social referents (for example, relevant role models) to progress from the latter to the former. And perhaps the earliest theorised *spatialised* assortment of such referents has been the 'gay ghetto'.

### 2.3.2 Theorising the Ghetto

Although by certain, more contemporary, accounts problematic, the 'ghetto' has been seen in the literature as the logical, if not optimal, place for gay men and lesbians to reside and socialise in. It has been characterised, in turn, as a safe place to retreat to in the face of "an intolerant heterosexual society" (Lauria & Knopp 1985: 158; also Adam 1978; and Levine 1979); as an essential material basis from which to develop an institutionally complete community (Harry & DeVall 1978, Murray 1979); as a meeting ground or 'cruising' space (Lauria & Knopp 1985; Levine 1979); and as a space of personal freedom, where it becomes easy for gay men and women to 'come out' and accept or even celebrate their gayness (Harry & DeVall 1978). Levine's (1979) description of the gay ghetto is not uncommon:

"an urban neighborhood can be termed a 'gay ghetto' if it contains gay institutions in number, a conspicuous and locally dominant gay subculture that is socially isolated from the larger community, and a residential population that is substantially gay." (364)

Broadly speaking, then, the 'gay ghetto' is reducible to being an area that is — and has historically been — a focus for gay existence. While some of its elements are observable and even quantifiable (for instance, gay-oriented businesses and/or 'institutions'), residential

populations are somewhat more difficult to ascertain. Indeed, until sexual orientation figures on national censuses, it will continue to be virtually impossible to determine the extent of a given area's gay population. As a result, the materiality of a gay ghetto will remain largely unsubstantiated.

Yet, as has been shown in more recent literature, and illustrated especially well in the case of lesbian neighbourhoods, residential concentrations and material evidence alone are not sufficient indicators. Much more significant is the extent to which this space exists in the local (and sometimes, as in the case of San Francisco, *global*) imagination (Rothenberg 1995; Valentine 1995). Certainly, a material presence of gay people (whether in residential or institutional form — ie. bars) must precede the formation of this imagined geography. As Valentine (1995) has observed in a British town,

"the 'lesbian ghetto' of Hightown<sup>4</sup> is a product of individuals coincidentally making similar housing choices — choices that reflect the fact that lesbians commonly have different lifestyles and hence different housing needs from many heterosexual households." (98)

But this materiality need not necessarily be visible to just anyone, especially not to heterosexuals. For instance, in Hightown "[t]here are no public expressions of lesbian sexualities; no mark on the landscape that 'lesbians live here'. It is a lesbiàn space only to those in the know" (Valentine 1995: 99). Similarly, Tamar Rothenberg (1995) notes "a distinct lack of designated lesbian places" (172) in New York's Park Slope lesbian ghetto. And yet, there is no contradiction here, for especially in the case of women, who are less safe in public places,

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<sup>4</sup> 'Hightown' is a fictitious name for the real lesbian ghetto studied by Gill Valentine over the last few years.

"perceptions and 'common knowledge', while lacking exactitude, may actually be more beneficial to the users of gay spaces. Word-of-mouth, not statistical information, is what lures women to a 'lesbian neighbourhood'. What matters to the people who live in a community is their experience of the place, how they feel walking down the street, the services available to them." (169)

Thus, the *meaning* of a place, as negotiated both individually and as a social group, becomes its 'reputation', and it is this that circulates within the community and attracts further population: consequently, Valentine observes that, "having been credited with ghetto status, Hightown's lesbian reputation appears to be triggering a snowball effect" (98). Similarly, Rothenberg argues that the fact "that the lesbian [spatial] 'community' has grown as large as it has is largely a tribute to the power of lesbian social networking" (177), a process that is captured quite effectively in the title of her study: "*And she told two friends...": Lesbians creating urban social space.*

Unlike the case of gay *male* ghettos, the 'services' and 'experiences' noted by Rothenberg are not seen as being typically gay in nature. Rather, the author speaks of "semi-lesbian or lesbian-congenial" spaces as opposed to fully lesbian spaces (165), and Valentine includes "[s]paces for support meetings and political activities [which] are commonly excluded from [male] surveys of gay institutional bases, which have tended to focus on the playful, hedonistic aspects of gay lifestyles" (101). Unlike gay male spaces, these are less permanent, more fluid, and therefore cannot be considered as sure material indicators of a lesbian presence (because they do not stay in one place long enough to be identified). Looking at (lesbian) ghettos in this way, then, and privileging the *immaterial* allows us to turn back and re-examine *male* ghettos, deconstruct them, and see to what extent these gay immaterialities define a gay ghetto — male *or* female. We might then be

able to better re-construct them, and return to more elementary grounds on which to base an evaluation of such neighbourhoods, namely as "Places where I feel safe as a lesbian [or gay man]" (Rothenberg 1995: 177) and "An area where lesbians [and/or gay men] live" (ibid: 172): this places less emphasis on (widely-known) material spaces, and more on gay everyday lives. We might also, as queer geographers have been increasingly doing, move beyond the gay ghettos, and begin to study and theorise other issues around sexuality and space, to give some thought to the ways in which sexualised (in principle, homo- *or* hetero-) spaces are produced.

### 2.3.3 Beyond the Ghetto: the Production of Queer Space

Gay spaces, like ethnic neighbourhoods, offer an excellent opportunity to investigate the ways in which spaces are produced, because they are spaces that have evolved fairly recently. This, according to Hans Almgren (1994), is largely due to the fact that

"While there is a lesbian and gay history there is no 'homeland' to long for, no collective language or memory. Instead these have to be produced and reproduced, discovered and cognitively mapped in each generation and culture." (49)

In other words, gay culture, and its associated material landscape, are constantly reproduced, because gay men and women had little tradition to work with, especially concerning the use of space. Also unlike ethnic minorities, the gay individual is not born into the community: s/he makes a conscious choice to assert their sexual orientation and 'come out', to take on a gay identity (Murray 1979). If, as we have seen, the gay identity *itself* is, in large part, a political construction, why then should it come as a surprise that their spaces and culture are, in turn, constructions?

For, as much as personal identities have been contested in terms of the extent of their constructedness, so has the essentialism of spaces (and their associated meanings) been questioned. Perhaps one of the most significant contribution of theorists in the field of queer geography, like feminist geographers, has been their insistence that (sexualised) spaces, like (hetero)sexual identities, are never a given. As David Bell (1991) has argued, "it is surely time to bring gay and lesbian geographies out into the open, in order to fully understand the role of sexuality and sexual preference in shaping social space" (328). To this effect, Maxine Wolfe (1992) has introduced a framework for looking at the ways in which relationships between people and their environments are a negotiated arrangement. Feeling rather bothered by the fact that "[gay] culture has been trivialised as a 'life-style' and [gay] places, spaces and geography are unknown and invisible to most people", she set out to show how "heterosexist bias has led to a consideration of women primarily in relation to men and children [and] has desexualised people/environment relationships" (139). Her research, illustrated by the production and use of lesbian bars, "speaks to these biases and demonstrates how consciousness about them can change the understanding of people/environment relationships." (ibid.) Rather than speaking to the gay male and/or lesbian experience alone, her findings have definite implications for the ways in which we view *all* spaces, as she concludes:

"Regardless of the people, environments, or environmental issues we are concerned about, we have to seek to understand the nature of systems and values (including our own) that create certain types of environments and not others, for certain people and not others, and how and why this happens." (154)

Wolfe's call for a more sophisticated analysis of the production of spaces has inspired one of queer geography's founding theorists, Larry Knopp (1995), to develop a framework of his own, one based on integrating sexuality in the way we understand cities. Knopp categorises ways of knowing and understanding cities into three commonly-held perspectives: the material (centering on the built environment), the ideological (or spatial consciousness), and humanism (the lived experience of the city). And, in reality, he sees these perspectives as being far from isolated from one another: "the city and the social processes constituting it are most usefully thought of ... as social products in which material forces, the power of ideas and the human desire to ascribe meaning are inseparable." (151) This framework is in many ways similar to the way in which Anderson (1991) qualified her approach to Chinatown, in that she tried to show "that bodies of theory that focus on ideological formulations like race can be compatible with those that emphasize their political, economic, and spatial articulations" (247).

Knopp (1995) sees cities as being significantly coded *sexually*, and argues that this has been a strong (if unconscious) force in shaping the cities we know today. For instance, he sees the nineteenth-century city as having been structured around class, gender and race-based markers, including "very traditional gender-based spatial divisions of labour, dominantly coded as heterosexual, and imagined and experienced in terms of public and private spheres of experience." (154). Similarly,

"areas and populations which represent failures of or challenges to aspects of the dominant order (eg. slums, gentrified areas) tend to be coded in both dominant and alternative cultures as erotic (ie. as both dangerous and potentially liberating), while those seen as less problematic tend either to be desexualised or to stress more functional approaches to sexuality." (152)

These codings, he goes on, "are connected to power relations [and] are (in this latter respect) fiercely contested." (153) In other words, the reason cities have evolved in the way they have is because heterosexuality — and all that it entails — has been (unconsciously) privileged, being as it is a sexual hegemony, and, whether dominant (ie. heterosexual) cultures wish to admit it or not, *all* spaces are sexually coded. Furthermore, heterosexuals *themselves* have used this coding to their advantage, dealing with marginalised groups by attributing them (and their respective spaces) with sexual depravity. As an example, Knopp notes how "social problems associated with nineteenth-century working-class communities (poverty, disease, etc.) ... frequently were (and continue to be) blamed on the alleged sexual irresponsibility of their residents" (156-7). Sexuality, like gender (and race), therefore becomes complicit with the production of space *and* with the assigning of (hierarchical) meanings to these spaces.

But, he continues, spaces are also sexualised on a much more elemental scale: people might use the same spaces, but their *experience* of a given space might differ a great deal. Knopp's argument is that different sexual possibilities exist based on different class, race and gender, and their consequent spatial experiences: in other words, one's sexual potential depends on the private and public places frequented and on the activities undertaken in those places. As a result, for instance, a white middle-class man has very different sexual possibilities available to him than does a black working-class woman. Thus, he writes, "while difference is a fundamental feature of human experience, it has no fixed form or essence. What constitutes it, ultimately, is different *experiences*" (159 - original emphasis). And, again, these experiences are granted hierarchical privileges based

on the (constructed) hierarchies of sexuality, gender, race and class. Everyday life thus clearly gets placed within a set of 'social relations' that inform our use of material space.

With respect to the creation of gay spaces, Knopp suggests that the gendered division of labour, which led to the segregated city forms we know today, created, in effect, spaces where either femininity *or* masculinity were the norm. As such, the spaces that were created were "environments in which homosexuality [had] the space, potentially, to flourish" (149): in other words, he would argue that it was certain (homosexual) men and women's *experiences* in these spaces that led to the material (gay) enclaves we observe today within these larger gender-coded spaces. He therefore sees it as no coincidence that gay male enclaves, for instance, have historically been found in spaces of male, middle-class privilege, namely the downtown core. Similarly, it could be argued that other researchers' typically finding *lesbian* enclaves in the *working-class* inner city (Adler & Brenner 1992; Rothenberg 1995; Valentine 1995) also reflects a gendered coding of such neighbourhoods: women's (straight or gay) locating in such neighbourhoods, as noted earlier by Valentine (1995), develops from a necessity for affordable family-oriented housing and facilities, thus creating the initial female-ness of the areas, or, in this framework, the 'potential' for a 'flourishing' gay community.

The strength of Knopp's argument lies in its generality. By deconstructing the city in terms of its gender *and* sexual codes, he effectively brings so-called marginal spaces into relation with dominant spaces: both spaces, within this framework, are constructions, based on sexualities that are not (theoretically) privileged over one another. By linking gender with conceptions of sexuality, and suggesting that "heterosexuality is still often

promoted as nothing less than the glue holding these spatial divisions of labour (and, indeed, Western society) together" (149), he is intimating that, should heterosexuality (or, at least, its stability) disappear, one is left with an understanding of cities which is very fragile indeed. Furthermore, one can go on to imagine what our cities might look like had sexual 'norms', as Katz (1995) has suggested, been different: what if homosexuality had been the 'norm'? How then might the spaces that constitute a city relate to each other? Clearly, then, not only has urbanisation reflected a white, middle-class heterosexual norm, it has also served to *confirm* heterosexuality, whiteness and the middle class *as* the norm — in a very tangible, material form (the built environment) — and has left all other (racial, sexual, economic) minorities on the margins. To quote Knopp:

"In a world, then, in which spatiality and sexuality are fundamental experiences and in which sexuality, race, class and gender have been constructed as significant axes of difference, it should come as no surprise that struggles organised around these differences feature prominently in a process like urbanisation." (159)

These assertions, although made in the context of gay geography, are very powerful indeed, and deserve the attention of *anyone* concerned with spatial processes. Queer geography can, and has, extended far beyond the study of queer spaces, and it is in these theoretical advances that, I believe, it is at its most useful. By turning the mirror of sexuality squarely to face the heterosexual majority, the field is exposing aspects of space that, rather than being taken for granted, need to be seen for what they are: constructions that not only reflect, but also *reinforce* a heterosexual bias.

Thus, by studying Vancouver's West End and Grandview-Woodland as constructed (homo)sexualised spaces, I hope to not only document the gay histories of these districts,

but also to contextualise their construction within the constraints of straight dominance. The ways in which these constraints worked to create these spaces operated in quite different ways for men and women, reinforcing gender-based boundaries and possibilities, and thus resulting in significantly distinct places.

## Chapter Three — Methodology

'Methodology' operates on many levels: from the personal, to the theoretical, and the technical. While I have already addressed, to some degree, my own personal positioning with respect to the topic (as well as the community) under study, and to the field of queer geography more generally, I feel I need to explore this further. After situating myself both personally and theoretically, I will describe the sources of information I have used to develop my understanding of the processes in question, as well as the methods I used to gather and analyse these materials.

### **3.1 Straight on the Street - Queer on the Sheet**

Establishing my 'position' entails significantly more than simply stating my (hetero)sexuality: there is considerably more at stake in my position than potentially being perceived as a lesbian, and the implications of this situation lay well beyond issues of sexuality. For one, I could be perceived as trying to 'pass' in order to gain entry into the community, in effect as deceiving my subject — which is clearly not my intention. I could also be seen as a 'sexual tourist', making a foray into the 'exotic' gay male/lesbian subculture, secure in the knowledge that I, unlike them, can return to my 'privileged' hetero-world whenever I want. Perhaps most worrying, I could be accused of trying to legitimate *my* representations of gay men and women in Vancouver, over those of the community itself, by using my position as a straight, white academic. Essentially, in evaluating the implications (actual or potential) of my performance of (or, in turn, my silence about) a sexual identity, and of others' *perception* of this sexual identity, I am

questioning my credibility, my competence, my right to speak to and about communities of which I am not a part.

I am engaging in a discourse that has haunted feminist practice for some time now. Clearly, discussions of subject positioning are not new (see Alcoff 1991; Cosgrove & Domosh 1993; Haraway 1991; Katz 1992; and Probyn 1993, among others), and as they have progressed there has been a considerable blurring of 'inside' and 'outside'. Brown (forthcoming) writes, "[e]thnographic distance is ... one that derives from the researcher's presence inside of a situation but outside of its context [yet] we never stand completely outside the worlds we study any more than we stand completely inside of them" (29). As a straight, white, queer-positive woman, I, too, stand outside and inside the world that I am studying. These next pages are about working out my position, about situating myself *vis-à-vis* my subject, inside yet outside of it, and defining what that will mean for the place of my research within academia, queer and straight, as well as within the wider society.

### 3.1.1 Positioning the Researcher: Theory and Practice

Perhaps one of the most contentious issues that I expect to face in presenting and representing my research subject is that of objectivity. In traditional, positivist terms, I would not need to be concerned with where I am 'positioned' with respect to my subject (Harvey 1989). If anything, I would be perfectly positioned, as an outsider to my subject community, to conduct so-called 'objective' research, research unobscured by any personal bias (at least no biases that may keep me from presenting my findings critically). However, as a feminist researcher, I am only too aware that such objectivity is a fallacy, an ideal that is never — that *should* never — be reached. 'Objectivity' needs to be redefined,

perhaps in terms of 'fairness', 'honesty', 'integrity' or 'responsibility' in representation. In turn, these terms, as practices, need to be taken seriously, beyond liberal tokenism, and form an integral part of feminist research praxis. Only in this context can objectivity remain a desirable, if not essential, goal of any social research project. Yet, how do we achieve it? What does it mean to have achieved it? What is the validity of research produced in this way? Other feminists, most notably Donna Haraway, have worked out a rationale for such an approach, and, based on what she has written, I hope to suggest strategies for working with this objectivity.

Haraway (1991) introduced to feminism the concept of situated knowledges. Drawing upon her experience as a female, feminist scientist, she effectively re-defined objectivity in knowledge. Indeed, Science, of all disciplines, hinges on the existence of an allegedly objective 'truth', a truth that needs to be 'discovered'. Yet Haraway debunks this idea of a universal 'truth', exposing how knowledge is constructed and subject to interpretation. This, loosely, is what she means when she talks of 'situated knowledge': the fact that knowledge is not a free-floating, absolute, abstract idea, but rather, in all cases, an embodied experience. The knowledge we produce is *always* critically produced (if in varying degrees) because it is shaped, presented, even censored by our internalised experience: the knowledge we represent has inevitably been sifted through our embodied set of beliefs and values. Such a critique, clearly, casts a new light on the state of the researcher: objectivity, by such a definition, becomes *subjective*. 'Truth' could be seen to become just another person's interpretation of a certain event or observation.

Consequently, the researcher is left to wonder, what is the point of doing research if there is no *one* 'truth' to be found? Haraway emphasises that the feminist project is not about finding and exposing 'truths', but about practicing an "objectivity that privileges contestation, deconstruction, passionate construction, webbed connections, and [the] transformation of systems of knowledge and ways of seeing" (191-2). In this way, not only does she validate alternative ways of knowing and forms of knowledge, she also sets the stage for redefining objectivity as being a critical positioning, a responsible and accountable position from which one can produce and communicate her knowledge. As a result, she legitimises what she calls 'partial perspective', implying that, from a feminist viewpoint, there exist multiple, non-hierarchical, perspectives of a given item of knowledge (as there are multiple, non-hierarchical subjects doing the 'seeing'), and, thus, no one privileged perspective. Each of these is accountable and responsible, because I can clearly vouch for my own subject position — I am not making any claims that I cannot defend, since they all relate back to my own perspective on a given set of elements.

With respect to producing responsible research (ie. responsible towards the subject under study), Alcoff (1991) also argues that what really matters is accountability. We need to be aware that our position informs our particular representation of a given subject, that how we view the world invariably colours how we represent it. We need to take responsibility for our role in representing our subject of inquiry, in speaking for the other, because "representation is never a simple act of discovery... it will most likely have an impact on the individual so represented" (Alcoff 1991: 10). The "I" doing the speaking does not stand autonomous from society, despite the claim of liberal theory, yet it cannot

be replaced by a collective "we" that is also a fictional construct; "[y]et to replace both 'I' and 'we' with a passive voice that erases agency results in an erasure of responsibility and accountability for one's speech" (Alcoff 1991: 11). If the "I" is located within society, and has a specific history within that society, then we must account for this context, for the 'baggage' that informs the "I"'s representation of the "not-I". Evidently, it is not sufficient to simply add an introductory 'disclaimer' statement describing our position, and leave it at that:

"such an act serves no good end when it is used as a disclaimer against one's ignorance or errors and is made without critical interrogation of the bearing of such an autobiography on what is about to be said." (ibid: 25)

Acknowledging one's position, and taking responsibility for it, is an ongoing process, and one that is re-negotiated at every stage of the project. Similarly, one's writings should be transparent to one's speaking position, and we should not lose hold of our grounding. So, how is that achieved in practice? How can I actively acknowledge my heterosexual subjectivity, that experiential lens which filters and represents my homosexual subject community? And how do I balance it with the other 'lenses' through which I perceive and represent my subjects?

I believe that the critical position that I occupy — critical of heterosexist (conscious and unconscious) social and spatial practices — gives me appropriate grounds from which to speak about gay spatiality. In other words, while I may be writing about Vancouver's gay men and women, I am doing it to illustrate (resistance to) heterosexual dominance. Therefore, what I am essentially representing is, in fact (like other queer geographers before me), this same heterosexual dominance. But the stance that I adopt does not dare to be

definitive. I remain open to the criticisms of others who may, in turn, speak for/of/about this subject — whatever their own subject position may be. Evidently, gay men and lesbians have written about themselves, and the text that I produce does not intend to be superior or inferior to theirs — just different. Different in that it speaks directly to heterosexuals' ignorance of the ways in which the spaces they have created constrict sexual minorities; and their ignorance of the ways in which these minorities have, in turn, subverted these spaces. A different voice speaking, essentially, *about* them and not (at least not intentionally) *for* them.

Clearly, this is not always a comfortable position to negotiate. In particular, being 'outside' one's research community can make fieldwork a difficult task. Evidently, the inability to negotiate an honest, accountable working relationship with a subject-other will result in a problematic analysis and representation. In certain cases, this inability may even force a researcher to take responsibility in *inaction*, and abandon her project altogether. Kim England (1994), for one, has been quite articulate about her concerns with researching lesbians. Presumably, as a straight, white woman, she has had personal difficulties in coming to terms with her relationship with both the lesbian community itself and, more generally, the whole issue of researching the 'Other'. Specifically, she is concerned with

"the process of making geography at a time when social scientists are increasingly suspicious of the possibility of 'objectivity' and value-free research, and when the acceptance of the socially constructed and situated nature of knowledge is increasingly commonplace." (81)

Seeking objectivity, she argues, invariably leads to *objectification* (of the research group), and that is just not the way of feminist research. Rather than placing themselves above

their research group(s), she writes, feminist researchers "usually favor the role of supplicant, seeking reciprocal relationships based on empathy and mutual respect, and often sharing their knowledge with those they research" (82). In addition, she continues,

"[feminist] fieldwork... is predicated upon an unequivocal acceptance that the knowledge of the person being researched (at least regarding the particular questions being asked) is greater than that of the researcher." (ibid.)

And this, effectively, shifts "a lot of power over to the researched" (ibid. — original italics), levelling somewhat the power relations at work. In this way, the fieldwork process is a dialogue, between two subjects — researcher and researched — who are themselves individuals and therefore informed by very different life philosophies, perspectives and biographies. This creates potentially sensitive situations that call for a certain amount of reflexivity on the part of the researcher, a reflexivity that "must require careful consideration of the consequences of the interactions with those being investigated" (82), consequences that may potentially effect a narrow construction or representation of the subject-other. As a straight woman researching lesbians, England perceives these issues as posing certain insurmountable problems. Most significantly, she worries about whether, by engaging in such a project, she is participating in the fetishisation of the 'Other', or that she might be, "albeit unintentionally, colonizing lesbians in some kind of academic neoimperialism" (84). So, what are my options as a straight researcher of gay men and lesbians, "where does all of this leave those who wish to conduct research with integrity about marginalized people?" (86).

Although she, herself, abandoned her original project, England still manages to offer some advice to other researchers. In particular, she advocates a need for researchers to

"accept responsibility for research" (ibid.), to take responsibility for their own agency in generating the results presented, the voices represented. She also feels strongly that there "needs to be recognition that the research relationship is inherently hierarchical... Reflexivity *can* make us more aware of asymmetrical or exploitative relationships, but it cannot remove them" (ibid.). Yet she still sees this as being hardly enough to fully justify this type of research, and questions whether, "given the inevitability of unequal power relations in fieldwork, we should even be doing this research at all" (ibid.). Clearly, she opted not to continue her empirical work, presumably as a result of her not being able to negotiate an ethically comfortable position for herself with respect to her subject community. I suppose the question now is, have *I* been able to negotiate such a position? I believe I have.

I am not blind to the implications of my interacting, on a research level, with gay men and women. I am not deaf to certain allegations that I am potentially adopting a dominant stance with respect to my subject communities. Indeed, this aspect of my position has been made especially clear to me, considering that my research is being funded by a government agency. Though I make it clear to my subjects that I am not an employee of the agency, but merely a scholarship recipient, I am aware of the implications of my association with it. I am no longer a 'free agent', in the communities' eyes, but an 'official', potentially spying on them and reporting back to the 'authorities'. I can no longer honestly claim to be doing research purely for myself or for academia: I am, effectively, doing it to inform the government. I must therefore try to turn it around and,

instead of 'using' the gay communities to inform CMHC<sup>5</sup>, I need to *use* CMHC to get lesbian and gay male experiences circulated, and their housing needs heard and, if possible or necessary, met. I am hoping that such a strategy will help reduce any 'imperialistic' implications that may be inherent in my research situation, as well as minimise the power differentials between my subjects and me.

I respect Kim England's position, and appreciate the insights she provides. Still, I think she is being rather hard on herself, and on other researchers. As Alcoff (1991) also asserts, I still believe that there is a way to produce sensitive work as an 'outsider'. England opens up the possibility herself when she writes, almost as an aside, that

"all the sympathy in the world is not going to enable me to truly understand what it is like for another woman to live her life as a lesbian. However, researchers are part of the world that they study... We do not conduct fieldwork on the unmediated world of the researched, but on the world *between* ourselves and the researched." (86 — original italics)

For clearly, it is not the researcher's role, or her place, to appropriate the lives of her subjects. The most one can hope for is to gain understanding *from her own perspective*, and to honestly transmit that understanding, to the best of her ability. It is true, we all are part of the same world, and we are bound by a certain curiosity, as human beings, to learn about each other, and this process need not be intrusive or harmful to either party. In order to achieve this, we need to make it clear that what we are producing is not a characterisation of the individual studied, nor an earth-shattering discovery. Rather, it is both a representation, in essence, of our *relationship* with that individual, and a positioned

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<sup>5</sup> Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation.

interpretation (the researcher's) of the subject's lived and familiar experience. Let me therefore borrow, again, England's words, and say, to this effect, that

"What I will be studying is a world that is already interpreted by people who are living their lives in it and my research [will] be an account of the 'betweenness' of their world and mine." (87)

In my opinion, there is a significant difference between this approach and that of taking for granted the position of the researcher, and this difference lies in building an honest, judgement-free, two-sided and open-minded relationship with the subject community(ies). It lies in a willingness to take emotional risks, to risk being in a mobile position *vis-à-vis* one's subject and possibly be made vulnerable by them, by their differential knowledge; to be put in our place and even be made to re-work our goals as the project progresses, as a result of these interactions. In this respect, the metaphor of 'betweenness' is useful. But I would add to it that of rootedness, of occupying the space in between without however losing hold of our selves, for, as England herself warns, and as I maintained earlier, we can only claim to speak with our own voice, informed by our own experiences and perspective. Thus, by holding on to my subjectivity, taking responsibility for it, and creating open, honest relationships with my subjects, I believe I have successfully negotiated the fieldwork aspect of my research, and created a relationship with my subject community that I (and hopefully my colleagues) can comfortably live with, without compromising either myself or Vancouver's gay men and women.

### **3.1.2 Straight on the Street, Queer on the Sheet?**

So, where does all this theorising leave me? After all this, have I been able to position my self, or at least make a place for myself, within queer geography? *Is there a*

place for straight researchers of queer communities? I believe so. At least, I believe there is a place for *this* straight researcher. And I believe the key lies in my motivation for doing this type of research.

As I see it, my project, contrary to what my critics might think, is not to use queer voices to further queer politics (at least, not directly). Rather, it is to use my own (heterosexual) voice to inform **straight** society, to show how the world is, at a very basic level, heterosexually constructed, and destabilise beliefs that this *must* be so. Furthermore, I wish to use this voice to reveal how spaces can be perceived and used in widely different ways, depending on the way we (sexually) interpret and experience the world around us. I see my research as contributing to a project that would see heterosexism and homophobia disappear. I want to show straight society that uses and perceptions of spaces are not a given but are constructed by those who inhabit them, and that there is no one 'right' way to experience space, but **several** ways that are suited to the person in question. Then, maybe I can get to the next level and get them to understand and respect that the sexual identities that inform these constructions are also valid in their own right. Although a large part of my research involves speaking with and about gay men and lesbians, my goal is not to explain queerness. Rather, it is to explain *to heteros* how queerness — and hence sexuality (including heterosexuality) — informs one's use of space.

### 3.2 The Project of Research

The methods used to gather information for this research project were varied. While it is not purely ethnographic, the project made use of a number of testimonies of

Vancouver gay men and women. Gay histories are not typically well-documented, and must be reconstructed with the help of oral histories, media reports, and other contextual evidence. Interviews, obviously, are also useful in interpreting the perceptions, culture, and everyday lives of gay men and women in this city, and thus are used in the latter parts of this research.

In all, twenty-six men and women were interviewed (12 women and 14 men). They represented various age groups and economic and educational backgrounds, with diverse family structures (from singles, to couples, to parents), and different tenure (although renters formed an overwhelming majority — see Figure 3.1). All of them were 'out'.

GENDER	AGE			FAMILY STATUS			SOCIO-ECONOMIC STATUS			TENURE	
	<30	30-40	>40	single	couple	w/ chld.	Stud.	Low- mid	Mid- up	Rent	Own
Men	5	5	4	6	8	1 <sup>6</sup>	4	4	6	9	5
Women	4	5	3	7	5	1 <sup>7</sup>	4	4	4	9	3

Figure 3.1: Interview Breakdown

As my project was to investigate The Drive as a lesbian space and the West End as a gay male space, my original intention was to interview men who lived in the latter, and women from the former. As the interviews progressed, however, and the blurring of

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<sup>6</sup> also single.

<sup>7</sup> also in a couple

boundaries became evident, I approached men and women who crossed the old boundaries: two women and two men fit this profile. Subjects were gathered using a 'snowball' approach, whereby initial contacts (five in all — each from unrelated social circles) were interviewed and asked to recommend friends or acquaintances as potential interviewees. These secondary people would not be contacted directly by me without their expressed permission. Failing initial contact, or upon a potential interviewee's request, a letter describing the project and the purpose of the interview was sent, which was followed up with a telephone call. Interviews lasted between 30 and 60 minutes, were recorded (although one informant requested no recording), and were transcribed within one week of their recording. If no tape was made, notes were taken and then fleshed out immediately after the interview. The material covered in the interviews depended on the individual's experience with Vancouver's gay neighbourhoods. Some individuals had lived in Vancouver all their lives, while some were from other cities and/or provinces; some had been 'out' for years, while for others this was a new experience. Therefore, not all people were qualified, for instance, to relay some of the city's gay history. Unstructured interviews (as opposed to a questionnaire) allowed me to be flexible and for informants to expand upon areas that they were particularly well-suited to comment on, thereby tailoring an interview to the informant in question. Rather than producing biased accounts, this method allowed for very detailed accounts to emerge, and for issues to surface that I may not have anticipated. In this way, I let the informants take me where they wanted to take me, rather than *my* leading *them* in a completely predetermined direction. In addition, all informants were asked about their awareness of, and appreciation for, their neighbourhood:

what they liked about it, what they did not like; why they chose to live there; how many people they knew and associated with in the neighbourhood, etc.

While interviews were invaluable in discovering and interpreting the ways in which the two neighbourhoods are experienced and reproduced as gay spaces, they were somewhat lacking in terms of their historical completeness. Because I was addressing the place of these neighbourhoods within the changing socio-economic and socio-cultural geographies of Vancouver, I needed to contextualise the information I was obtaining from my informants. The materials I used to do this included some published works (most notably, two theses: one dealing with the West End (Fairclough 1985) and one with Grandview-Woodland (Jackson 1984)); the Canada Census (1971 through 1991); and local newspaper and magazine articles dating back to the late 1960s. The theses were works that addressed some of the history that I sought to document, and therefore were directly relevant to the task at hand. The Census was used mainly in Chapter Four, to sketch the socio-economic characters of each neighbourhood, and to trace the quantitative changes that paralleled the qualitative (cultural and ideological) changes that were occurring there with respect to their (homo)sexualisation. Finally, mainstream newspapers and magazines were useful in two important ways. First, to broaden and 'thicken' the description of these neighbourhoods, beyond their statistical characteristics: this was especially useful in relaying the 'pre-histories' of the areas, prior to their gay identification, and establishing the mood of these neighbourhoods at this time. And second, to mark the change in public perception and determine when each neighbourhood began to be associated — by the (straight) mainstream — as gay-identified. This, clearly, comes later, most significantly in

the 'reproduction' stage of gay spatialisation. Gay media — *Xtra! West* and *Angles* (local — from 1993 to 1995), and *Out* (U.S. — for 1995) magazines — were also used, for various purposes. The most immediate use of the local publications was to assist in mapping out gay social spaces, as defined by the location of events, services, businesses, and so on that advertised in these media. Locating these places is undeniably useful in demarcating gay-identified neighbourhoods, and in gendering them (gay male vs. lesbian). More implicitly, these magazines were also helpful in keeping me abreast of issues in the communities, in determining more contemporary cultural trends, and in familiarising me, more generally, with the subtext of gay identities.

My ties with the city's gay communities were reinforced with my participation in a Vancouver organisation. *Queers in Space Vancouver* is a collective composed of (mostly gay) artists and urbanists (planners, geographers and architects) engaged in raising awareness of Vancouver's queerscape. Through writing, public art and audio-visual installations, members seek to give voice and shape to sexualised space. While the collective's main goal is to improve the understanding of straight people for the experience of gay people in urban space, it raises and addresses issues of constructed sexualities and spaces. As a founding (and continuing) member of this collective (founded in January 1995), I have had the opportunity of being involved in some useful activism and fulfil part of my goal of dismantling essentialist (straight) sexualities. For instance, a current project, entitled *Queersville*, is a visual art installation (planned for the 1996 International AIDS conference in Vancouver) aimed at communicating gay urban mappings and gay-inspired urban design. I have also had access to an invaluable resource, in that I was able to discuss, first-hand,

issues around Vancouver's sexualised landscape, and changing gay cultures. I forged an in-depth understanding of the city's gay geography and its subtleties, while expanding my circle of informants<sup>8</sup>. The group also acted as a sounding-board, whereby I could get feedback on my perceptions, theories and observations, as a semi-participant-observer (ie. not gay) researcher of gay communities. The trust that I built with this group also increased my credibility within the community, and made it easier for me to be referred to additional contacts. Also, having had such a close working relationship with others interested (and often involved) in the (homo)sexualisation of Vancouver made it possible for me to produce more accountable work, and to be more critical of my findings: essentialising and generalising is always more difficult when the distance between researcher and researched is reduced in this way. By being so close to a number of very different people, all experiencing the same spatial constraints and opportunities, the processes — rather than the people — began to take center stage. Also, because discussions often revolve around criticisms of straight-designed and -used space, I became very aware of the hetero-hegemony theorised about here: this critical view of hets was, in effect, critical of me and my heritage, and it became important to me that I not replicate it — or that I at least expose it and counteract it. Rather than providing a quantifiable set of data, then, my involvement with *Queers in Space Vancouver* served to inform and focus my research, making it useful to those wishing to destabilize straight spatial dominance.

The data I used, then, span a number of categories, each covering any number of issues addressed in this research. Certainly, my direct contact with Vancouver's gay men

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<sup>8</sup> *Queers in Space* members (twelve in all) were not included as 'interviewees' in the above breakdown.

and lesbians, whether through interviews or *Queers in Space*, forms my primary source of information, while the other materials flesh out the overall picture of each neighbourhood's genesis as gay-identified spaces. The various types of evidence serve to balance each other, and moderate, and modify, the sometimes extreme picture presented by any one source.

## Chapter Four: A Brief Pre-History of The Drive and the West End

A visitor to the two neighbourhoods of the West End and Grandview-Woodland (the East Side), cannot fail to see the conspicuous differences in their appearance, their mood, their population. A cursory glance at both areas is sufficient to reveal fundamental elements that make each neighbourhood so distinct from the other: even without the gay component of each district, there are differences between the two. Indeed, as clear an opposite as east is to west, east-side Grandview-Woodland is diametrically opposed to the West End.

Spatial processes do not occur independently of each other *or* of other, perhaps broader, *social* processes and conditions. As I have begun to show, at least theoretically, the same can be said of queer districts. Indeed, the inherent differences in each neighbourhood could not help but attract different cultural groups: hence, the gay male attraction on the one hand, and the lesbian on the other, is in large part explained by the nature of each district. In order to better understand the circumstances by which the West End and The Drive emerged as gay-identified neighbourhoods, therefore, it is necessary to describe the two neighbourhoods as *contexts*, as material and cultural entities that led to, facilitated, and complemented, the rise of a gay identity in these areas. This chapter will therefore seek to paint a picture of the ways in which the two neighbourhoods — outside their gay geneses — have figured on the Vancouver landscape. In particular, I wish to relate the more general histories of the two areas, and substantiate them with the demographic and socio-economic changes that have characterised them over the last twenty

years. As will hopefully become clear, the West End and The Drive were significant Vancouver neighbourhoods in their own right before they became gay-identified, and this latest phase in their developments has added yet another rich layer to their already notable positions on the city's landscape.

#### 4.1 'Slumming it' in the East End: The Drive

"One of Grandview-Woodland's most distinctive characteristics is the variety of people who call the neighbourhood 'home'. A genuine microcosm of the City, a brief stroll down Commercial Drive will reveal the many benefits a vibrant, immigrant culture can contribute to a neighbourhood. A multiplicity of languages fills the air, adding a natural music to the already festival-like atmosphere."<sup>9</sup>

Located at the opposite end of the inner city from the West End, Grandview-Woodland is best epitomised by its 'heart', its social and commercial focus, known affectionately to Vancouver locals as 'the Drive'. Closely linked to its surrounding residential blocks, the Drive also has an important commercial base, which has developed around its significantly multi-ethnic population. Unlike the West End, the Drive serves a much more local population, composed of a mixture of its current residents and of Vancouverites of Italian, Portuguese and Chinese origins.

Grandview-Woodland, in many ways, typifies what one would call a thriving inner-city neighbourhood. A southward residential extension of Vancouver's port functions, it has long harboured new immigrants to the city, who historically provided manual labour

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<sup>9</sup> City of Vancouver Planning. 1993. *Grandview-Woodland: A community profile*, #5 Vancouver, B.C.: City of Vancouver Planning Department, p.1.

on the waterfront<sup>10</sup>. And, while adjacent neighbourhoods developed into Chinatown and Japantown, Grandview-Woodland was more strongly identified with Southern European immigrants — namely Portuguese and Italian. Although the neighbourhood is still a focus for these communities, it has since also accommodated some of Chinatown's overflow, as well as newer immigrants from the West Indies, Latin America, and South-East Asia. The area also contains a significant number of Native Indians, who have historically inhabited apartment hotels in the nearby Downtown East Side<sup>11</sup>. Despite such changes, however, the working-class character of the area, as confirmed by the census analysis (below), is still prevalent.

Grandview-Woodland is still very much a residential enclave. In spite of its cultural role to a number of ethnic communities, its primary function is to provide affordable and diverse housing to inner-city households.<sup>12</sup> The district contains a significant number of single-family homes (nearly 30% of its stock — see Table 4.2), as well as apartments, other multiple-dwelling structures (including secondary suites and conversions), co-ops, and non-profit/-market units. Such diversity can accommodate a large assortment of households, and most units are offered at rents lower than in other inner-city areas. It is therefore an ideal neighbourhood for households that might not be able to leave the inner city (for lack of transportation, for example), or who might prefer it, because of certain cultural

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<sup>10</sup> from interview with ward's community planner.

<sup>11</sup> In fact, there now exist a handful of co-ops and other accommodations designed specifically for, and run by, Natives in the area

<sup>12</sup> for a detailed discussion of Grandview-Woodland's ethnic history and character, see Brad Jackson's (1984) work.

attachments and/or proximity to work, school, family, and so on. Its rental rates are comparable to those in certain suburban areas, yet its location offers easy access to city amenities and work.

Commercially, its focus is to accommodate the multi-ethnic communities who make their home there. Thus, Commercial Drive — the business heart of the neighbourhood — acts as an effective index for the area's socio-cultural make-up at any given time. Yet the 'festival-like atmosphere' conferred by Commercial Drive, as described by City Hall, is both created and consumed largely by the neighbourhood's (current and past) local population. *Fêtes* like 'Italian Days', sponsored by the Drive's Italian businesspeople, do not attract a wide audience, and hardly give the City hope for increased tourism: the numerous revellers originate mostly from the neighbourhood itself (though they aren't necessarily Italian-Canadian) and from other local Italian enclaves. And although its local shopping is popular with Vancouverites, who will often make a weekend trip into the area for fresh produce and Italian cheeses, pastries and meats, it is not a neighbourhood that enjoys wide exposure to outside tourism. In other words, it is not likely to be a stop — or even a drive-through — on Vancouver bus tours.

This local orientation, combined with the important ethnic component of the neighbourhood, has resulted in great civic pride, and a high incidence of grass-roots political activity. A city planner<sup>13</sup> noted that Grandview-Woodland was among the first neighbourhood in Vancouver to establish an Area Council to City Hall (in 1976), a kind of 'mini-council' which relays community needs to City Council and which gives a certain

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<sup>13</sup> from a personal interview.

level of political autonomy to the community — at least as far as giving them the opportunity to determine their needs and propose alternatives for action in an organised manner. The neighbourhood was also among the first to have developed a neighbourhood plan for itself, and is perhaps best known for its innovative community services centre, the Britannia Centre, which opened in 1976.

Cited as a particularly successful case study of participatory planning, the Britannia Centre announced to Vancouver and, indeed, all of British Columbia, that inner-city residents were a political force to be contended with. As noted by former group executive Michael Clague (1988), "one particular theme stands out in this story. It is that of citizens setting precedents with City Hall for the provision of community services... 'Britannia waives the rules!' (iii) Located just one block west of Commercial Drive, the centre, which combines educational and recreational facilities, as well as community and health services, was developed by a group of residents and businesspeople from Grandview-Woodland and neighbouring Strathcona, with the help of city planners and politicians. It provides a textbook example of a grass-roots planning project, the only one of its kind, and scope, in Greater Vancouver. It also therefore illustrates the uniqueness of this neighbourhood, in terms of its political involvement and awareness, and, while (according to Mr. Clague) the project helped reinforce the area's waning familistic orientation, one can see how countercultural types would have been attracted to it in the late 1960s and early 70s.

This countercultural ambience was also fostered by the neighbourhood's locational attraction for university students. Indeed, Grandview-Woodland is the closest inner-city neighbourhood to Simon Fraser University, which is situated approximately eight (8)

kilometres east of Commercial Drive, atop Burnaby Mountain. It also happens to have cheap rents and shared accommodations, and has done so for a long time. In fact, in the mid-seventies, Grandview-Woodland was comparable to Kitsilano in that it too was a 'hippie' haven, with a large number of student and young adult communes. Kitsilano gentrified, but Grandview-Woodland's transformation is progressing much more slowly, and students remain as a vital ingredient in the community's *mélange* of people (Serafin 1994), enhancing the countercultural edge of the neighbourhood's socio-cultural landscape.

The resulting population profile is therefore a mix of assorted social groups, from students, to established (ethnic) families, to feminists, and on, and on, which has evolved over time. Indeed, characterisations of The Drive cannot fail to mention its overwhelming diversity, as evidenced by the following descriptions:

"It's home to artists, writers, left-wingers, immigrant groups (Italians, Chinese, Central Americans, Indo-Canadians), single parents, big families, labour groups, Third World advocacy groups, feminists, multicultural groups, the employed, the self-employed, the unemployed and students." (Stainsby 1989: D14)

"The Drive [is] a basically low-rent community that houses artists and musicians, students and lesbians, the unemployed and ordinary workers." (Applebe 1990: 9)

"Everyone seems to have a place here... The character [of the neighbourhood] has evolved over time, but it has a distinctive multicultural character. There's such a variety and a lot of tolerance for different points of view." (Bowman 1995: 21)

"To friends who wonder why they left Kitsilano, [a new resident] cites the ethnic mix. Her children... will profit from exposure to different cultures, she says. Next door are Italians and Portuguese, down the street, Chinese families. There are pensioners, toddlers and numerous teenagers. 'It's a totally mixed community, which is nice.'" (Godley 1984: B1)

Serafin (1994) has referred to the "clash of cultures" exhibited on The Drive; Brad Jackson (1984) characterised The Drive as being a "social barometer and cultural magnet" and a potential forum for future socio-cultural conflict (97); and in his article entitled *Joe's*, Michel Beaudry (1988) uses Joe's Café, a popular (if not notorious) cappuccino bar in the heart of The Drive, as a microcosm of what the East End or The Drive has become — a mish-mash of (ethnic, social and sexual) minorities:

"'You could say Joe's is the crossroads of the universe', says Tom, an old university buddy. His tone is tongue-in-cheek, just. 'I mean — think about it. There's the young toughs from Britannia [high school] who come in here for a game of pool or to play the vidiot machines; there's the Portuguese guys who hang out at the bar and talk soccer with Joe and Carlos; there's the Gay Mothers Against Men, the artsies, the punk musicians and Lefties Without a Cause. There's the westsiders who come slumming after a performance at the Cultch [Vancouver East Cultural Centre] and the young professionals who are buying up real estates. There's even the local bag people.'" (113)

'Diversity' therefore seems almost an understatement in terms of The Drive's population: it is in fact its most defining feature.

Statistical analysis of census data for this neighbourhood from 1971 to 1991 confirms this demographic progression, but also gives more depth to this history, adding to it an illuminating socio-economic dimension (see Tables 4.1, 4.2, and 4.3). Indeed, despite the great leaps it has taken in the last 25 years in terms of social upgrading (way beyond the West End in particular), it remains below city standards in most aspects of socio-economic status, and continues to exhibit characteristics that place it somewhere between being a suburb and an inner-city neighbourhood.

Perhaps the most significant changes felt in Grandview-Woodland are those related to employment. A predominantly working-class neighbourhood, it recorded a 368% increase in managerial and professional<sup>14</sup> employment from 1971 to 1991, bringing its share from 7% to 23%<sup>15</sup>. The number of women professionals in the neighbourhood went up 441%, surpassing by far changes in the rest of Vancouver, and the number of Grandview-Woodland men in similar occupations increased by 310%. Despite such notable development, however, the average proportion of managers and professionals remains below that found in the city (33%), and the average household income only rose by 8% (while the city recorded a 30% average income increase). Further, participation in the labour force increased by 48%, bringing participation rates for the neighbourhood much closer to city rates than they were in 1971. It is significant to note that women's labour force participation increased by nearly 80%, going from only 34% in 1971 to 61% in 1991 (or, from 13 percentage points below city figures to only 1). Thus clearly, employment changes from 1971 to 1991 indicate that an important shift was recorded in this neighbourhood, particularly with respect to women, who seem to have achieved the greatest growth with respect to employment and professional occupations. Despite this, however, it seems that in general, at least in terms of employment and economic characteristics, Grandview-Woodland continues to exhibit social status levels well below city averages. Professionalisation has not yet been accompanied by significant income

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<sup>14</sup> This employment category includes the first four occupational classes outlined in the 1991 Census: managerial/administrative; teaching; medicine/health; and natural/social sciences, arts, and religion. The corresponding categories in the 1971 Census are the occupational groups numbered 11, 21, 23, 25, 27, 31, and 33.

<sup>15</sup> all statistics cited can be referred back to Tables 4.1, 4.2 and 4.3.

growth, suggesting the presence of Damaris Rose's (1984) 'marginal gentrifiers', a growth that, as we have seen, typically includes disproportionate numbers of women.

If we turn our attention to other household characteristics, we note that the number of non-family households in the neighbourhood doubled during the twenty-year period, while for the city as a whole figures only increased by 73%. Similarly, the number of family persons (ie. individuals in family households) decreased by 36%, while the City of Vancouver saw a 1% *increase* of such persons. If we compare the neighbourhood with the city at both ends of the time spectrum, we note that the neighbourhood went from being overwhelmingly family-oriented (82% family persons compared with 77% in the city in 1971), to being significantly *non-family-oriented* in 1991 (66% family persons in Grandview-Woodland compared to 70% in the city). In addition, the number of single, divorced and separated persons increased significantly (by 52%, 88% and 6%<sup>16</sup> respectively) — this despite a 12% decrease in persons 15 years or older, and a 21% decrease in overall population — while the number of married persons decreased by 52%. As reported in the 1991 census, 60% of the population over 14 years of age were single (never married, divorced or separated), while only 34% were married. This is notably different from figures across the city, which show that only 48% of the population were single (as defined above) and 40% were married. Although it is difficult to come to any conclusive interpretation of these data, we can safely state that the number of single persons has increased in the neighbourhood, this being due in large part to the relatively large proportion of divorced/separated persons (34% of singles). We can also conclude that the

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<sup>16</sup> The change in divorced and separated persons represents changes from 1981 to 1991: the categories "divorced" and "separated" did not appear on the 1971 Canada Census.

Table 4.1: 1971 Census Summary

## Census Data - 1971

	Grandview Woodlands		West End		Vancouver	
	#	%	#	%	#	%
Total Population	35,438	100.0	38,130	100.0	426,260	100.0
Male	17,929	50.6	17,495	45.9	208,140	48.8
Female	17,506	49.4	20,625	54.1	218,115	51.2
Age Distribution						
0-4	2,899	8.2	1,055	2.8	24,425	5.7
5-9	2,811	7.9	565	1.5	28,160	6.6
10-14	2,813	7.9	430	1.1	30,625	7.2
15-19	2,682	7.6	1,320	3.5	33,385	7.8
20-24	3,689	10.4	6,160	16.2	44,415	10.4
25-34	4,893	13.8	9,075	23.8	59,255	13.9
35-44	4,305	12.1	3,910	10.3	48,055	11.3
45-54	3,818	10.8	4,240	11.1	52,200	12.2
55-64	3,563	10.1	4,395	11.5	48,205	11.3
65 +	3,967	11.2	7,080	18.6	57,535	13.5
Marital Status						
Pop'n 15 +	26,918	100.0	36,180	100.0	343,050	100.0
Single	6,969	25.9	13,955	38.6	101,185	29.5
Married	16,872	62.7	16,225	44.8	198,815	58.0
Divorced						
Separated						
Widowed	2,148	8.0	3,660	10.1	31,040	9.0
Schooling (gr.9+)						
Non-University	14,254	53.0	23,490	64.9	203,595	59.3
University	2,186	8.1	7,485	20.7	58,460	17.0
Mother Tongue						
English	20,244	57.1	30,025	78.7	313,095	73.5
French	479	1.4	1,155	3.0	6,690	1.6
Other	14,720	41.5	6,945	18.2	106,475	25.0
Home Language						
English	25,111	70.9	35,080	92.0	362,830	85.1
French	102	0.3	445	1.2	2,375	0.6
Other	4,131	0.8	795	0.4	19,965	4.7
Labour Force	12,162		25,210		208,945	
Male - Empl'd	6,498	85.4	11,345	87.3	110,265	88.4
Unemployed	1,108	14.6	1,645	12.7	14,435	11.6
Female - Empl'd	4,028	88.4	11,230	91.9	76,285	90.6
Unemployed	527	11.6	990	8.1	7,960	9.4
Employment Rate		86.6		89.5		89.3
Male		85.4		87.3		88.4
Female		88.4		91.9		90.6
Occupational Information						
Males - All	7,381		12,725		121,405	
Professional	466	6.3	2,695	21.2	20,780	17.1
Clerical	630	8.5	1,330	10.5	10,920	9.0
Service/Sales	1,671	22.6	3,500	27.5	29,160	24.0
Females - All	4,400		12,355		82,095	
Professional	367	8.3	2,120	17.2	14,530	17.7
Clerical	1,431	32.5	5,750	46.5	31,615	38.5
Service/Sales	1,433	32.6	2,580	20.9	21,765	26.5

## Census Data - 1971

	Grandview Woodlands		West End		Vancouver	
	#	%	#	%	#	%
Occupations (cont.)						
Total - All	11,782		25,080		203,500	
Professional	833	7.1	4,815	19.2	35,310	17.4
Clerical	2,061	17.5	7,080	28.2	42,535	20.9
Service/Sales	3,104	26.3	6,080	24.2	50,925	25.0
Labour Force	12,170		25,190		208,945	
Male	7,613	62.6	12,990	51.6	124,700	59.7
Female	4,557	37.4	12,200	48.4	84,245	40.3
Participation Rate		45.1		69.9		60.9
Male		56.1		78.8		75.2
Female		34.0		62.3		47.6
Private Hhlds	11,442	100.0	23,110	100.0	153,415	100.0
One-family	7,830	68.4	7,605	32.9	95,115	62.0
Multiple family	362	3.2	30	0.1	2,940	1.9
Non-family	3,245	28.4	15,455	66.9	55,370	36.1
Avg. Hhld Income						
Household	\$28,116		\$27,135		\$34,901	
One-family	\$28,865		\$34,344		\$39,041	
Mobility						
Pop'n 5 and over	32,567	100.0	37,065	100.0	401,795	100.0
Non-movers	24,080	73.9	19,665	53.1	296,720	73.8
Movers	8,481	26.0	17,385	46.9	104,655	26.0
Persons in						
Private Hhlds	34,006		37,350		408,790	
# fam. pers.	27,882	82.0	17,525	46.9	318,385	77.9
# non-fam. pers.	6,123	18.0	19,825	53.1	90,405	22.1
Avg. hhld size	3.0		1.6		2.7	
Occupied Private Dwellings	11,425	100.0	23,090	100.0	153,240	100.0
Owned	5,446	47.7	855	3.7	71,845	46.9
Rented	5,984	52.4	22,250	96.4	81,395	53.1
Single-detached	5,799	50.8	475	2.1	76,100	49.7
Apartment	5,210	45.6	22,470	97.3	72,800	47.5
Avg. monthly rent	\$402	37.5	\$503	39.4	\$476	48.6

Table 4.2: 1991 Census Summary

## Census Data - 1991

	Grandview Woodlands		West End		Vancouver	
	#	%	#	%	#	%
Total Population	28,055	100.0	38,410	100.0	461,890	100.0
Male	14,095	50.2	19,800	51.5	232,780	50.4
Female	13,955	49.7	18,605	48.4	240,430	52.1
Age Distribution						
0-4	1,760	6.3	520	1.4	23,735	5.0
5-9	1,365	4.9	350	0.9	21,930	4.6
10-14	1,100	3.9	275	0.7	21,570	4.6
15-19	1,315	4.7	710	1.8	24,805	5.2
20-24	2,435	8.7	3,940	10.3	40,975	8.7
25-34	6,920	24.7	11,415	29.7	101,530	21.5
35-44	5,105	18.2	7,405	19.3	80,205	16.9
45-54	2,650	9.5	4,385	11.4	49,685	10.5
55-64	2,340	8.3	3,420	8.9	42,620	9.0
65+	3,040	10.8	5,995	15.6	66,155	14.0
Marital Status						
Pop'n 15+	23,805	100.0	37,260	100.0	427,545	100.0
Single	10,575	44.4	20,140	54.1	162,690	38.1
Married	8,035	33.8	8,010	21.5	170,055	39.8
Divorced	2,430	10.2	4,875	13.1	30,290	7.1
Separated	1,185	5.0	1,725	4.6	13,445	3.1
Widowed	1,595	6.7	2,510	6.7	29,500	6.9
Schooling (gr.9+)						
Non-University	17,365	72.9	23,010	61.8	263,815	61.7
University	5,880	24.7	13,950	37.4	135,685	31.7
Mother Tongue						
English	15,695	55.9	27,865	72.5	271,500	58.8
French	440	1.6	1,330	3.5	6,845	1.5
Other	10,695	38.1	8,000	20.8	175,000	37.9
Home Language						
English	18,460	65.8	33,085	86.1	319,800	69.2
French	95	0.3	455	1.2	2,185	0.5
Other	7,645	27.3	3,690	9.6	125,930	27.3
Labour Force	17,450		25,970		271,095	
Male - Empl'd	7,820	82.6	12,395.0	85.6	127,575.0	88.2
Unemployed	1,645	17.4	2,085.0	14.4	17,110.0	11.8
Female - Empl'd	6,815	85.3	10,380.0	90.3	113,860.0	90.1
Unemployed	1,170	14.7	1,110.0	9.7	12,550.0	9.9
Employment Rate						
Male		83.9		87.7		89.1
Female		82.6		85.6		88.2
Overall		85.3		90.3		90.1
Occupational Information						
Males - All	9,150		15,220		141,730	
Professional	1,910	20.9	5,255	34.5	46,110	32.5
Clerical	880	9.6	1,850	12.2	12,845	9.1
Service/Sales	2,475	27.0	4,970	32.7	37,765	26.6
Females - All	7,745		12,225		123,930	
Professional	1,990	25.7	4,025	32.9	41,145	33.2
Clerical	2,345	30.3	4,105	33.6	37,010	29.9
Service/Sales	2,400	31.0	3,625	29.7	34,845	28.1

## Census Data - 1991

	Grandview Woodlands		West End		Vancouver	
	#	%	#	%	#	%
Occupations (cont.)						
Total - All	16,895		27,445		265,660	
Professional	3,900	23.1	9,280	33.8	87,255	32.8
Clerical	3,225	19.1	5,955	21.7	49,855	18.8
Service/Sales	4,875	28.9	8,595	31.3	72,610	27.3
Labour Force	17,460		28,005		271,095	
Male	9,465	54.2	15,585	55.7	144,685	53.4
Female	7,995	45.8	12,420	44.3	126,410	46.6
Participation Rate		66.6		74.9		68.0
Male		72.1		80.5		74.1
Female		61.1		68.9		62.2
Private Hhlds	12,665	100.0	26,240	100.0	199,935	100.0
One-family	5,925	46.8	6,215	23.7	98,745	49.4
Multiple family	225	1.8	25	0.1	5,165	2.6
Non-family	6,520	51.5	20,010	76.3	96,025	48.0
Avg. Hhld Income						
Household	\$30,293		\$33,492		\$45,180	
One-family					\$39,041	
Mobility						
Pop'n 5 and over	25,515	100.0	37,370	100.0	440,170	100.0
Non-movers	9,620	37.7	10,340	27.7	186,370	42.3
Movers	15,885	62.3	27,030	72.3	253,805	57.7
Persons in						
Private Hhlds	27,320		37,695		461,830	
# fam. pers.	17,920	65.6	13,705	36.4	321,625	69.6
# non-fam. pers.	9,405	34.4	23,990	63.6	140,205	30.4
Avg. hhld size	2.2		1.4		2.3	
Occupied Private Dwellings	12,665	100.0	26,240	100.0	199,935	100.0
Owned	3,480	27.5	3,105	11.8	81,770	40.9
Rented	9,185	72.5	23,135	88.2	118,160	59.1
Single-detached	3,610	28.5	120	0.5	88,435	44.2
Apartment	430	3.4	19,545	74.5	33,110	16.6
Other Multiple	8,560	67.6	6,555	25.0	77,630	38.8
Other	50	0.4	25	0.1	760	0.4
Avg. monthly cost	\$557	4.9	\$710	26.8	\$711	12.5
Owned	\$566	2.4	\$774	28.6	\$718	5.7
Rented	\$553	37.5	\$701	39.4	\$707	48.6

Table 4.3: Census Change 1971 to 1991

## Census Change 1971-1991

	Grandview Woodlands		West End		Vancouver	
	#	%	#	%	#	%
Total Population	(7,383)	-20.8	280	0.7	35,630	8.4
Male	(3,834)	-21.4	2,305	13.2	24,640	11.8
Female	(3,551)	-20.3	(2,020)	-9.8	22,315	10.2
Age Distribution						
0-4	(1,139)	-39.3	(535)	-50.7	(690)	-2.8
5-9	(1,446)	-51.4	(215)	-38.1	(4,425)	-15.7
10-14	(1,713)	-60.9	(155)	-36.0	(8,695)	-28.4
15-19	(1,367)	-51.0	(610)	-46.2	(11,815)	-35.4
20-24	(1,254)	-34.0	(2,220)	-36.0	(19,610)	-44.2
25-34	2,027	41.4	2,340	25.8	42,275	71.3
35-44	800	18.6	3,495	89.4	32,150	66.9
45-54	(1,168)	-30.6	145	3.4	(2,515)	-4.8
55-64	(1,223)	-34.3	(975)	-22.2	(5,585)	-11.6
65+	(927)	-23.4	(1,085)	-15.3	8,620	15.0
Marital Status						
Pop'n 15+	(3,113)	-11.6	1,080	3.0	84,495	24.6
Single	3,606	51.8	6,185	44.3	61,505	60.8
Married	(8,837)	-52.4	(8,215)	-50.6	(28,760)	-14.5
Divorced	1,140	88.4 *	1,325	37.3 *	16,900	126.2 *
Separated	70	6.3 *	(450)	-20.7 *	(4,905)	-26.7 *
Widowed	(553)	-25.8	(1,150)	-31.4	(1,540)	-5.0
Schooling (gr.9+)						
Non-University	3,111	21.8	(480)	-2.0	60,220	29.6
University	3,694	168.9	6,465	86.4	77,225	132.1
Mother Tongue						
English	(4,549)	-22.5	(2,160)	-7.2	(41,595)	-13.3
French	(39)	-8.2	175	15.2	155	2.3
Other	(4,025)	-27.3	1,055	15.2	68,525	64.4
Home Language						
English	(6,651)	-26.5	(1,995)	-5.7	(43,030)	-11.9
French	(7)	-7.0	10	2.2	(190)	-8.0
Other	3,514	85.1	2,895	364.2	105,965	530.8
Labour Force	5,288	43.5	760	3.0	62,150	29.7
Male - Empl'd	1,322	20.3	1,050	9.3	17,310	15.7
Unemployed	537	48.5	440	26.7	2,675	18.5
Female - Empl'd	2,787	69.2	(850)	-7.6	37,575	49.3
Unemployed	643	121.8	120	12.1	4,590	57.7
Employment Rate	-2.7	-3.1	-1.9	-2.1	-0.2	-0.2
Male	-2.8	-3.3	-1.7	-2.0	-0.2	-0.3
Female	-3.1	-3.5	-1.6	-1.7	-0.5	-0.5
Occupational Information						
Males - All	1,769	24.0	2,495	19.6	20,325	16.7
Professional	1,444	310.2	2,560	95.0	25,330	121.9
Clerical	250	39.7	520	39.1	1,925	17.6
Service/Sales	804	48.1	1,470	42.0	8,605	29.5
Females - All	3,345	76.0	(130)	-1.1	41,835	51.0
Professional	1,623	441.8	1,905	89.9	26,615	183.2
Clerical	914	63.8	(1,645)	-28.6	5,395	17.1
Service/Sales	967	67.5	1,045	40.5	13,080	60.1

## Census Change 1971-1991

	Grandview Woodlands		West End		Vancouver	
	#	%	#	%	#	%
Occupations (cont.)						
Total - All	5,113	43.4	2,365	9.4	62,160	30.5
Professional	3,067	368.2	4,465	92.7	51,945	147.1
Clerical	1,164	56.4	(1,125)	-15.9	7,320	17.2
Service/Sales	1,771	57.1	2,515	41.4	21,685	42.6
Labour Force	5,290	43.5	2,815	11.2	62,150	29.7
Male	1,852	24.3	2,595	20.0	19,985	16.0
Female	3,438	75.4	220	1.8	42,165	50.1
Participation Rate	21.5	47.6	5.0	7.2	7.1	11.7
Male	16.0	28.6	1.7	2.1	-1.1	-1.5
Female	27.1	79.7	6.6	10.6	14.7	30.9
Private Hhlds	1,223	10.7	3,130	13.5	46,520	30.3
One-family	(1,905)	-24.3	(1,390)	-18.3	3,630	3.8
Multiple family	(137)	-37.8	(5)	-16.7	2,225	75.7
Non-family	3,275	101.0	4,555	29.5	40,655	73.4
Avg. Hhld Income						
Household	\$2,177	7.7	\$6,357	23.4	\$10,279	29.5
One-family		N/A			46,520	N/A
Mobility						
Pop'n 5 and over	(7,052)	-21.7	305	0.8	38,375	9.6
Non-movers	(14,460)	-60.0	(9,325)	-47.4	(110,350)	-37.2
Movers	7,404	87.3	9,645	55.5	149,150	142.5
Persons in						
Private Hhlds	(6,686)	-19.7	345	0.9	53,040	13.0
# fam. pers.	(9,962)	-35.7	(3,820)	-21.8	3,240	1.0
# non-fam. pers.	3,282	53.6	4,165	21.0	49,800	55.1
Avg. hhld size	(0.8)	-27.4	(0.2)	-13.4	(0.4)	-13.3
Occupied Private Dwellings						
Owned	1,240	10.9	3,150.0	13.6	46,695	30.5
Rented	(1,966)	-36.1	2,250.0	263.2	9,925	13.8
Single-detached	3,201	53.5	885.0	4.0	36,765	45.2
Apartment	(2,189)	-37.7	(355.0)	-74.7	12,335	16.2
Other Multiple	(4,780)	-91.7	(2,925.0)	-13.0	(39,690)	-54.5
Other	1,880	28.1 *	(55.0)	-0.8 *	12,690	19.5 *
Other	50	1.1 RR *	5.0	25.0 *	510	204.0 *
Avg. monthly cost						
Owned	\$26	4.9 *	\$150	26.8 *	\$79	12.5 *
Rented	\$13	2.4 *	\$172	28.6 *	\$39	5.7 *
Rented *	\$151	37.5	\$198	39.4	\$231	48.6
Rented *	\$33	6.3 *	\$143	25.6 *	\$114	19.2 *

\* = Change from 1981 to 1991

neighbourhood is in majority composed of single persons, and thus very different from the city as a whole, which exhibits something closer to a 50-50 distribution.

A final characteristic which merits noting, especially in light of the neighbourhood's history, pertains to its ethnic make-up. As we have seen, Grandview-Woodland is well known for its multi-ethnic nature. However, statistically at least, the district has lost some ground over the last twenty years. A good indicator of ethnic presence is mother tongue. While the mother tongue of 42% of Grandview-Woodlanders was neither French nor English in 1971 (compared to 25% of Vancouverites), absolute figures had dropped by over one quarter in 1991, down to 38% and equivalent to city figures. Granted, the proportion has not changed significantly. However, it is significant that the neighbourhood, in this respect, is now more 'average' or reflective of city-wide trends. It is also worth noting that the neighbourhood has suffered a net loss of ethnic Canadians: while the population of Grandview-Woodland has decreased by 21%, the number of non-English/-French speaking residents has dropped by 27%.

Clearly, Grandview-Woodland is a neighbourhood that has undergone important changes in the last 25 years. Looking at the employment statistics, one could surmise that the area has experienced widespread gentrification: the overwhelming and unquestionable rise in professional employment would indeed suggest this. However, income levels in the neighbourhood are still significantly lower than those in the rest of the city (33% percent lower). In addition, while the considerable increase in single persons, both never married and separated/divorced; the absolute decrease in population (by 21%) with a simultaneous increase in number of households (by 11%); combined with high numbers of co-operative and non-profit/assisted housing units, would not necessarily dismiss gentrification (as seen in Rose's (1984) work on marginal gentrifiers), a substantial increase in rental occupancy

(54%) and equally sizable *decrease* in home ownership (36%) might. The reason for these statistics, I believe, is two-fold. Firstly, the neighbourhood has, in part, simply caught up to the times, so to speak, and "progressed" towards employment levels found in the rest of the city. The *type* of employment held by individuals, that is, increasingly professional, is also a result of post-modern trends, attributable to the maturing of the baby-boom cohort, their favouring of "soft" professions, and the growth of such jobs in a post-industrial city like Vancouver (Betz, 1992; Ehrenreich & Ehrenreich, 1979; Ley, 1987; Pfeil, 1990). Second, I would return to Rose's idea of marginal gentrifiers, and her characterisation of them as typically female professionals. Certainly, the neighbourhood's socio-economic make-up matches closely that of the districts which she studied in Montréal, and other evidence suggests that some alternative form of gentrification may, indeed, be occurring. For instance, low-rent secondary suites and multiple conversions — housing options suggested by Rose as being ideal stock for marginal gentrification — form a large proportion of available units in Grandview-Woodland, and the area contains about 550 co-op units and 85 non-profit units, another indication that perhaps more unconventional gentrification is occurring.

Thus, although the neighbourhood may be said to have undergone a kind of quasi-gentrification — at least in terms of its transformation with respect to employment trends — when it comes to housing trends it is still very much a rental-dominated area, albeit with full-gentrification potential. It is also one of the few remaining inner-city neighbourhoods which could conceivably experience a more "traditional" form of gentrification (ie. through restoration of an existing structure)<sup>17</sup>: whereas gentrification in

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<sup>17</sup> Strathcona, immediately west of Grandview-Woodlands, is perhaps the only other such neighbourhood. Others (such as Mount Pleasant or Kitsilano) have almost reached their saturation points.

Vancouver has tended to take the form of re-development, Grandview-Woodland contains a relatively large number of (presumably) restorable single detached homes (29%). Considering the recent economic/employment trends in the neighbourhood, therefore, it is quite probable that it could experience full-blown gentrification in the next few years, and indeed resident testimonies and a visual inspection of the neighbourhood today give every indication that the process has already begun. Certainly, as noted by Serafin (1994) and Jackson (1984), *commercial* gentrification is well underway on 'The Drive'; and housing gentrification, slowly but surely, is indeed creeping over the neighbourhood, one of the last bastions of ethnic inner-city stability.

#### 4.2 A 'Swingers' Paradise': The West End

"Strolling beside English Bay, ice cream cone in hand or people watching from an outdoor cafe on Denman Street on a summer afternoon, the West End seems more like a resort than an inner-city neighbourhood. The West End has a quality of excitement and a unique and exhilarating street life, day or night, not found in any other city neighbourhood."<sup>18</sup>

In Vancouver's West End street-side cafés and restaurants abound. These facilities draw hundreds of people to linger on its sidewalks. Its favourable location — adjacent to downtown's office and shopping facilities, hotels, as well as to Stanley Park and English Bay's beaches — makes it highly popular year-round. The busy 'street life' characteristic of the West End is so pervasive, that out-of-town tourists, and even Vancouver 'weekend warriors', do not necessarily recognise the important residential component of the district. Although it is filled with high-rise apartments and condominiums, one does not necessarily

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City of Vancouver Planning. 1993. *West End: A Community Profile*, #21. Vancouver, B.C.: City of Vancouver Planning Department, p. 1.

think that the towers are all residential: experience with other large urban centres would make us presume otherwise. Thus it is possible to be unaware of the fact that this is the most densely populated neighbourhood in Vancouver.

Unlike Grandview-Woodland, the West End was initially developed for Vancouver's turn-of-the-century aristocracy, who took advantage of the area's amenities such as the beaches and Stanley Park. However, when lands owned by the Canadian Pacific Railway located just south of False Creek were developed into the fashionable, new upper-class suburb of Shaughnessy, a mass exodus occurred, and the West End soon became a rooming house district. Intensive commercial and office development in downtown Vancouver in the 1950s and '60s increased land values in this residential pocket, and neglected rooming houses were replaced with high-density rental apartments from the late 1960s onwards.

Characterisations of the West End in the 1960s, 70s and 80s offer a distinct evolution, from a dense, if impersonal, 'concrete jungle', to an 'urban village'. It is clearly a neighbourhood that has fought for the 'community image' it retains today:

"The West End has long labored under the 'concrete jungle' image, but the thousands of people living near Denman Street know better. It is a neighbourhood. The essentials are all crowded into a space of a few blocks — the community centre, the library, the greengrocers and the banks, the drycleaner and the shoe repair."  
(Power 1984: A6)

Indeed, in the late sixties, West Enders were seen to "have a tendency to choose their location in line with self-styled, high living, swinging myths they [thought were] appropriate to themselves" (MacDonald 1968: A7): they were the young adults who, with the changing mores of the 60s, were making a go of it for the first time, outside the family home. Yet what they found was not a liberating, urban community, but an inner city like

many others: a refuge for street youth, prostitutes, and drug dealers, and for others like themselves who were trying to get their feet on the ground:

"'People stay a few months and move on,' said a rental agent. 'They have come here from the prairies, or the States, and are trying to get their bearings. They all want a room with a view.' More often than not, West End living is a stopgap between lives... Community spirit is non-existent, except in rare cases... The West End people...old, halting, carrying well-dressed dogs under well-aged fur coats. Sixteen-year-old runaways hiding out on park benches. Slender young men strolling together in the dusk. Solitary mothers herding children through supermarkets."  
(Ward 1973: 47)

Prostitution was especially a problem in the neighbourhood. Like Commercial Drive in Grandview-Woodland, Davie Street forms the physical core of the West End — yet the similarity ends here: Vancouver's prime prostitution area for a long time (until the late 1980s), the street earned the reputation of being the city's "sin strip" (Wanless 1994: A37), and was the subject of a 1984 documentary entitled Hookers on Davie.

Yet some seed of 'community' did exist, and when urban planners sought to raze the 'blight' they perceived to be breeding in the West End, there were those who clearly relished the neighbourhood's urbanity, who held onto some ideal of 'community' despite others' experience and outsider perceptions:

"The West End is a haven, a beacon, for the active, the vibrant, the creative — the people who make a city exciting... The West End is crowds. It is people on the street. It is anonymity. It is a city in itself... [Planners] seem unable to grasp that there are people who detest home ownership, who enjoy crowds, who long for concrete, who revel in anonymity, whose hearts sing at the sight of soaring high-rises, who may wince but feel somehow comforted at the sound of squealing breaks on the street outside, so far below." (Stainsby 1969)

The 'community' may have been somewhat unconventional, yet there clearly was something there. For instance, the removal of prostitution from the neighbourhood is seen

to be largely the result of community efforts such as CROWE (Concerned Residents of the West End) and their 'Shame the Johns' protests. Also, the West End was the first neighbourhood in Vancouver to get a local area Planning Council, which had a store-front office on Denman Street for years. The Council addressed issues such as traffic problems (which resulted in the implementation of mini-parks to block intersections and prevent cars from using residential streets to bypass artery traffic), development applications, and social planning (the West End Community Centre came about as a result of public demands to the Council). Evidently, this seed of community took strength in its accomplishments, and grew, to the point where the West End is now a local neighbourhood community in its own right.

Having shed its negative image, then, the West End is undergoing a revival. Its population

"has changed from low-income singles'...to a large mixture of high-disposable income singles and childless couples, many of whom own their own apartments... the area is becoming...an urban village whose residents differ considerably from suburbanites. Urban villagers... see the car as only one of several ways to travel, don't have to travel far anyway because services are nearby, live better will less and support their neighbourhoods." (Wanless 1994: A37)

Housing in the neighbourhood includes rental units (most of them remnants of the 50s and 60s building boom), strata-titled apartments (many converted from rental units, and some original) as well as newer condominium development, and construction and some conversions continue. As will be seen in the census data, rents have long been higher in this area, and now affordability (and hence accessibility) is further hindered by the fact that the rental market is decreasing rapidly.

Such high-end housing redevelopment can be largely attributed to the neighbourhood's increasing desirability, initiated by its proximity to natural amenities and sustained by its global exposure. Indeed, the West End's skyline has come to symbolise Vancouver to tourists worldwide, and images of strollers and loungers on English Bay, or of Robson and Denman Streets' shop-scapes grace the pages of travel brochures. Even regional promotion of the neighbourhood, as noted above, reflects this leisure-oriented perception of the West End. And, unlike Grandview-Woodland, this 'street life' — as in most other downtowns — is shared with outsiders. In this respect we can compare the West End's 'globalism' with Grandview-Woodland's 'localism': the West End's higher exposure to foreign travellers and investors has made it a much more globally-oriented part of the city, while Grandview-Woodland has remained a much lower-profile (ie. 'local') area.

What this has meant for the West End is a rapidly increasing cost of living and, consequently, changing demographics. Recently, significant foreign investment in Vancouver (in particular from Hong Kong) has been directed to redeveloping the north shore of False Creek immediately east of the West End, and the anticipation of these mega-projects has stimulated high-end (condominium) development in the neighbourhood. Some planners and architects have long foreseen the West End becoming another Manhattan: an upper-class, congested district where only the city's wealthy households will be able to afford residence (though this, predicted since the late sixties, has yet to occur). However, as will be evidenced shortly, this transition seems more imminent than ever, with an increase in young, childless, upwardly-mobile home-owning households, and a corresponding relative decrease in families and renters. The West End is thus well on its way to becoming the premier urbane district of Vancouver.

Unlike Grandview-Woodland, the West End<sup>19</sup> is a neighbourhood which has remained relatively stable with respect to its employment profile. Compared with the rest of the city, it has long maintained higher standards, with a higher-than-average proportion of university-educated people (37%), of employed professionals (34%), and of labour force participants (75%)<sup>20</sup>. Household income levels, however, are lower in the West End, averaging at \$33,000 in 1991, ranking well below the city average of \$45,000. However, as described below, the West End contains a significant number of single persons, and household size is notably lower than the city average (1.4%, as compared to 2.3% for the city as a whole): thus it is to be expected that household income be lower, since households are likely to consist of single income earners. Yet incomes rose by only 23% in the West End from 1971 to 1991, while in the city they rose by nearly 30%, indicating that upward mobility has perhaps been slower here than elsewhere in Vancouver. This would suggest one or both of two things. First, that professionals, here again, might be employed in more "soft" professions, such as cultural occupations (arts, media, etc.), para-medical occupations (massage therapy, chiropractic, naturopathy, etc.), or teaching, rather than in more traditional, high-paying "hard" professions like law or medicine. This is highly conceivable, given findings on the so-called "new middle class" (Betz, 1992; Ley, 1987), and given that the majority of the population in the neighbourhood is aged 25 to 45 years. In fact, while it is difficult to estimate the proportion of West Enders who are employed in these "soft" professions, it should be noted that 34% of them were considered managers or

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<sup>19</sup> Defined as census tracts 60, 61, 62, 63, 64, 65, 66, 67, and 68.

<sup>20</sup> all from 1991 Canada Census. Equivalent figures for the City of Vancouver are, respectively, 32%, 33%, and 68%. It is also interesting to note, however, that a gender breakdown of professional employment figures indicates that the proportion of female professionals in the West End has been equivalent each year to those in the rest of the city, while figures for men have been consistently higher in this neighbourhood than in the city as a whole.

professionals in the 1991 Census. On the other hand, the lower-than-average income levels can also be attributed to the fact that a large proportion of the population (53%) is employed in lower-paying, clerical and sales- or service-oriented occupations, thus offsetting the gains incurred by the professionals. Since unemployment rates are comparable to those in the rest of the city (indicating that we are not likely dealing here with *unemployed* professionals), I rather suspect that the interplay between the presence of a relatively high number of so-called "soft" (ie. new-middle-class) professionals and that of many service employees is the cause of the relatively low average income in the West End. To this equation some might add the proportionately higher number of senior citizens in the neighbourhood (25% vs. 23% city-wide)<sup>21</sup>, although the difference is negligible at best, and scarcely accounts for that much of an income differential. Besides, this cohort is fast diminishing in the neighbourhood, to the benefit of the so-called "baby-boom" cohort, while across the city the number of seniors has increased since 1971: we can therefore expect their contribution to the economic profile of the West End to become less significant as the years progress.

Other interesting demographic statistics include the fact that the West End contains disproportionate amounts of single and married people, compared with the rest of Vancouver. Indeed, while, as seen above, Vancouver has a more or less equal distribution of people in each of the two categories, 72% of the West End's population is single (again, never married or divorced/separated), while only 22% of West Enders are married. Further, a full 54% of adult singles in the West End have never been married; only 39% of Vancouverites reported the same statistic. Thus, the West End can be characterised as an

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<sup>21</sup> statistics include individuals aged 55 and over (from the 1991 Canada Census).

overwhelmingly singles-oriented neighbourhood, much like the majority of downtown neighbourhoods across Canada. In addition, the gender distribution within the neighbourhood has shifted considerably in the twenty-year period, from 54% female in 1971, to 52% male in 1991; this represents a 13% increase in men and a 10% decrease in women. This is particularly interesting in terms of this study, and in view of the fact that, city-wide, the distribution is reversed (50% men, 51% women in 1991) and that both genders experienced an equivalent increase in population (approximately 11%). Clearly, there is a trend evident in this neighbourhood whereby men are being attracted while women are moving out. This could be partly explained by the fact that rents in the area are at the high end for inner-city districts (though equal to the city average), and, perhaps more significantly, that they have experienced a 30%<sup>22</sup> increase since 1981; rents city-wide, meanwhile, have only increased by 13%. Further, the number of apartments has remained practically constant over the twenty year period, while the number of owned dwellings has increased by over 260%, thus almost tripling in twenty years. Women (especially if they are single, clerical or service workers, as statistics here would render likely) are typically less financially able to purchase homes: thus they have probably been pushed out as a result of both the relative decrease in the number of rental units, and the increase in rents themselves. Significantly, clerical workers (primarily women) declined by over 1600 between 1971 and 1991.

Therefore, unlike Grandview-Woodland, trends in the West End have either followed city-wide socio-economic trends quite closely, or indeed exceeded them. Evidently, the West End has long enjoyed economic conditions which are much more

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<sup>22</sup> this figure represents change in average (ie. owned + rented) rents.

favourable than those in Grandview-Woodland. This may surprise some urbanists, since the West End appears as really little more than a downtown apartment district. However, it is a neighbourhood which has seen significant investment in the last twenty-five years, mainly because of its desirable location (near amenities such as the beach and Stanley Park, and close to Vancouver's office district): many new condominiums have been developed, and apartment buildings have been gentrified and/or converted (to condominiums) in the neighbourhood since the mid-seventies<sup>23</sup>. In this sense, one could speak of the West End as being a gentrified neighbourhood, even though it contains a large majority of apartments (rather than single-family homes). In this other respect, then, it is also quite different than Grandview-Woodland: while the latter neighbourhood seems to be in an early stage of gentrification, the West End's progression is definitely more advanced, though it has perhaps not yet reached its saturation point.

### 4.3 Worlds Apart

Already it becomes evident that the two neighbourhoods under study are, both statistically and structurally, strikingly different, both in terms of their current characteristics as well as their respective historical trajectories. Grandview-Woodland is perhaps best described as a working-class 'inner-city suburb': a formerly blue-collar, non-anglophone neighbourhood once located in a peripheral location to downtown Vancouver, and which thus developed initial suburban characteristics (for instance, a familistic

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<sup>23</sup> Conversion figures are unavailable from City Hall or housing authorities, such as the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (only the number of construction and demolition permits issued is known). However, realtors in the area and long-time residents suggest that many formerly rental buildings have become condominiums. Another interesting facet to these conversions has been the handful of formerly commercial facilities (such as the old BC Hydro tower) that have also been transformed into strata-titled units.

orientation and strictly defined gender roles), but which has since become integrated into inner-city Vancouver. Consequently, its social characteristics have changed to match more closely those found in the rest of the city. By contrast, the West End has always been a central, inner-city neighbourhood. It has therefore exhibited housing and demographic trends similar to those found in other North American inner cities: initial residential development, a transition stage (including new construction and a population boom), a down-grading stage (including conversion of single-family homes into rooming houses), and finally a reinvestment stage<sup>24</sup> (which in this case began as redevelopment approximately thirty years ago). Its corresponding social characteristics have also been typical, from upper-middle class families (at the turn of the century), to an increasingly transient population, and now a social landscape dominated by small (one- to two-person), young, middle-class households.

It is my contention that such inherent differences in the two neighbourhoods contributed to their being chosen by gay men and lesbians as locational foci. In particular, I intend to show how the housing, employment and income conditions which I have outlined for each neighbourhood were significant in attracting either women or men, and how other associated social characteristics helped to welcome and foster gay male and lesbian (including lesbian-feminist) ideals at the time when these two communities were becoming increasingly visible (ie. early to mid-1970s). I also suggest that some of the demographic changes which I have documented here were influenced by the presence of these communities in Grandview-Woodland and the West End over the course of the last twenty-five years, and will show in what ways, and to what degree, this influence was felt.

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<sup>24</sup> from Yeates 1990: 219.

The emergence of the West End and The Drive as gay places was a result of existing material conditions coinciding with a set of ideologies, associated with each neighbourhood and each sexual sub-group. Specifically, I argue that the type of housing available in each neighbourhood, combined with the areas' respective socio-economic profiles and/or opportunities, and their cultural (ideological) attributes, served to attract gay men or women at very specific times in these communities' evolutions. Indeed, timing, I maintain, was quite significant to the way and the *place* in which each community evolved in Vancouver, as it was in other North American cities. As will be shown, changes on the urban landscape were paralleled by, and in fact dovetailed with, the gay 'revolution' and, in turn, gay spatialisation.

### 5.1 Understanding gay liberation

The Stonewall Riots, in New York's Greenwich Village in 1969, had a significant effect on the emancipation of both gay men and gay women (Castells & Murphy 1984; Lockard 1985; Rothenberg 1995):

"This time it was not only a matter of being close to social places where sexual networks could be connected. It was a whole specific lifestyle, *defined as gay*, that the new *militants* tried to develop symbolically and politically. They tried to establish a *community*, in its full multidimensional meaning." (Castells & Murphy 1984: 254 — original emphasis)

It was with gay liberation that 'gayness' began to take shape; that gay visibility and consciousness were raised. Yet, while the Riots affected both gay men and lesbians in important ways, similarities, effectively, end here. If "the new self-assertion of

homosexuals," as Altman (1982) has argued, "has made sexuality itself a political issue" (xi), it is *gender* politics that have, in turn, divided gay male and female liberation. As a result, each (gendered) sub-community must be examined separately if important distinctions are to be made.

### 5.1.1 Gay Men: A *Culture of Desire*<sup>25</sup>

Early studies of gay male sociology tended to emphasise the sexually-oriented pleasure/leisure aspect of their culture (Harry & DeVall 1978; Humphreys 1975; Levine 1979; Warren 1978) — what Bell (1991) calls "the 'pleasure-geographies' of gay nightlife" (324). Although, as argued by Bawer (1993), we now recognise that a sex-focused identity only applies to a certain proportion of gay men (and, arguably, only part of the time at that), it must be understood that the sexual component of the gay male identity was a focal point of early gay activism. Moreover, before the 1950s, sexual activity was the main social bond that homosexual men shared, lacking any formal or organised 'gay culture' or institutions (Castells & Murphy 1984; Lauria & Knopp 1985; Warren 1974). Long before the emergence of commercial gay areas — let alone full-fledged ghettos — gay men swarmed to specific areas within the city wherein they could find or purchase casual sex (Humphreys 1975; Lauria & Knopp 1985). These places — ranging from parks, to public washrooms, bathhouses and beer parlours — were typically found in the inner city (Edwards 1993; Lauria & Knopp 1985), where anonymity and partner variety were undoubtedly assured. Anonymity of course was critical, as long as homosexuality was considered not only a psychiatric disorder, but also a crime.

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<sup>25</sup>

Browning 1993.

Further, the Stonewall Riots were, as pointed out by Bawer (1993), very much centred around this so-called 'pleasure geography'. The Stonewall Inn, a popular gay night spot in Greenwich Village in the late 1960s, was the site of significant riots in the summer of 1969 when police threatened to arrest anyone found inside and then close the place down. In this, the first major event in the history of gay activism, New York City's gay men physically fought police for their rights, and burned the inn to the ground themselves, in a final act of defiance. The impulse for 'outsiders' to trivialise this event (one might ask, 'who cares about a *bar*?') is countered by its historical and *symbolic* significance to the gay movement, for bars were places where many gay men went looking for sexual encounters and for validation of their sexual identity, where everyone was "presumed to be gay, and... a legitimate object for sexual advance" (Warren 1974: 21). With Stonewall, then, the gay rights movement was officially born, and, "triggered not by a landlord's eviction of a gay couple but by a police raid at a bar, the gay rights movement focused from the beginning not on domestic-partnership rights but on sexual freedom" (Bawer 1993: 168). This has meant that issues of sexual freedom and access to sex and sexual partners featured quite prominently in the development of a gay identity and culture. Indeed, as Altman (1982) writes, "for homosexuals, bars and discos play the role performed for other groups by family and church" (21). Consequently, it should come as no surprise that the places which, historically, have been loci of such sexual activity (ie. urban, with an active nightlife) are where gay neighbourhoods eventually developed. Sanzio (1980) has called gay spaces "les espaces du désir", and it seems evident that gay areas did, in fact, emerge as pleasure-oriented places. That they subsequently evolved into self-sustaining communities (to the point of being characterised as 'quasi-ethnic' by writers such as Murray (1979) and Blacke-Fraser et. al (1991)) can be attributed, as we shall see, to the rapid development,

from the early 1970s onwards, of an elaborate gay culture based on "self-affirmation and assertion" (Altman 1982: 152) and to the increasing materialisation of this culture, through gay businesses and residential concentration.

### 5.1.2 The 'Double Yoke' of Lesbianism: On Being Gay and a Woman

There is no question that gay male and lesbian cultures differ significantly, and Altman (1982) and Adler and Brenner (1992) agree that this difference is due in large part, simply, to the fact that lesbians are women. Being women, lesbians face considerably more restrictions in their locational options. While gay male space is defined by what it has meant to the community's sexual identity, lesbian spaces are where solutions to several social, political and cultural constraints converge.

More specifically, it is argued that "one cannot talk of gay female and gay male identities in the same way [because] lesbians... tend to assert a feminist rather than a gay identity" (Altman 1982: 12). Indeed, while gay male culture appropriates and subverts socially accepted (ie. heterosexual) sexual and gender norms, lesbians, as feminists, tend to question these norms altogether. As Altman goes on to write,

"the argument of some lesbian-feminists [is] that gay men can, in fact, achieve most of what they want without having any real effect on the position of women... that the struggle for gay civil rights is not sufficient and leaves the basic structures of heterosexism unchallenged." (131)

Lockard (1985), Ettorre (1978) and Wolf (1979) concur that Gay Liberation was a significant force in raising awareness of lesbianism, but that it was feminism or the Women's Liberation Movement that gave lesbians group consciousness:

"Prior to [Lesbian Feminism]'s emergence, lesbians went to gay bars and clubs or joined organisations like Kenric or Sappho. These particular places or organisations attempted to promote an understanding of lesbianism (as an individual or personal

problem), but did not have radical politics (group consciousness)." (Ettorre 1978: 512)

Similarly, Wolf delineates two distinct periods in lesbian history: what she terms 'old gay life' (centering around bars, and dating back to the 1950s and earlier) and a later period, characterised by "a significant shift in lesbian self-image and lifestyle as a result of the influence of the women's and gay liberation movements during the late 1960s and early 1970s" (22). Thus, although gay men and lesbians share the political goal of eliminating prejudices and discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation, their framework and strategies differ profoundly to reflect gender differences. In other words, lesbians carry the additional political and social burden of being women: their "defined deviance... has been and is based on heterosexism *and sexism*" (Wolfe 1992: 142 — my emphasis). This burden is multi-faceted, and each of these facets further restricts available urban space for the lesbian community.

Certainly, for many lesbians there is a crucial difference between (straight) feminism and lesbianism — sexually *and* culturally. Although some lesbians have argued that "women's culture and lesbian culture are basically the same" (Jay 1979: 51), it is increasingly evident that a separate lesbian culture is evolving, with its own literature, folklore, music, films, etc.<sup>26</sup>, and that for many lesbians, the difference in sexual orientation (between them and heterosexual women) is a critical one. Yet certainly, just as gay male culture was founded upon sexual liberation, lesbian culture owes a debt of

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<sup>26</sup> Lesbian and lesbian-inspired films, such as The Incredibly True Adventure of Two Girls in Love, Boys on the Side, and Bar Girls have exploded onto the screen in the last few years, and some 'classics' include The Colour Purple (based on Alice Walker's novel), and Desert Hearts. And some particularly good recent literature includes: Robin Stevens' edited volume, Girlfriend Number One (1994), a wonderful compilation of contemporary short lesbian writings; Terry Castle's The Apparitional Lesbian (1993), a fresh and revealing look at historical lesbians as portrayed in mainstream literature; and, Mabel Maney's growing collection of 'Nancy Clue' mysteries, a lesbian-inspired parody of *Nancy Drew* mystery novels.

gratitude to the feminist movement of the 1970s, and the shift in the lesbian self-image that occurred at this time has been said to have been

"closely bound up with very major changes in self-perception brought about by the feminist movement, which itself had allowed large numbers of women to discover a capacity for sexual and emotional involvement with other women." (Altman 1982: 1)

Correspondingly, many leading feminists were (and are) themselves lesbian, and many feminists have 'adopted' lesbianism as a political act meant to challenge patriarchy (Valentine 1993c). This latter, constructionist approach to lesbianism, which considers that "being a lesbian is... about being a woman-identified woman" (ibid.: 239), is a political statement that draws clear links between lesbianism and feminism. Further, the "term, 'woman-identified-woman' became a direct attack on the established order and became equated with real feminist practice" (Ettorre 1978: 513). Thus, "whilst for some lesbians, their lesbianism is primarily an expression of their feminism, for others their feminism is more a facilitation of their lesbianism" (Edwards 1993: 41). Indeed, as pointed out by Ettorre, lesbian and feminist political action often merge, and, for instance, lesbian action-oriented institutions (such as community or crisis centres) also serve the female population in general. Lockard (1985) concurs, noting that "the women of the lesbian community maintained many ties with other feminists" (90).

Lesbianism and feminist politics have therefore had an undeniable mutual relationship that was instrumental in each movement's flowering throughout the 1970s and into the 80s. And, although the two have since parted ways to a certain extent — to the benefit of both, some would argue (Valentine 1993c) — the historical bond remains, and

historicising lesbian communities has often led researchers to conclude, as Barnhart<sup>27</sup> did, that

"membership [in the lesbian community] was based on being a lesbian, *identifying with the counterculture youth movement and its ideals*, and participating in, and showing a commitment to, the community and its activities." (Lockard 1985: 85 — my emphasis)

Consequently, because feminism evolved as part of the counterculture movement, it can be argued (and indeed observed) that lesbian culture holds a lot of the same values, priorities and tastes as did members of the counterculture. This, I contend (and others — Adler & Brenner 1992; Altman 1982; Castells 1983; Lockard 1985; and Wolf 1979 — agree), has been a significant factor in the locational patterns of Western lesbian communities.

Thus, lesbian and gay male culture have evolved in different ways, based on different ideologies. While contemporary gay male culture (at least in its beginnings) was very much centred on sexual freedom, lesbian culture has been more inclined to a political feminism. As suggested by Wolfe (1992) and Knopp (1995), gay people (like everyone else) seek environments that reflect their needs and values. Consequently, we can expect (and observe) that gay male enclaves will develop around sexual marketplaces, while lesbian neighbourhoods will emerge in areas that were influenced by feminist and countercultural politics in the 1970s — the period when lesbian neighbourhoods began to develop. Furthermore, these latter neighbourhoods will also fit the socio-economic profile most accessible to women, especially in terms of cost of housing.

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<sup>27</sup> Barnhart, E. 1975. *Friends and lovers in a lesbian counterculture community*, in N. Glazer Malbin (ed.) Old Family/New Family. New York: Van Nostrand Press. (referenced in Lockard [1985])

## 5.2 Place-ing Gayness

The differences that emerge between the two sexual minorities — gay men and lesbians — are, evidently, equally apparent in the locational choices they make, as social groups, to assert their socio-cultural and material positions. Many Western cities' landscapes have been inscribed with gay male and lesbian values, and definite patterns arise. As will be shown, these patterns are repeated in Vancouver, resulting in the two distinct neighbourhoods that are the subject of this research. Let us therefore examine the ways in which these spatialisations occurred, as perceived by other researchers of gay communities, and as confirmed in the case of Vancouver.

### 5.2.1 The West End: Community from Propinquity

The West End's emergence as a gay male enclave was a result of sheer propinquity. Historically, gay male culture has, to a significant extent, been defined by the (homo)sexual drive that was the main characteristic shared by most gay men until fairly recently (until a more complex, post-AIDS-scare, politically-driven gay male culture and practice began emerging). Quite simply, the production of settled gay male places occurred in areas adjacent to the 'scene' — the bars and other public places frequented by gay men looking for sexual encounters.

'Models' of gay male spatialisation put forth by other authors confirm this hypothesis. And while most theories of early gay male spaces were generated some years ago (the early 1980s and before), some more contemporary writings corroborate the earlier findings. For instance, Whittle (1995) and Hindle's (1995) research in the UK isolates the two key elements that form the basis of these earlier theories: gay nightlife, and available, suitable housing. Whittle, Hindle, and Lee (1979), Castells (1983), Castells and Murphy (1982), Levine (1979), Lauria and Knopp (1985), and D'Emilio (1981, 1983) concur:

residentially- and institutionally-based gay neighbourhoods developed in inner-city areas that were first known to gay men primarily for their public sexual 'hunting grounds'.

"The initial queer space formed was furtive and nomadic," writes Ingram (forthcoming),

"and was often associated with infrastructure such as railway stations. In turn, the major gay 'ghettoes' have been formed in urban cores around public transportation, pedestrian routes, and hospitable public space." (7)

Indeed, the gay neighbourhoods studied by these writers evolved in areas that historically contained a number of public gay places (such as parks, bars, bathhouses, and 'tearooms' or public toilets):

"At first, gay institutions and cruising places spring up in urban districts known to accept variant behaviour. A concentration of such places in specific sections of the city...results. This concentration attracts large numbers of homosexual men, causing a centralisation of gay culture traits. Tolerance, coupled with institutional concentration, makes the areas desirable residential districts for gay men." (Levine 1979: 375)

The progression from outdoor public places, to bars, to residential convergence and, finally, institutional completeness is a pattern that recurs in all of these narratives. But most importantly, the presence of suitable housing (ie. rental apartments) figures in all of these as well. Hindle (1995) even goes so far as to suggest that, "whether gay villages will develop more generally probably depends on the availability of suitable housing" (23). Whittle (1995) similarly isolates the importance of available housing, and attributes the settling of Manchester's Gay Village in its current location to the presence, in the early 1980s, of rental housing in the district:

"Ironically just as the bars and clubs, in the late 60's, had originally grown around the area where cruising and cottaging would draw in customers, in the early 1980's as the rent scene had moved to the Sackville Street and Bloom Street area, which were originally considered very disreputable haunts, so the clubs and bars followed." (36)

As indicated by Hindle, however, the 'rent scene' in Manchester's historical gay district has since been converted into more expensive, mostly non-rental accommodation, and thus has deterred recent gay settlement, and the "gay area is...without a clearly visible residential component, principally because there is a lack of cheap accommodation for rent close to the [institutional and commercial] village" (23). As a result, Whittle adds,

"the space becomes more accessible and attractive to 'ordinary' heterosexuals, not less, and as such heterosexual society is seen to attempt to reclaim it, buying their way in, through such notions as mixed clubs and bars." (31)

Thus, without the stabilising element of appropriate, affordable housing, the state of the gay male ghetto becomes precarious indeed. It is therefore evident that housing plays a significant role in the development of a gay male neighbourhood, as does the historical presence of more gay-specific institution. A distinct pattern of gay male settlement emerges from this dynamic, a pattern that is repeated in many Western cities.

Such a genesis can be illustrated through the case of Toronto's Church-Wellesley neighbourhood (Bouthillette 1994). During the 1940s, 50s and 60s, Toronto's 'underground' gay (male) beer parlours and bars slowly migrated from the city's civic district (at Queen Street and University Avenue), eastward to Yonge Street, and then northward (up Yonge) to College and Wellesley Streets. By this time (late 1960s, early 1970s) the gay rights movement was in full swing, and thus Toronto's gay community began to concentrate in this latter area, when the development of apartments in the area suddenly also created a significant number of housing units. As a result, what began as a gay-oriented commercial area in the 1970s is, today, the heart of what, arguably, is Canada's most institutionally complete gay community (Blacke-Fraser et. al 1991).

Toronto's experience demonstrates how, despite the fact that issues of sexuality may not be

as dominant today as they once were (as will be shown in the following chapter), complex gay urban places have grown most clearly from kernels of sexual marketplaces. Recognised early on for their gay meeting places, these neighbourhoods, in time, were shaped by dominant social forces (namely, the gay rights movement), to be transformed into commercial, political and residential districts catering specifically to gay men.

This has also been the case in Vancouver. Fairclough (1985) has noted that the West End's beaches, Stanley Park, and the English Bay bathhouse (a public washroom/change room facility intended for the use of beach patrons) have historically been gay cruising places in Vancouver, long before any material gay presence was evident in the area. Ingram (forthcoming) concurs, writing, "various forms of contact in outdoor space leading to acts of homosexuality, especially involving gay and bisexual men, has [sic] been occurring since the city's inception" (27). Yet, Wiseman (1983) has noted that "gays became more visible in the West End in the late 1960s, concurrent with the Stonewall Riots" (35). Thus, it was not until Stonewall and widespread gay liberation that more permanent gay settlement of the area occurred. Furthermore, the coincidence of the gay political movement with redevelopment in the West End (most notably the sudden increase in rental apartments) allowed this spatialisation to occur quite rapidly, for, as Wiseman goes on to write, "apartment life is not incompatible with the gay lifestyle" (ibid.). The development of the West End as a gay ghetto (at least to the early 1980s) is effectively summarised by Terry Fairclough (1985):

"Long-time residents suggest that the West End had a small population of self-identified homosexuals as early as the late 1940s, when the area was largely a rooming-house environment. The gay liberation movement of the early 1970s, combined with the rapid expansion of inexpensive one-bedroom apartments in the area, made the West End a focus for gay migration across western Canada. The

perception of large numbers of others like themselves in a cosmopolitan, exciting inner-city neighbourhood drew gay men to the West End. Visibility and freedom for gay men were achieved in the area with organised political action." (96)

Interviews with long-time gay residents that I conducted yield a similar scenario, but place more emphasis on the West End as a historical sexual marketplace. More specifically, the presence of gay bars in the downtown area, a more formalised set of gay places, has been seen as having been an important factor in placing the West End firmly within the cognitive maps of gay Vancouver. Before the appearance of gay bars, gay life remained largely underground — or at least unseen (by straights). However, according to one informant, bars literally brought gay men to the streets, in full view of anyone on Davie Street, as they waited in endless queues at the bars along there. Although promiscuity had always been an important part of gay culture, bars now formalised and localised this: "that was the whole reason to be out there, was to get lucky, right?", remarked the same informant. Other informants also recalled bars as being an important set of institutions for gay men in the mid-70s and 80s, and one man even spontaneously mapped them out for me (see Figure 5.1). As in Toronto and Manchester, early bars were located in the commercial and industrial districts, away from residential areas. However, as gay settlement began in the West End — the closest affordable residential area to these gay places (in fact located between these 'formalised' semi-public places, and the more traditional outdoor places) — bars began migrating west, to Davie, Burnaby and Robson Streets. This, according to one man, further anchored gay residential concentration, in the late 1970s, in the high-rise apartments east of Denman:

"And then, you know, these high-rises started popping up and all the guys used to move in, and it was interesting because they were really centrally located, almost

entirely exclusively along Burnaby Street, Burnaby and Harwood, between Burrard and down usually about as far as Broughton or maybe Nicola." (interview)

The presence of a large number of apartment buildings in the West End, then, was a key to the development of a gay ghetto there. Had it not been for those, one may speculate that, like Manchester, the neighbourhood's gay identity may have been far less recognised: for it is residential concentration that allows gay men to become visible in their everyday lives. Bars create a (night-)time-based set of gay places that can remain largely invisible to those not frequenting the area at those times. A gay residential presence, however, creates a visibility that is evident at all times and in many other, everyday places. And this is what allows a gay ghetto, like the West End, to materialise and become part of the local (gay or straight) consciousness. Indeed, popular media, at least from the early 1970s, have noted the presence of gay men in the West End, from describing "slender young men strolling together in the dusk" (Ward 1973: 47); to remarking on the presence of "homosexual bars and gathering places along Davie Street" (Kirkwood 1977: 6); to gay men's political involvement with respect to ridding the neighbourhood of prostitution in the late 70s (*Davie Street...* 1977; Kirkwood 1977). In 1980, a Vancouver Magazine writer estimated that "1/4 to 1/3 of the gay [male] population [of the Vancouver Region] likely lives in the West End" (Sturmanis 1980: 76); a few years later, a Vancouver Sun columnist determined that between 3,700 (10% of the West End's population at the time) and 7,000 (of an estimated 110,000 in the Lower Mainland of British Columbia) gay men lived in the neighbourhood (Andrews 1983). Obviously, such figures can be little more than educated guesses (given the lack of such data), yet the fact remains: "that there are gay people living in the West End there is no doubt" (ibid.). This population base has furnished the neighbourhood with the essential element needed for further gay institutionalisation to

# Gay institutions c. 1975-80

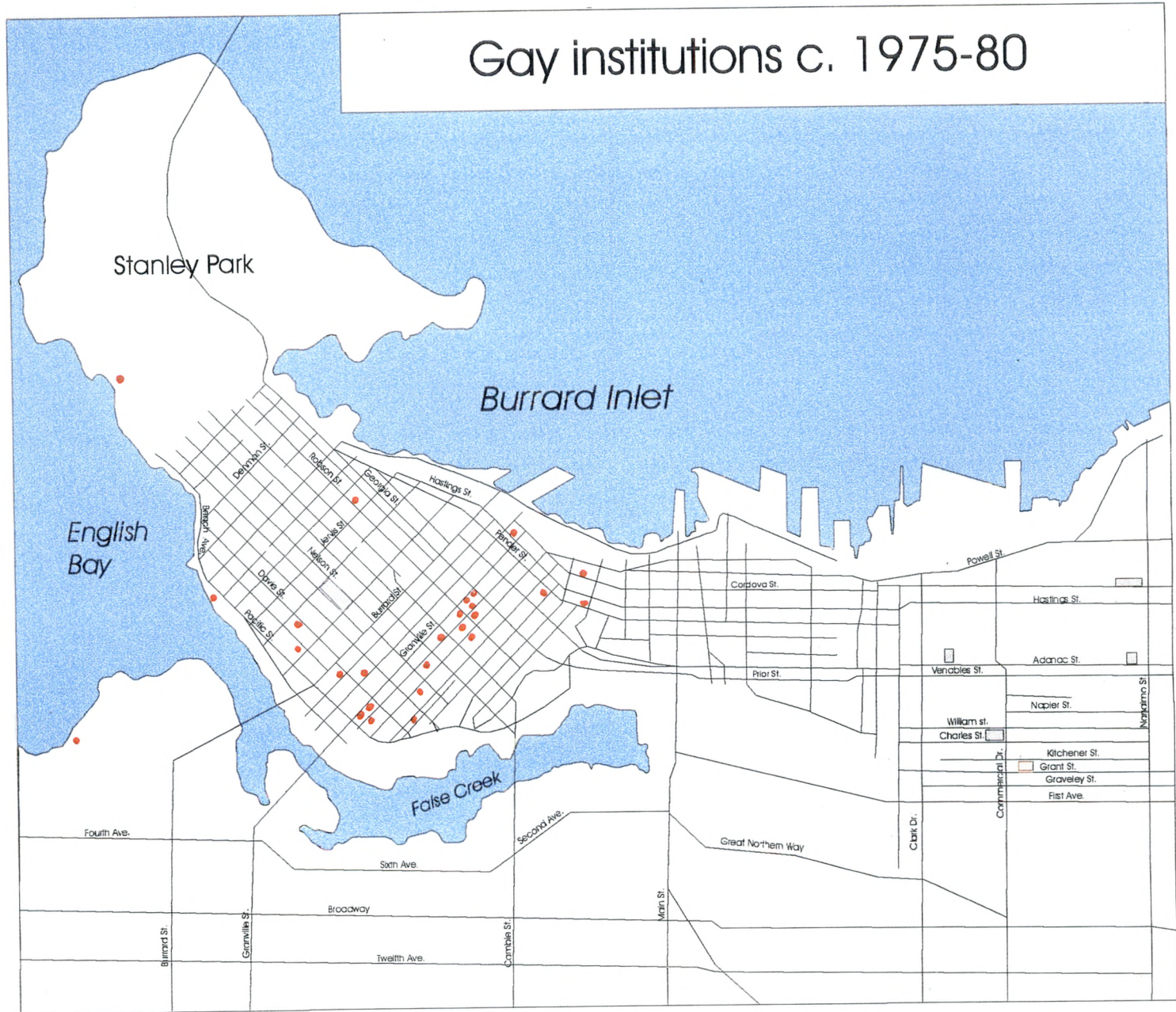


Figure 5.1: Map of gay institutions c. 1975-80

occur, in a process of reproduction, given its creation of both a gay market as well as an important symbolic, yet rooted, gay identity.

This model for the production of gay male places has clearly been repeated in Vancouver: from a landscape of sexual opportunities that drew gay men to the downtown area, settlement in the nearby West End — which became increasingly viable — soon followed, this area being the only feasible residential node in the vicinity of these sexual marketplaces. Similarly, as I will now demonstrate, areas which are known as lesbian districts, in Vancouver and elsewhere, were selected based on this community's particular politics and cultural heritage, although events unfolded in a rather dissimilar manner.

### 5.2.2 Commercial Drive: Where the Counterculture and the Family Converge

Just as the West End reflected the needs of gay men in the early 1970s, Commercial Drive has, for lesbians, embodied a distinctive set of politics and material possibilities. In her study of New York's lesbian spaces, Rothenberg (1995) contends that

"the timing of Park Slope's gentrification and the women's movement — particularly the directions of lesbian-feminism, cultural feminism and radical feminism — was essential in creating Park Slope as the centre of lesbian population in New York." (175)

This theory, as I have begun to sketch it here, is one that I see as being equally applicable to the case of Commercial Drive and Vancouver. Therefore I shall make considerable use of this framework in evaluating and relating the production of The Drive as a lesbian space, along with more material (yet related) elements (such as housing and socio-economic opportunities.)

In terms of the association between (feminist) politics (and practice) and space, many authors have generally remarked that lesbian ghettos are frequently surrounded by counterculture institutions. To this effect, consider the following observations:

"Castells (1983), Wolf (1979), Barnhart (1975) and Lockard (1985) all found lesbians located in counter-cultural areas in the cities they studied... [surrounded by] counter-cultural institutions such as theatres, coffee shops, studios that present progressive/fringe entertainment, alternative businesses like food and bicycle repair coops, radical and feminist bookstores etc... [such an] area has a much higher proportion of people living in non-traditional households [and] has a quasi-underground character; it is enfolded in a broader counter-cultural milieu". (Adler & Brenner 1992: 29-32)

"It is in the creation of a whole network of women's centers, coffee houses, rap groups, dances, bookstores, newspapers, rape crisis centers, etc. that one sees most clearly both the development of a lesbian identity and its links with straight feminists... While gay men are more likely to develop the sort of commercial enterprises associated with the sauna/disco culture... lesbians have been more attracted to the idea of self-conscious counter-institutions." (Altman 1982: 163)

While such characterisations may seem overly stark, they are nonetheless confirmed by other, perhaps more direct studies of lesbian spaces, that widen the field, to a certain extent, and describe lesbian ghettos as usually very mixed areas. For instance, Wolf's (1979) study of San Francisco revealed that "women do tend to live in certain ethnically mixed, older, working-class areas of the city: Bernal Heights, the Mission district, the Castro area, and the Haight-Ashbury" (72); similarly, Rothenberg's (1995) Park Slope area "became 'established' as an 'artsy-lefty' neighbourhood... very leftover sixties, very laid back, like [Greenwich] Village without the [high] rent" (175). Closely associated with counter-cultural values, lesbian-feminist ideals continue to embrace community-oriented living and seek to (re)construct space to reflect these ideals. As we have seen, Commercial Drive certainly fits this model. A successful combination of countercultural and ethnic institutions, the neighbourhood figured prominently in the 'radical' 1960s and 70s. As observed by one informant, the two neighbourhoods in Vancouver that harboured communes in the 1970s were Kitsilano and Grandview-Woodland. However, by the late

1970s and early 1980s, Kitsilano had already gentrified, while Grandview-Woodland retained its marginal, counter-cultural ambience. This is most likely because of the stabilising influence of its diverse (ethnic) population (*Changing faces*: 107), which has effectively resisted significant middle-class invasion over the years, as well as the stigma that the 'East Side' bears as the "part of Vancouver where people live only by necessity, never by choice" (White 1980: 103). Seemingly, this marginal character continued into the 1980s (and, to a certain extent, the 1990s), when Brad Jackson (1984) identified a "new wave" of people attracted to The Drive, composed of "an amorphous and loosely connected group of students, radicals, feminists, gays, artists, pre-, semi- and full-professionals, amongst others," whom he saw as having had an impact on changing the Southern European character of the neighbourhood, on housing and "in the various formal and informal institutions that they have helped to create in the area" (151).

Yet the common perception of The Drive as an Italian area was a very persistent one, and thus a certain ambiguity arises when one considers that this neighbourhood, prior to lesbians' moving in especially, was very much associated with Southern European machismo. One might wonder, "why would feminist women want to inhabit a space pervaded by such patriarchy?" A somewhat simplistic, yet effective, explanation could be that the neighbourhood also represented other, more desirable characteristics. For instance, women, being perhaps more vulnerable than men — or at least less safe in public places — might have been attracted by existing perceptions of Grandview-Woodland's under-stated, working-class, suburban-like family character. The neighbourhood's low profile would have assured a certain level of privacy, while the stable familistic nature of the neighbourhood — as opposed to, for instance, the transient nature of the West End —

would certainly have provided a heightened degree of physical security. And lesbians cite this — personal safety — as an important reason why they appreciate their neighbourhood:

"I like that it's very diverse [with] a lot of diverse communities that tolerate each other pretty well. It is a pretty queer area, as well as mixed with some really odd conservative communities, and that seems to work in some weird way. But, you know, I've had people...I've walked down the Drive with my girlfriend, and had someone mock-shoot me from across the road, and, you know, it's definitely there. But I like that it feels pretty safe to be out. It feels pretty safe to walk around with kids." (interview)

Such a positive characteristic, I believe, greatly offset the male-centred culture of this neighbourhood and thus lesbians were not as greatly deterred as one might think.

Also, and perhaps more significantly, the population's diversity seems to be an attractive feature:

"I just, I like this neighbourhood out here, it's just more relaxed, not so pretentious. More cultures, different cultures, culturally diverse." (interview)

"Seems like such a colourful area, I mean, you know, you've got your Italian mammas walking down the street, you've got your reall rubby-dub types, you've got your bull-dykes that you wouldn't wanna meet on a dark night. Then you've got your trendy young kids that you wouldn't know whether they're straight or gay, or who they are, then you've got two women walking down holding hands." (interview)

Cultural diversity, beyond its desirable cosmopolitan aesthetic, has allowed lesbians to 'belong', to become a minority within a collection of minorities. In his short, yet insightful, ethnography of *The Drive*, Michel Beaudry (1988) quotes one of his lesbian interviewees, whose words echo those of the women whom I spoke with:

"it's not like we're segregated from the mainstream or anything. We don't feel like outsiders or fringe-dwellers — we're just another minority, like so many others who live in this neighbourhood. No better and no worse" (123).

Like other minorities, lesbians have felt like they could belong on The Drive.

Furthermore, if Rothenberg is correct to observe that lesbians fail to create visible spaces more because of their historical inability to effect local (political) power than because of essentialist notions of a territorial femininity (as posited by Castells (1984)) then The Drive's grass-roots political history would have been yet another attractive feature to lesbians who, at the time of their initial spatialisation, were still very much influenced by feminist praxis. To lesbians in particular, the neighbourhood is especially known for its lesbian-feminist political awareness, as noted by this informant: "there's a very strong draw with the political climate out here, because people are more aware, definitely that has a lot to do with it, for sure." And this, according to one long-time resident of the Drive, has long been the case, for even in 1980 the area was known for harbouring "a lot of political dykes".

As suggested earlier, timing has had a lot to do with the spatialisation of lesbians in Vancouver. While it was the 'coming together' of lesbian emancipation with the counterculture that provided lesbians with a culture and a certain sense of spatial control, it was the coming together of these cultural movements with changing social conditions that led to its final spatialisation. The material conditions that existed in Grandview-Woodland in the late 1970s and early 80s were ripe for lesbian settlement. Again, Rothenberg's study mirrors quite closely what transpired in Vancouver:

"Park Slope historically has been a real active community', said one lesbian resident... 'there was an influx of political activists when you could get housing cheap'." (175)

Indeed, the presence of cheap, suitable housing is perhaps the most often cited locational motivation for lesbians on The Drive, and this is attributed, more often than not, to the

fact that lesbians are women. Clearly, gender-based spatial restrictions have affected lesbians in various ways. The first of these has to do with household structure. Even though gay and lesbian households, typically including two or more same-sex, unrelated people, are equally non-traditional in certain respects, lesbian households are further marginalised because lesbians "are far more likely than gay men to carry [family] responsibilities, to have children" (Adler & Brenner 1992: 26). Because many lesbians do not 'come out' until after they are married with children (Wolf 1979), or because, like so many other women, they become single mothers at an early age, "they are more likely than gay men to be primary caretakers of children" (Adler & Brenner 1992: 32). As a result, unlike most gay men, housing and neighbourhood requirements will include space and facilities for children, and an environment that is more conducive to raising a family (more so than, for instance, a downtown neighbourhood typical of gay male ghettos would be). Family considerations, then, are a further spatial restriction, one that is placed on lesbians because they are women.

Also because they are women, and contrary to gay men, lesbians face some significant financial constraints. Jay and Young (1979) have found gay men to be among the most affluent minority in the United States, largely because of their reduced financial commitments (due to their typical lack of dependents). A corollary to this, it could be argued, would likely be that lesbians, as women, single mothers, and often in a live-in relationship with another woman, are at the extreme opposite end of the economic spectrum, with their statistically-low average income (being women) and their family responsibilities. Altman (1982) corroborates this view, and writes that "social mobility... applies especially to men; under present socioeconomic conditions, to be a lesbian often means to surrender the possibility of social mobility through marriage" (157).

Economically marginalised, lesbians are therefore "less likely than gay men to be able to afford the security of owning their own homes, [and] commonly have problems finding suitable housing." (Valentine 1993c: 241).

Effective solutions to these constraints have combined both feminist community ideals and the need for affordability (Altman 1982). Women's communes are perhaps the most radical of these, yet they include many of the elements judged ideal to lesbian mothers: a sharing of facilities, costs, childcare, household chores, etc. Co-operatives are certainly a more common option, especially since the late 1980s, but perhaps the most common is the simple sharing of a house by two or more households, often in the form of subdivided flats (Anlin 1989), a scenario not altogether different from Rose's (1984) theory of marginal gentrification. It is therefore often observed that lesbians will tend to locate in poorer districts (Winchester & White 1988), with "significantly lower levels of owner-occupied housing, lower rent levels and lower proportions of traditional families than the remainder of the city" (Adler & Brenner 1992: 29). Economic and household considerations are therefore significant factors in restricting lesbians' housing — and thus locational — options. Once again, The Drive appears to have been a prime candidate where viable housing options were available at the time when lesbians were beginning to form spatialised communities.

As seen in Chapter Four, the neighbourhood has always had a family orientation, with a large number of 'unconventional' rental units (co-ops, secondary suites, flats in houses — even communal arrangements) that have long had lower rents than the city average. Having resisted wide-spread gentrification, these conditions therefore offered a secure, affordable environment for lesbians fifteen years ago:

"I think when a lot of women started living here it was because the rent was really affordable and nobody wanted to live in the east end and it was kind of whatever, you know it wasn't a really trendy spot to live and so rent was really affordable."  
(interview)

In addition, the neighbourhood's housing stock is also better suited to households that may include children, or several adults in a cost-sharing situation:

"My gut feeling is, women moved into this neighbourhood cause, let's be honest, women don't make as much as men, especially not ten or twenty years ago, and they can't afford rents downtown. Plus women have kids and they want their kids to be able to run around." (interview)

"It just so happens a lot of us just don't make much money so we congregate where it's cheaper to live, and we live in two or three bedroom houses, we share accommodations. Basically that's why...the one bedrooms are a lot more affordable in this neighbourhood as well and there are children." (interview)

Such housing requirements were easily filled in Grandview-Woodland, where, as seen earlier, multiple conversions (ie. large houses subdivided into more than two suites) are a distinctive element of the streetscape; nearly 30% of housing is single-detached, many of them with secondary suites; and 16% of housing is considered 'non-market' (while only 10% of units city-wide are non-market). The district also harbours a number of housing co-operatives, which reflect lesbian-feminist counter-cultural values in their conception and operation, including income-based rents and the sharing of maintenance work. As a result, according to one informant, "a lot of the coops ... are really queer". Thus, with respect to housing, the neighbourhood was well-suited to the women, who, evidently, began moving in during the early 1980s.

### 5.3 Conclusion

As in the West End, gay spatialisation on The Drive has incorporated ideological, material and experiential factors, but in significantly different ways. As a result, it has produced a notably dissimilar gay space. While in the West End gay material (public and leisure) spaces preceded gay settlement (which, in turn, suited itself to existing housing forms), The Drive's gay settlement was driven equally (if unconsciously) by ideological (political) forces and by experiential (socio-economic) conditions that converged on an amenable landscape. The production of a gay Drive was significantly more complex than that of a gay West End, a result of a more complex process of cultural identity formation. Gay male culture, quite plainly, has existed (at least historically) as a predominantly sex-driven culture. Its places, consequently, were primarily concerned with the provision of sexual encounters. Contrary to this, lesbian culture emerged as an amalgam of countercultural and feminist ideologies that focussed on a sexual identity — lesbianism. Sexuality, although an important part of a lesbian's identity, did not feature as prominently in early (ie. political) lesbian culture. As a result, lesbian *sexual* places were not as significant as those of gay men, and lesbian spaces developed rather around feminist and countercultural ideals and spatial manifestations. Clearly, gay men and women have produced very different landscapes, in very different places, based on equally different values and cultural norms. And as we shall now see, the reproduction and perpetuation of these landscapes — as identifiable gay landscapes, both to gay *and* straight people — have featured mechanisms that continue to reflect these disparities.

The processes that are key in inscribing certain areas as gay male or lesbian spaces are what I define as the 'reproduction' of gay spaces. Here, then, I seek to describe the ways in which the gay identity of the neighbourhoods is maintained, as well as recognised by Vancouver's population (gay *or* straight). In other words, I investigate the material strategies that were adopted in the West End and on The Drive to reinforce the (gay) ideologies of these spaces. In this way, I am describing the ways in which gay people have modified their environments to reflect their values, needs and desires. However, this has an important corollary: for space *itself* plays a significant role in shaping the cultures that depend on, and emerge out of, it. Evidently, a process is at work whereby Vancouver's local gay (male and female) culture is being reproduced *by* these environments. This reverse process clearly also merits investigation.

## 6.1 Reproducing Spaces

Of the two neighbourhoods, the West End is the most developed as a distinct subcultural place. This is undoubtedly a direct reflection of men's higher access to capital, although it also reflects gay men's culture as different from that of gay women. Lesbian culture in Vancouver, by contrast, merges to a significant degree with women's culture. Rothenberg (1995) identified "semi-lesbian or lesbian-congenial spaces" (165) in Park Slope, rather than fully-lesbian spaces, and I think this also applies to The Drive.

### 6.1.1 The Gay West End

Several types of gay-friendly or -specific land uses exist in the West End: commercial, residential, institutional, and fleeting and (relatively) permanent meeting places

(see Figure 6.1). Indeed, by most standards (Murray 1979), it would be considered an 'institutionally-complete' gay neighbourhood. Most, though not all, of these spaces are oriented to gay men (as opposed to lesbians), but some are patronised by a variety of people<sup>28</sup>. Furthermore, many non-gay-specific or -oriented places also exist in the neighbourhood, including, for instance, a few supermarkets, a McDonald's, a pharmacy, as well as a number of hotels and a number of offices, and other shops and businesses. Yet the area harbours a significant concentration of gay-oriented places that clearly marks it as a gay neighbourhood.

The places that reproduce the West End as a gay space can be divided roughly into two major categories: the formal ones, and the informal ones. The latter, if difficult to isolate or define, are nonetheless the most unequivocally gay in character. These include the more time-specific spaces (for instance, Stanley Park trails after dark), as well as the streets themselves, any time of day. Of course, all the streets are not all gay, all the time. Yet as Ingram (forthcoming) has argued, it is on the streets, or in outdoor space, that gay culture is increasingly being reproduced, such that "bars are only minor stops with the outdoor space along the way now holding more promise for a range of social contact and solidarity" (30). It is on the streets that one may witness two men walking hand-in-hand, or engaged in a good-bye embrace on the corner of Davie and Thurlow, and these are the acts that inscribe the neighbourhood as a gay space.

It is also on the streets that gay men live their everyday lives, supported by the network of more formalised spaces that line them. Perhaps the most 'visibly gay' of these

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<sup>28</sup> Indeed, with the West End being such a popular tourist sightseeing destination (with its beaches, Stanley Park and viewpoints, not to mention its central location), it is hardly surprising that certain shops, restaurants and cafés will have a quite varied clientele — gay, straight, male or female.

spaces are commercial ones: gay book/gift stores, gay cafés and restaurants, trendy men's clothing stores. They typically display rainbow flags, stickers or windsocks — the international gay symbol — and a conspicuous number of patrons are male and sport the gay fashions of the day. These spaces create a 'scene' whereby gay men linger and are recognised by others, and by some straights, as such. They create a network of meeting places, of places to be seen:

"I mean, Delaney's [gay-popular café], you know, that's sort of... I mean, and if you go there, the time to go there is Saturday morning, bright sunny summer's day, and everybody is there! [laughs] And everybody's having their five-dollar coffees, and everybody looks really great! I think it's just a total scene" (interview)

It is a landscape of consumption (of fashion, food, and coffee, coffee, coffee), where the dubious bar — as a meeting ground — has been replaced by more socially-acceptable alternatives. Indeed, the consumption aspect of the neighbourhood is what brings many to its streets, and can get overwhelming at times, as an informant comments,

"I think the West End is getting increasingly more packaged: you have to wear the right clothes, and you have to be seen sipping coffee at the right coffee houses, and it's becoming a bit much." (interview)

Despite this, another informant credits this change, from bars to more 'mainstream' commercial places as gay social spaces, as having been instrumental in creating 'community' in the West End:

"it wasn't like there was any kind of even a community, no place for the gays to go... I would say that the biggest change in all of that, where guys would come out and meet each other and be openly gay in the West End really came about with the coffee places and gyms...more non-alcoholic places. I would say Little Sister's [gay bookstore] probably had a big thing to do with [it]." (interview)

# Advertisers in Xtra! West Magazine

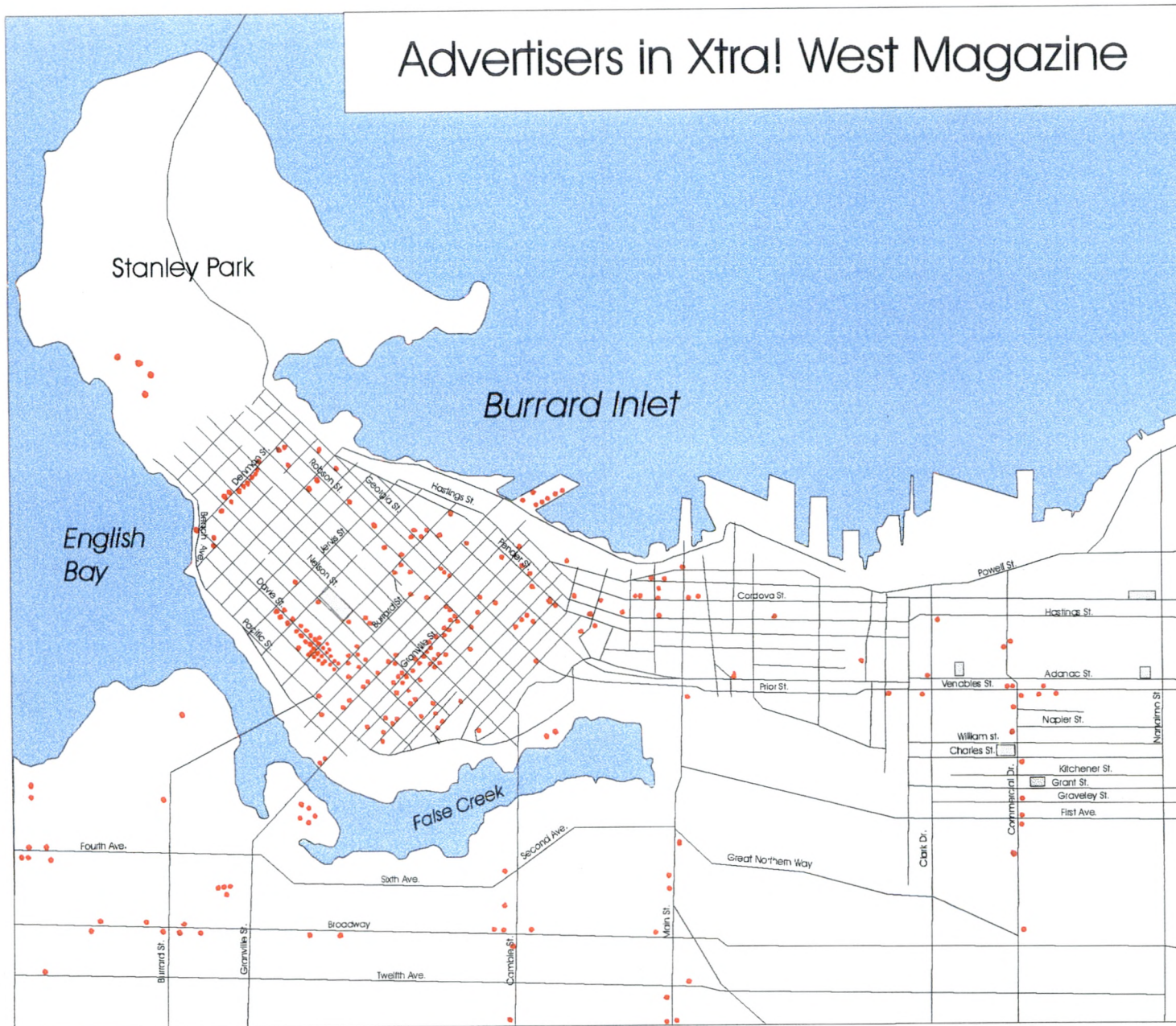


Figure 6.1: Map of advertisers in Xtra! West

And the necessity of a gay community centre<sup>29</sup> has even been questioned, on the basis of the significant social role played by these places:

"Well, I wonder how much they [community centres] would need to [exist], because there are, what, 'club-o-rama' around here, and there's coffee shops..." (interview)

The assumption that the area's restaurants, clubs and cafés are unquestionably gay spaces is inherent in both these testimonies, and is reinforced in the advertising that appears in *Xtra! West*, Vancouver's newest bi-weekly gay newspaper. Of the issues surveyed (a random sample of 14 issues), 42% of retail ads were for restaurants, bars or cafés. Of these, 74% were establishments located in the West End (see Figure 6.1), and all the bars (in the West End) were advertised specifically to a male audience (see Figures 6.2 and 6.3). Some of these establishments, such as The Edge Coffee Bar and Hamburger Mary's, are firmly in place on Vancouver's gay landscape and could even be considered landmarks; the others are definitely trying to work their way into the gay imagination. And some are so fully ingrained, that they don't even need advertising (such as Delaney's coffee bar, definitely among 'the right coffee houses' in which to be seen).

The gay landscape that emerges is rooted in consumption. Like many of us, it is through consumption that gay men socialise, but, more importantly, it is through consumption that they are *recognised*: it is these places of consumption that mark the West End as a gay area to those who are familiar with it (straight or gay); it is by the location of these places, as advertised in the city's gay newspapers, that newcomers to the city (or the

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<sup>29</sup> Though it has been having much difficulty garnering enough community support to move and improve its facilities. While new cafés and restaurants open, almost monthly, in the West End, the Gay and Lesbian Centre is down to one full-time staff (on a minimal salary), and is located in an inconspicuous second-floor office on a side street off Davie Street.

city's newly 'out') can map Vancouver's gay male geography. In this way, the West End's gay character is significantly reproduced through its places of (gay) consumption.

The predominance of gay-oriented, or gay-owned/-operated services in the neighbourhood also reinforce its gayness. Again, when one surveys *Xtra! West*, one finds that 20% of service ads are for professional services, including lawyers, financial advisors, counsellors, insurance agents, and so on, but not including medical, real estate or travel services (which, added to the above total, raises the percentage to 51%). These personal services (excluding the last three categories) are mostly located in the West End (59% of ads, 57% of advertisers). The same is true of medical professionals (64% of ads, 82% of advertisers) and real estate agents (53% and 50%), while travel services include agencies (67% of which are in the West End) as well as destinations, such as hotels and B&B's, which are typically out of town. Other services include non-profit agencies such as AIDS Vancouver or Meals on Wheels, which are all located in the West End (except the Vancouver Lesbian Connection and AIDS Vancouver Island), as well as personal services such as those related to beauty and fitness, which are also located primarily in the West End (61% of ads, 55% of advertisers). The West End definitely gets the lion's share of advertisers (50% of advertisers), a proportion that increases noticeably if out-of-town advertisers are removed from the total (to 57%). Thus, from these sources, the West End clearly emerges as Vancouver's premier gay area.

This character is further reinforced by the fact that most of the city's major gay events (male or female) take place in the West End. Perhaps the most famous of these is the Pride Parade that snakes along English Bay and through the West End every B.C. Day (the first Monday in August). Drawing thousands of gay men and women from Vancouver, the Lower Mainland and beyond, the Pride Parade is an occasion for gay men

# Gay male-specific advertisements

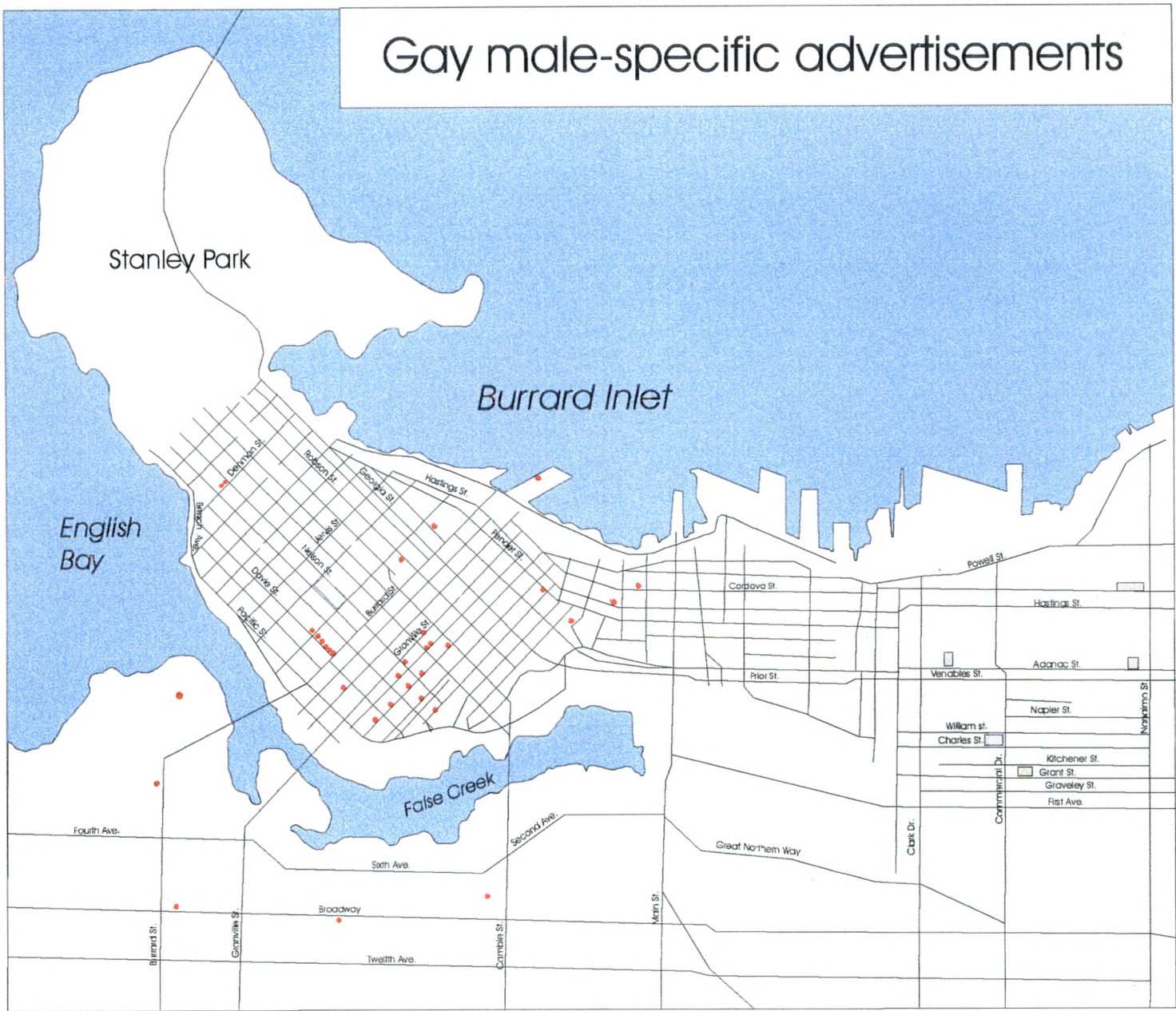


Figure 6.2: Map of gay-male-specific advertisers in *Xtra! West*

# Bar advertisements

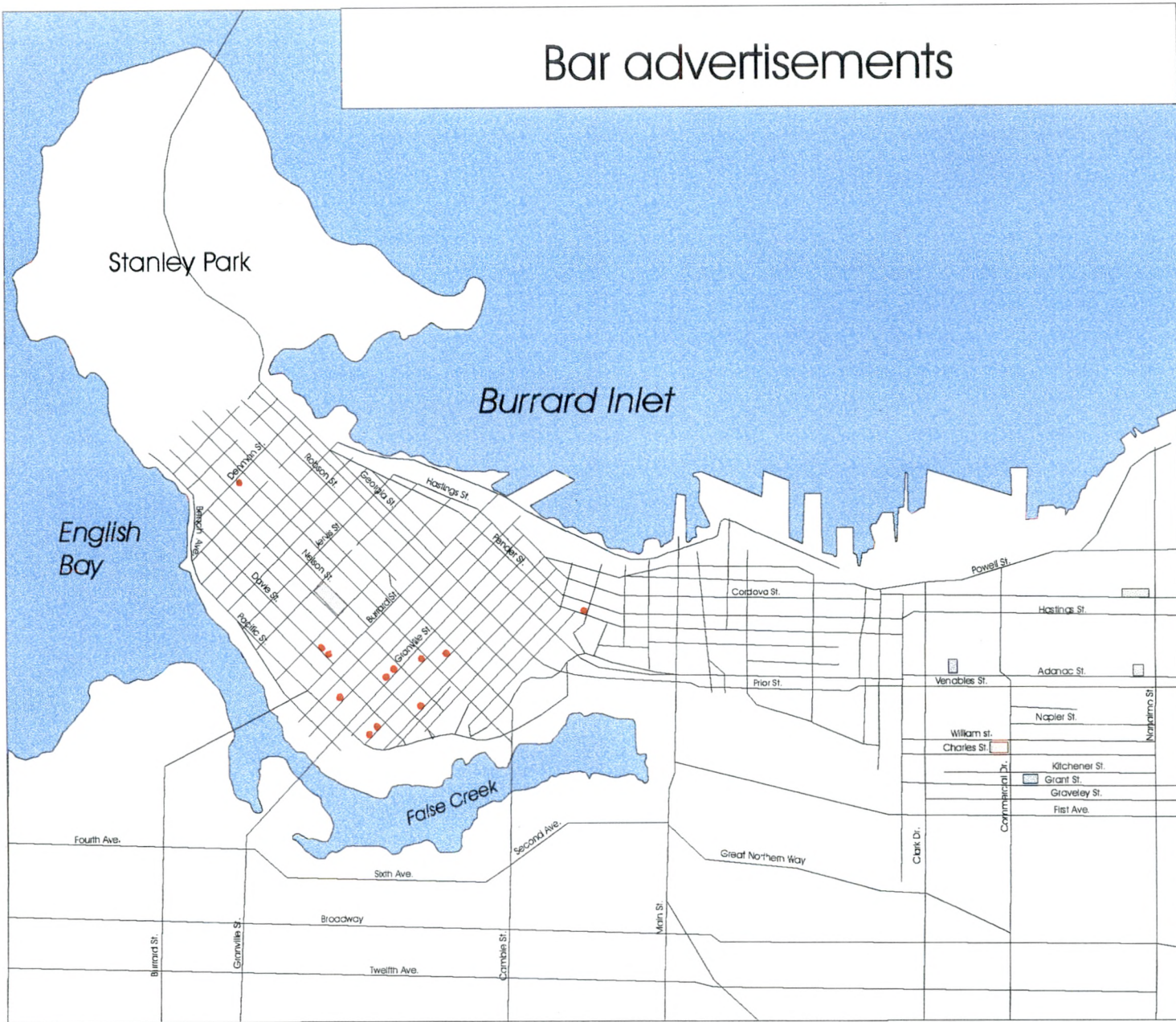


Figure 6.3: Map of gay bars advertised in Xtra/West

and lesbians to be with each other, celebrate their culture and themselves, encourage and display the diversity that characterises 'the gay community', show solidarity, and make their numbers and presence known to the rest of society. If nothing else, the Parade's ever-increasing numbers and audience advertise the size and diversity of the gay population. The fact that the Parade, which is covered on the province's six-o'clock news, takes place in the West End places the neighbourhood squarely at the heart of gay life in British Columbia, particularly to those who are unfamiliar with it (and, for instance, who see it on the news in Prince George). The scale of this type of inscription became international when, in 1991, the International Gay Games had its parade, and many of its non-athletic events, in the West End: gay men and women who had likely never been to Canada, let alone Vancouver or the West End, went away knowing (and circulating) the fact that gay Vancouver lives in the West End, thus internationally reproducing the West End as gay. They and their friends, on returning or coming to Vancouver, would know to look to the West End for their gay socialising.

It is interesting to note that gay male political activism, such as public demonstrations, rarely take place in the West End (Brown 1994). This is not unusual, as also shown by Davis (1992, 1995) in Boston. The point of gay activism is not so much to reinforce gay spaces, but to subvert straight spaces or to effect political pressure (on the straight-dominated government). Therefore, activism is most effective (and most warranted) in non-gay places, such as suburban shopping malls or city hall. These activities undoubtedly serve to reproduce gay space (by diminishing the supremacy of straight space, or by acquiring more gay rights), but only indirectly: by not occurring in these places, the link is less clear.

More informal networks are also at work in reproducing the gay character of the West End, most notably with respect to further fixing residential concentration. Several of the men I interviewed reported helping, or being helped by, other gay men in their housing search. One man characterised the process as follows:

"within the gay community there's a real network, well, I guess that's the definition of a community, but... For example, the guy who takes care of this building, he lives with his lover downstairs. I think about 75% of this building is gay. So you go to a bar and you see them [the managers] there and then they introduce you basically to everyone else in the building. So you get to know everybody. Then the word gets out, that if you're moving out Mitchell's<sup>30</sup> looking for a place to sublet, or to take over an apartment or whatever." (interview)

Other less explicit mechanisms are also at work, such as the couple I interviewed who helped a friend find a suitable condominium and recommended one very close to theirs. Another couple got into a building which they deemed exceptional, and they are forging contacts with gay men in the suite they ultimately want, with the expectation of moving into it when the men move out. Evidently, gay men know they will find others living in the West End, and know that they can rely on their support in finding suitable housing. This kind of networking reinforces the gayness of the area *to the gay men themselves*, while increasing the numbers (and hence the visibility) of gay men in the neighbourhood, thus doing the same for the rest of Vancouver, and making life easier and more comfortable for gay men in the West End.

#### 6.1.2 "Get your bags girl and RUN!" to The Drive

The lesbian identity of The Drive, though known throughout most of Vancouver, is forged around different elements. Most notably, its reproduction has been somewhat more subtle than that of the West End, because it is less evident as a material culture: for one,

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<sup>30</sup> fictitious name.

there are not as many gay-specific shops or venues (see Figure 6.4), though this is not unusual (Rothenberg 1995). The strategy of 'lesbianising' The Drive has, rather, overwhelmingly involved using the spaces that were there and appropriating them (if only temporarily). In this way, one could say that lesbians have come into more direct contact with their non-lesbian neighbours, and this is the main process by which the lesbian character of the neighbourhood came to be recognised by the population at large.

Reproduction of the lesbian community itself is equally slippery. The basic elements that have marked The Drive as a lesbian space (or as acting to concentrate lesbian population) have largely been feminist or women's institutions. A small number of neighbourhood institutions, such as the Vancouver Lesbian Connection and the Gazebo Connection (two lesbian networking groups), are aimed specifically at gay women, but the majority of them are grass-roots organisations aimed primarily at women in general, as well as visible minorities and low-income families. These include the Vancouver Status of Women's office (established in 1976), the Women's Health Collective (which has since moved from the heart of the neighbourhood to the Broadway area further south), MOSAIC (a multicultural integration service organisation), and the REACH community clinic. Given lesbianism's link with feminism and women's issues in general, such a place-based focus on women's institutions, at a time when these were a rarity, not only reinforced the area as one open to — and active in — women's issues, but created a strong lesbian association for the area. Lesbians came to recognise The Drive as a neighbourhood that, by attracting feminist activists, would also invariably attract other lesbians — whether as women active in the movement themselves, or as women expecting the presence of the latter. While the political history of the neighbourhood attracted lesbians to the

# Lesbian-specific advertisements

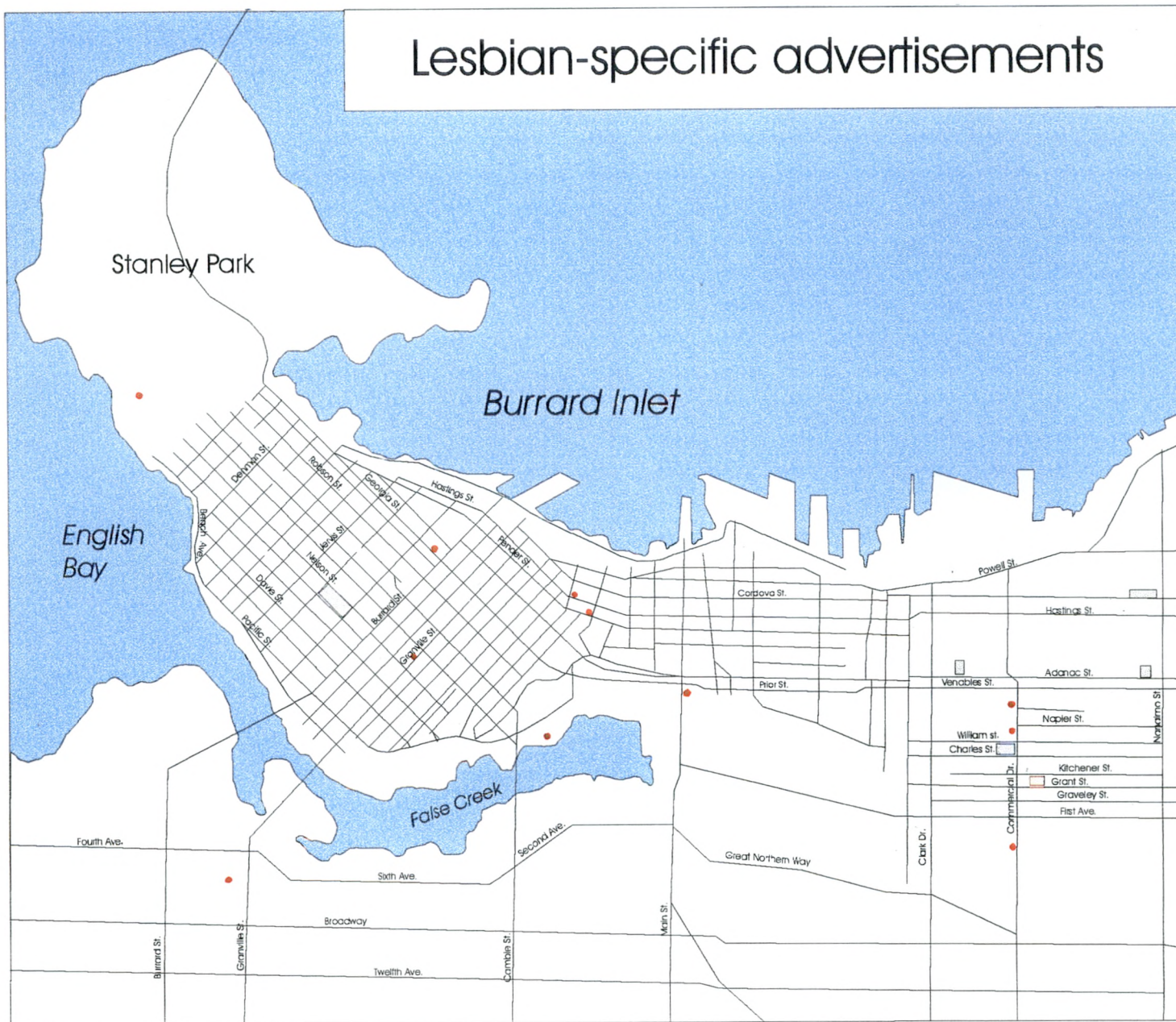


Figure 6.4: Map of lesbian-specific advertisers in Xtra! West

neighbourhood in the first place, their presence served to confirm the political awareness of The Drive and keep lesbians there. The leftist political inclination of the neighbourhood has certainly not waned, and the recent relocation of the Greenpeace headquarters to The Drive continues to reinforce this. Furthermore, the celebration of Stonewall 25<sup>31</sup> in Grandview Park, on Commercial Drive, worked to bring neighbourhood politics closer to gay politics, while the Women in View festival, a number of whose venues are in the area, continues to strongly identify the area with women's politics.

Rothenberg (1995) has identified the importance of propinquity in reproducing lesbian neighbourhoods. Although somewhat less discernible, this process is significant in entrenching and increasing lesbian population:

"Wolf noted that: 'since much of the socialising in the community consists of visiting friends, women without cars try to live near each other, so that gradually, within a small radius, many lesbian households may exist' (Wolf 1979: 99).

Valentine (1993a) reports a similar socialising form among lesbians in a small British city. Home visits are especially appealing because there are so few public *and* 'private' spaces where lesbians can feel comfortable being themselves; having friends nearby becomes all the more important." (177 - original emphasis)

This was confirmed by most of my lesbian informants, who revealed that they socialised mainly in their neighbourhood, especially with other lesbians:

"I could always swing more money, but I didn't really want to. The rent is really reasonable out here, but it's also, it's Commercial. I know a lot of people here, and because I'm on my bike it's hard for me to go all over the city to see my friends, if that was the case. But it just so happens we're all here" (interview)

"there's just hundreds of people that I know in this area. In fact, whenever you go to do anything that's lesbian-oriented, like the other day I was trying to find a gym

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<sup>31</sup> Stonewall 25 was a festival commemorating the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Stonewall Riots. It included several parties at West End bars, but its crowning event was the celebration in Grandview Park, a music festival and rally aimed at reinforcing gay solidarity.

— I've joined a new softball team this summer, and I've never met any of these women before, most of them I hadn't met, and I said I would go about finding a gym. I didn't have to find out where anybody lived, I just found a gym in this neighbourhood, because I know half the team is gonna live in this neighbourhood." (interview)

"[I do] most of my socialising up here. I think everybody lives in the neighbourhood. There's one [friend] who lives in the West End who's moving to the East End. Generally speaking, in this area. The people I hang out with all live in this area... One thing best about my neighbourhood, would be all the dykes who hang out here, totally. You can walk up the street and you're pretty much guaranteed to run into somebody that you know" (interview)

The kind of networking that occurs with gay men in the West End is also evident here, and many women reported having found their current housing after a friend's recommendation:

"in 1980 I was a hippie and I lived in a Kits commune, 'cause that's where all the health food stores, hippie bookstores and all that were at that time. But I got tired of living out there, and I was involved in the feminist movement at the time so I was out here [on The Drive] quite a bit. So I started looking for a women's commune around here, and eventually moved into one with a friend of mine." (interview)

"it wasn't until I guess the summer of '91 when I came into town [from Burnaby] to meet some people, a lesbian couple actually, to dog-sit for them, they were going away, another friend of mine knew them from before...so I came out and met them and they were fine, and that was cool. So I went and stayed there for about a month, a couple of weeks a month something like that. And just talking with them, they had me over for dinner, just talking with them and what-not, and I think they knew that I was a dyke before I did, cause 'gotta move you into the city, get your bags girl and RUN! There'll be no going BACK! We'll move you into the EAST END! And Blah, blah..' So, it's like, alright then. They were pretty instrumental in getting me into the city, for sure." (interview)

Thus, both the general knowledge that 'lesbians live here', as well as more direct, personal friendship networks, have been useful in reproducing a lesbian residential landscape on The

Drive. Proximity to one's friends is clearly as important to the women as is the knowledge that "because it is a lesbian community, there are a lot of your sisters out there" (interview).

Such a high level of local networking and socialising undoubtedly creates a forum within which lesbian culture and identity can develop. It has also undeniably contributed to the area's streets becoming the primary focus of lesbian public life, as mentioned by another informant (and confirmed by some of the above observations). This also reflects a creative female use of space, as streets are the most immediately accessible public places. Unable to economically support an array of more formal establishments, unlike their male counterparts, lesbians have appropriated this most obvious public space over many others.

Yet formal commercial places exist in the area, and have served to reinforce lesbian identification. However, like the institutions, they are oriented (at least officially) more generally to women. For instance, the Book Mantel, located on Commercial Drive<sup>32</sup>, was for a long time the only women's bookstore in Vancouver and carried books and magazines of interest to gay women and men. Other stores, such as a maternity shop and a couple of women's consignment clothing stores, also create a focus for women, while book and food co-ops (including Uprising Breads — an East Vancouver hippie landmark) reinscribe the area's leftist roots. Furthermore, lesbian-owned shops, though not typically lesbian-specific, are beginning to take hold, including a toy/games store, and a new women's sex shop, Womyn's Ware (whose owners insist is open to anyone concerned with female sexuality, whether female or male, gay or straight or bisexual). Like the institutions

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<sup>32</sup> The Book Mantel was unfortunately forced to close its doors when its rent was raised in the spring of 1995. The lesbian community held a 'memorial party' at the store on closing night to commemorate the passing of this neighbourhood institution.

described above, these commercial spaces mark a lesbian presence on The Drive, while giving the women a further stake in their neighbourhood and increasing their visibility to non-gay residents and visitors.

But perhaps the most effective way by which the area has come to be known by non-gays as a lesbian neighbourhood relates to the integration that has taken place, between them and the neighbourhood's other residents. Unlike the West End, The Drive retains its diverse character, within which, as stated by Beaudry's (1988) informant, lesbians are 'just another minority', a view that is supported by my own informants:

"it's a very comfortable neighbourhood even though we have a lot of Italians and the machismo and all that, that you have to deal with as well. It's still very comfortable: people can just be who they wanna be and they won't look twice at you for being who you are." (interview)

"The Italians are still here, which is wonderful, cause without them...They add...it's a real neighbourhood community with them here. They're really, like, 'this is my home', and they wouldn't let anything terrible happen... These guys [next door] are great. My roommate calls them professional Italians... They're always bringing over their Italian things. She teaches me how to make lasagna." (interview)

Neighbourhood integration — often on a very small scale — has been significant in exposing the other (non-gay) area residents to lesbians, acting to both raise awareness of the lesbian presence, while lessening misconceptions around lesbianism.

While lesbian-specific social spaces have been attempted in the past (Josephine's bar-slash-café being the most notable example), they have failed to survive, because, as noted by McNee (1984), lesbians have less money and thus find it difficult to support spaces exclusively dedicated to them:

"Josephine's was run by women — mainly women I think. And they had do's in there and stuff, and it was never... I mean, they had stuff and I guess people went and stuff, but they couldn't make it." (interview)

"I've always felt that, especially in the gay community for women, things just never seem to stay once they get going. The men always seem to manage, their bars are always around, always stuff going on. Women are always fly-by-night, and groups disband and fall apart, and they never seem to get money to get things going, it's always been such a difficult thing for women." (interview)

Instead, lesbians have used existing places and have made their own space, however ephemeral, within them. Joe's Café is such an example. Introduced in Chapter Four as a microcosm of The Drive, Joe's has not failed to include lesbians in its clientele. More than this, the coffee bar became an integral part of the lesbian community, although the relationship between Joe and his lesbian patrons remained largely a business association:

"by the late 1980s [Joe] was subsidising a lesbian softball team and his bar had become known as the number one lesbian bar in the city. He was no liberal: he wasn't *ideologically* on the side of the lesbians at all. But he know how his bread was buttered." (Serafin 1994: 86 — original emphasis)

Some lesbians evidently felt closer to Joe and his place, as testified by Beaudry's (1988) informant:

"A funny thing about this bar... I spent so much time here during my last pregnancy that Joe told me if I delivered my baby here, he would give him free coffees for the rest of his life. My child is a child of Joe's Cafe — he's as comfortable here as he is at home." (123)

The relationship was nonetheless inherently quite respectful, and the bar's association with lesbians (and leftists) was widely circulated in the popular media:

"Nine o'clock and the day's first clients straggle in. A long-haired hipster in Buffalo Bill mustache [sic] and goatee... A couple of lesbians, *bras-dans-le-bras*, buzz cuts and baggy army surplus clothing... Elsie the cigarette lady wanders in on her first rounds of the day, bums a smoke from the women but cannot convince them to buy her a coffee." (Beaudry 1988: 108)

"gay and lesbian people have been going there for 10 years and Joe's has always been a place you could have a coffee and sit for hours" (Ward 1990: A1)

It is therefore ironic that a betrayal of this respect is what forever inscribed The Drive as a lesbian space. In the summer of 1990, one of Joe's waiters protested the affectionate behaviour of a couple of his lesbian customers. In an effort to support his waiter, Joe sided with him and was thus perceived as anti-lesbian. The incident escalated, in a matter of hours, to the point where a city-wide boycott of Joe's Café was encouraged, and gay activists picketed the establishment, often coming into verbally violent conflict with passers-by and Joe's supporters (Serafin 1994; Ward 1990; Wilson 1990). Exchanges between Joe and the protesters precluded negotiation, resorting instead to such acts Joe spraying the protesters with water, or the protesters' 'mooning' Joe. Fears that the boycott "could...cause irreparable damage to Joe's reputation as the gathering place for intellectuals, feminists, punks, tree-planters and lefties who have for so long called it home" (Ward 1990: A1) were not realised, however, and the main outcome was that Joe's — and consequently The Drive — were now forever inscribed as lesbian-congenial spaces. The misunderstanding was eventually cleared up, and lesbians have returned to patronise the bar once again. And gays and non-gays now associate The Drive more readily with its lesbian population concentration.

Unlike the West End, therefore, the reproduction of The Drive as a gay (lesbian) space was (and is) much more rooted in ideological and everyday life issues. Rather than placing emphasis on gay-specific establishments, services and institutions, The Drive's lesbian community has forged its neighbourhood's gay identity out of its (mostly positive) interaction with the rest of the area's mixed population, and out of its support for feminist and leftist ideals and institutions. The lack of lesbian-specific places, therefore, is hardly an anomaly, but rather reinforces Vancouver's lesbian community's appreciation for social diversity. It also reflects the more generally accepted fact, supported by other studies, that

lesbians are less inclined (or able) to develop, and exclusively support, market-based material spaces.

## 6.2 Reproducing Cultures

The creation of these gay landscapes has, in turn, affected the ways in which Vancouver's gay men and women view and define themselves and each other. Evidently, local cultures emerge that differ from what 'gay culture' is generally perceived to be. Whether this is indicative of general trends in gay male and lesbian cultures everywhere, or is an isolated phenomenon is not always clear.

The change in focus from bars to coffee shops is perhaps most indicative of a grounded gay (male) cultural change. Like their predecessors, coffee shops serve as a place for gay social interaction. However, *unlike* bars, cafés are much more open — both physically/materially and ideologically. Physically, they are spaces that typically feature a large window onto the street, with seating lined directly against it, squarely facing 'the outside'; some even have seating directly on the sidewalk, physically interacting with 'the outside'. In this most material sense, passers-by (who are not necessarily gay) come into close, often direct contact with gay men (whether or not the former are aware of it). Similarly, while some cafés definitely have a stronger gay atmosphere than others, none are exclusively gay (unlike many of the bars), and many straight people (locals and tourists alike) feel quite at ease sipping their coffee here, alongside gay people. There is no sense of firmly demarcated gay/straight spaces: rather, spatial identities are quite fluid, and the feeling of alienation is much less evident than it would have been if these same straight people had found themselves in a gay bar. However, this coffee culture is a significantly West-coast phenomenon — Seattle, a few hours south and the birthplace of the Starbucks

chain, has, like Vancouver, become famous for its coffee. I therefore suspect that changes in the use of public space in other cities or regions may be occurring in quite different ways. In this way, the adaptation on the part of Vancouver's gay men can be seen to be a particularly local experience. One of my informants, having recently moved to Vancouver from Eastern Canada, confirms this speculation: "God! I've gotta get in shape, I live in Vancouver now! Everyone's in such good shape here! Nobody smokes, and everybody drinks so much coffee!". And so the local context of Vancouver, as a city of coffee-drinking outdoorsey people, becomes part of the definition of the city's gay culture, and gives the West End a certain reputation in the eyes of gay men from outside the city. Parts of mainstream local culture therefore are appropriated by the local *gay* culture, whose mechanisms, in turn, materially inscribe it onto the local gay landscape.

Similar processes can be seen at work in shaping Vancouver's lesbian culture. One of the most immediately noticeable features of the lesbian community in this city is its distinct lack of radical lesbian politics. Like most large North American cities, it supports a chapter of Lesbian Avengers, but they are not as active as in other cities. In fact, no major incidences of activism have been reported in any of the media (gay or straight), and a spokesperson for the Vancouver Lesbian Connection, where the group met until 1994, could not recall any recent Avengers event. The group actually disbanded that year, and has just recently started up again. And while the protest at Joe's was over anti-lesbian sentiment, the protesters were a mish-mash of gay men, lesbians, young students — even some of Joe's waiters quit their jobs and joined them (Serafin 1994). Lesbian-specific activism was conspicuously absent; this was not unusual. Rather, lesbian politics in this city are more generally oriented to women's issues, local political concerns, and more broadly 'queer' issues. Consequently, we see lesbians getting involved, for example, in

women's housing co-ops, the Vancouver Status of Women office, AIDS Vancouver, the Out on Screen and Women in View Festivals, and the pursuit of gay civil rights. Lesbian culture in Vancouver, I suspect because of the women's physical integration into a very mixed neighbourhood, adopts a very easy-going, tolerant character, in which it takes the place, indeed, of 'just another minority' culture: female, lesbian, queer. That the community readily identifies with The Drive, itself an eclectic landscape where no one element prevails, is indicative of this cultural association, as are the women who testified to their appreciation of the neighbourhood's diversity (Chapter Five).

In addition, I should note the absence of lesbian bars in the neighbourhood. Evidently, despite lesbians' financial constraints and different socialisation patterns, some cities do support a number of lesbian bars — some in increasing numbers (Wolfe 1992). But there is no exclusively lesbian bar in Vancouver. The Lotus, located between East Vancouver and the West End, near Gastown, is the only bar that has a consistent women's night (it used to have several a week, but has since gone down to one), and Denman Station is the only officially mixed bar. There are also a handful of lesbian parties, most notably those sponsored by Flygirl, which occur about monthly, and usually in West End venues. And some West End gay (male) bars hold occasional women's nights, for instance the Shaggy Horse (which actually closed earlier this year) and Graceland. Therefore the lesbian bar scene, as well as being meagre, is not located anywhere near The Drive. Furthermore, none of the women (except one) reported any regular patronising of local bars: "women aren't as into the club scene just in general," said one woman, "at least not in Vancouver." The lack of lesbian-only places on The Drive, therefore, is not incongruous with the lesbian culture that has developed in Vancouver.

Clearly, the places in which these communities have anchored themselves have had a significant impact on the ways in which their respective cultures have developed. Gay male and lesbian cultures emerge that are reflective of not only Vancouver culture, but also the respective neighbourhoods' local cultural context. Furthermore, the changes that are evidenced in both cultures, as a result of their interaction with their immediate environments *and* as social conditions change (particularly with respect to homophobia and increasing 'queer' solidarity) can also be seen to affect the ways in which gay people interpret and use space. In particular, the once strict boundaries between gay male and lesbian spaces, and between straight and gay spaces, are tending to shift and dissolve, causing further change in Vancouver's gay landscape.

## Chapter Seven — Conclusion? Shifting and Blurring Boundaries

### **7.1 Shifting Boundaries**

Spatial changes in Vancouver's gay male and lesbian communities can be perceived on two levels. First, between the two communities in question, whereby neither neighbourhood — the West End or The Drive — is, in its sexual identity, perceived by gay men and women to be exclusively male or female. In other words, there is increasing fluidity between the two neighbourhoods, and gay men and women in greater numbers are finding what they need in the 'other' neighbourhood, and feeling less alien there. Second, shifts occurring in gay self-identity have made heterosexually-coded areas less hostile, thus blurring the border between straight and gay space, and openly allowing further movement between the two (in both directions).

#### **7.1.1 Blurring Gender Boundaries**

The boundaries between the gendered gay spaces in Vancouver are being increasingly transgressed by members of either community, thus diminishing their actual validity. Perhaps the most noticeable trend is that of gay men moving away from the West End (or other parts of the city, province or country) into Grandview-Woodland. The reason cited most often for this migration is financial. As we've seen, rents in the West End are among the highest in Vancouver, making it more and more difficult for young people to live there. Indeed, the bulk of migrants are perceived to be young gay men who, twenty or even ten years ago, would have sought the West End as a viable refuge from heterosociety. Now, though, they are finding a landscape of increasing homeownership (with new and converted condominiums) and high rents, making it more difficult to make a go of it there:

"So now, they're starting to move out of the West End because it's just not affordable anymore and they're looking for cheaper alternatives that are still kind of funky and that offer something more. But it's almost exclusively the young guys."  
(male interview)

Presumably, the older men secured housing while it was still affordable and/or have a standard of living, that comes with age, that can support living in the West End. The cultural attraction is still there, but not everyone can afford to live in it. This is changing the demographics of the West End, from the 'swingers paradise' it was reputed to be in the 1960s and 70s, which continued into the 1980s but with a distinctly more gay character, to a 'yuppified' landscape of white, upper-middle-class professionals:

"what's happening in the West End, is it's getting more and more expensive to live here. I think in the next 5 to 10 years it'll become a mini-Manhattan: only the very wealthy will be able to live here... I mean, I don't think it's an exaggeration, if you look at what's happening right now there's like super-luxurious condominiums infiltrating just sort of in the heart of that whole area of Beach [Avenue]." (male interview)

The West End's marginality made it accessible, at one time, to those who existed on the margins of society, but its gentrification, like elsewhere, produced some (gay male) displacement.

Also, the intense focus on gayness, as noted by an earlier informant, has made the neighbourhood intolerable to some:

"I actually don't really appreciate the fact that there's so many gay people around. That doesn't... it's not a really big deal, for me, I'd actually rather have a more mixed community. I just find it tiresome after a while. You know, it'll like, you walk down the street, and you feel like you're on... you've been commodified, let's say. Like everybody has to have a certain look, and everybody has to have a certain classification, and it gets tedious." (male interview)

This preference for a 'more mixed community' is echoed by another informant as well:

"I would like to see more foreign people, or English-as-a-second-language people come into the West End. It is sometimes very, very Caucasian at times. I love walking down the sea-wall and hearing German and French and Italian... I think that's great... I love older people being around us. They're a nice advantage in our community. It's not a family community at all, which is really too bad, cause there are very, very few kids" (male interview)

But since the neighbourhood is economically unfeasible for seniors and for most families and (non-Chinese) immigrants, it remains — and presumably *will* remain — homogeneous.

Another interesting possible indicator of cultural change concerns the use of bars, and it appears that this may be a change that extends beyond Vancouver. Clearly, the perception that 'the' gay male culture is a bar culture is alive in this city, at least in the gay men that I interviewed. Many of them apologised for not being 'active' in the gay community, fearing they would not be a good interview, because they did not go to bars — they did not fit 'the lifestyle'. 'The lifestyle' is certainly pushed by gay publications such as *Xtra! West*, who feature large ads for bars and baths, often depicting muscular, scantily-clad men in suggestive poses (see Figure 7.1), thus reinforcing the importance of these places within the gay sphere. Yet, the men's comments beg the question, "Is this 'lifestyle' outdated?" It seems rather curious that most, if not all, of these men — who represent various age groups, life situations, and social circles — would be outside popular gay culture. Yet this is clearly where they perceive themselves to be:

"We're not as gay-active as a lot of our friends... We're really bad at that. We never go out, or we very rarely go out. It's like the running joke with our friends! If we go out twice in a row, it's amazing!... probably most of the things we do are in the West End. But not so strongly gay-related, though." (interview)

"I don't drink very much, I'm not sure if I'm terrified or intimidated by the bars and the clubs and all that, so I don't go to them at all — I'm gonna be a lousy interview! [laughs] No experience!" (interview)

In his study of changing gay values in America, Mendelsohn (1995) makes a similar observation, noting that "it seems increasingly clear that in the [ghetto], the gay identity on display seems to correspond less and less to who many gay people feel they really are" (112).

Admittedly, the bars have indeed shifted in their clientele and their atmosphere: 'specialised' bars (eg. leather, jock, 'clone') are the rarity rather than the norm, and mixed (male and female) or ladies' nights are often a weekly occurrence. Gay men attribute that largely to the advent of AIDS, which significantly altered patterns of interaction between gay men, and, in effect, reduced the level of promiscuity among them, as one interviewee remarked to his partner some years ago:

"with the advent of AIDS and the scare of all this, I'm sure that it's gonna cause a change in the mentality of men, that eventually they're gonna do more nesting and start to get together in couples and stuff, because that's really the only safe thing to do." (interview)

Consequently, as another man observed, "the 'scene' in the West End is not a bar scene anymore, and those who still go to bars don't go there to be sexually promiscuous, but to have fun with their friends" (interview). And in the instances where the men interviewed recalled going to bars recently, this was always the context: going by yourself was not done; rather, one went with a group of friends, men and women (often gay and straight). Also, broader social changes are seen as having altered, and in fact reduced, the need for the closed space of the bar in which to socialise. These changes emerge as much from within the gay community itself, as they do from the rest of society, and have meant that gay men are much more comfortable being themselves in public space. One informant describes it in these words:

"it's really that Generation X kind of thing, between 25 and 35 [years old]. Those guys that have sort of grown up knowing a little bit more freedom...and a little looser way of being, they've sort of realised, 'Well, yeah, you know, as well as being gay, I'm a person too.' And most of the guys that were my age or older only



did whatever was involved in that little, very specific area. The other guys figured, 'Now it's okay, you can cross over all kinds of boundaries! Miracle of miracles!'" (interview)

Arguably, the transformation this man describes can hardly be assumed to be isolated (as AIDS and social change have occurred in all Western countries), and thus one can conclude that it indicates a general trend in changing gay cultures. What remains interesting is the fact that the 'old' culture still figures most prominently in the gay imagination, while the men's everyday lives confirm a quite different reality.

This changing gay male reality has meant that spatial changes have occurred in this community. One of the most obvious options to gay men looking for alternatives has been The Drive. With its still-affordable housing (which includes a significant proportion of rental units), its social diversity, and its queer-positive character (thanks to the lesbians who paved the way for them), The Drive and its general vicinity have had an undeniable appeal to gay people from all over Vancouver. For men who don't identify with 'the lifestyle', The Drive is a place where they can be gay without being associated with the sexually-promiscuous image that still pervades the West End:

"There's a lot of men moving into this neighbourhood, now, cause they're trying to get away from the West End image. If you're not one of these guys who goes out every night, and is just wanton with their sexuality and so forth, you know... Like I have a guy living downstairs, he's gay, and he's not like that at all: he's very home-body, he's not a blatant fag, and he wouldn't wanna live down there with all that hype." (female interview)

Evidence of this migration can be found in the evolving material landscape of The Drive, which includes a gay-male-owned grocery, a gay-male-owned gift and novelty shop, and, most notably, Harry's Off Commercial, the only gay-specific public space on (or in this case, *off*) The Drive. Harry's, which (ironically) sits in Josephine's old location, is

owned by a gay man named Harry Grunsky, and employs mainly gay men. It serves a predominantly gay, but gender-mixed clientele, and does not try to hide this from the rest of the community. The sign on Harry's door reads "Yes we're very open", and he is quite adamant that his café's floor-to-ceiling window facade never be covered with curtains or posters, so that the space not be closed to people outside, from whom he feels he and his customers have nothing to hide. Given that the West End's gay (male) landscape is so dotted with cafés, and that I have made such a point of emphasising the importance of these spaces to the evolution of gay culture and self-identity in Vancouver, it is ironic that, of all the gay-oriented spaces on The Drive, this — a café — was the first to be successful. It is also ironic — yet indicative of changes in the community here — that it is owned and operated by gay men — *not* women. Yet there appears to be no resentment on the part of the women. A few women interviewed in the café (on an individual basis) concurred: this was a place where they could be themselves comfortably, where there was "good energy"<sup>33</sup>, where "Harry makes [them] feel right at home"<sup>34</sup>. And this is clearly Harry's philosophy, as he's been "talking about opening his own place where gays and lesbians could be themselves since 1989 [sic], when two lesbians were removed from Joe's for kissing." (Filipenko 1994: 11). Thus, rather than being a mark of gay men taking over The Drive, Harry's place is a sign of "a growing gay male presence *sharing* The Drive with the lesbian community" (Griffin 1995b: B3 — my emphasis). Certainly, the gay identity conferred to the neighbourhood by the lesbian presence has had a character quite different from that typical of gay male neighbourhoods, but that too, as we have seen, is changing.

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<sup>33</sup> from interview.

<sup>34</sup> from interview.

Therefore, instead of a take-over, we can talk more of a reworking of gay identity on The Drive, more reflective of (gender) diversity in the community, more in tune with 'queer' politics (rather than gay male or lesbian).

This blurring of identity boundaries is also felt in the West End, where gay women are also found in increasing numbers. I was alerted to this by a female informant who lives just off The Drive:

"I was actually surprised when you were associating gay men with the West End, and dykes with the East End, cause I know a lot of fags in the East End, and a lot of dykes in the West End... I know of one [West End] building in particular where my partner lives which is managed by dykes and the whole building is full of dykes! And they're not the power-suited gay women, you know, they're like East End dykes, but they live in the West End." (interview)

One couple, unhappy with their choice to live on The Drive, clearly voiced their preference for the West End:

"We'd actually prefer to live in the West End with the men. We like the West End, but I just find that gay men are more fun, I mean really. They like to go out and have a nice time, and, you know, I just think they're fun. We prefer to be in a mixed crowd, you know we're not the kind of people that like to just mix with gay women and not mix with anyone else. We're not really part of any, I don't know what you'd call it, a subculture?" (female interview)

The 'subculture' they perceived did not align itself with their personal politics, and they felt it was "becoming more...militant, if you wanna use the word, over this side" (interview). They even felt alienated by the leftist politics evident in the neighbourhood, which they clearly did not identify with.

Another woman — herself a migrant from The Drive to the West End — also perceived this 'militant' politic, and felt that the women who lived on The Drive and those in the West End were different:

"There's a different type of lesbian that lives down there, I think. It's really hard to say, but... I hesitate to use the word 'radical', but... A more in-your-face type of person. I guess a more outspoken, a more extroverted type, that I've noticed anyway." (interview)

Not at all excited by the prospect of an all-lesbian apartment building in the West End ("I don't think I'd like to live in that building! [laugh] I don't think so, I think I'd like to stay away from that one!"), she was much more content living her life quietly — as a lesbian, yes, but not a 'radical' lesbian. She was hardly apolitical: she was in fact quite active with the Gay and Lesbian Centre, which operates out of the West End, volunteering her time with them on various projects and events. Yet she had not at all enjoyed her time on The Drive (approximately two years), finding the West End much more convenient, and much more easy-going in terms of letting gay people express their affection for each other — not 'in-your-face', to use her words, but 'comfortable'. In fact her comments, in terms of why she liked the West End, echoed quite glaringly those of the men I'd spoken with. The kind of space the men had created in the West End conformed to her values much better than The Drive did — which presumably has long been the case for her — yet it was only with the breakdown of gender barriers, between gay men and lesbians, that she was able to move into their space. Similarly, to gay women who are just new to Vancouver, the West End is perceived as a queer space (as opposed to a gay male space), and they move quite readily to this central neighbourhood, supported by the gay (male and female) network that has developed there, and not at all fazed by the area's gay male history. While affordability is still an issue in the West End in general, there remain isolated pockets of relatively affordable housing that are particularly well-suited to lower-middle income

singles<sup>35</sup>. Here again, then, a balance is achieved, evening out male-to-female ratios, and reinforcing a cultural identity that, in this case, has been developed by the men, but is being shared by the women.

The cultural identity cultivated and reproduced in each area is quite distinct, and although each arose out of cultural experiences historically particular to either gay men or lesbians, they are now sought after by both. Certainly, the areas' respective male or female reputations persist, and are still embedded in Vancouver's gay folklore and psyche: one cannot erase history. Yet the cultures represented by each neighbourhood have less and less to do with gendered sexuality, and more and more with values and lifestyles that gay men and women can now openly share. In the case of Vancouver, this has meant that the West End continues to be a neighbourhood very much associated with its active material culture — its clubs, cafés, theatres, shopping, etc. — while The Drive has its leftist political street culture, with its alternative theatre<sup>36</sup>, multi-cultural population, shops and facilities, and its socio-economic mix:

"Commercial Drive is the future, man...Vancouver isn't going to stay middle-class anglo-white forever — the 21st century is just around the corner and it's going to bring some major upheavals to this part of the world. You might as well get used to it now." (Beaudry 1988: 125 — quoted from a 'self-described neighbourhood sociologist')

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<sup>35</sup> In fact, one could even say that the trends (as depicted in Chapter Four) show a convergence between city-wide average rents and West End rents (based on rental units alone). The West End may still be an expensive place to live (certainly more expensive than The Drive), but it is increasingly comparable to other rental districts, such as the West Side (near UBC), Kitsilano, or Fairview.

<sup>36</sup> Vancouver's 1995 Fringe Festival was held at ten East Vancouver venues on and around the Drive. Organizers felt that the neighbourhood's character and amenities (such as funky cafés and late-night spaghetti houses) was particularly well-suited to the alternative theatre festival, and hoped that it could become its permanent home.

The issue of who can subscribe to the ideologies and participate in the experiences embodied in each of these spaces is no longer an issue of gay men vs. lesbians. Exchanges between the two populations are now much more conceivable and do occur. A sense of solidarity between gay men and women is developing, that has everything to do with the right to lead their everyday lives openly, how and with whom they choose. This, clearly, in turn, also brings them much closer to hetero-society, and thus it should come as no surprise that a similar kind of *open* migration and blending is occurring between gay spaces and straight spaces.

### 7.1.2 Blurring Sexual Boundaries

Certainly, gay people have always existed in straight-identified places: from children growing up in suburban families, to gay men denying their sexuality through (hetero) marriage, to two 'spinsters' who never struck their neighbours as being gay. But being 'out' in the suburbs or in other areas (such as rural or small towns) has been a long time coming. Though it is not as easy in some places as in others, more and more gay men and women are moving away from the downtown and into outer areas (Bawer 1993; Lynch 1987; Markowitz 1995; Mendelsohn 1995): "The dream of the liberated zone has been undermined, as other neighbourhoods and suburbs are considered viable destinations for many gay men and lesbians" (Davis 1995: 285). And this is occurring for a number of reasons.

The most practical set of reasons has to do with the price of living in a large city. In the late 1980s, Lynch (1987) isolated five sociocultural shifts that he saw as explaining the beginning of this migration; four of these were directly related to changing values in society in general. These were, the general shift of US population to the suburbs; the mounting costs of rent and real estate in the city; the recession of the late 1980s, which

impacted people's aspirations with respect to social mobility; and a general shift in lifestyle whereby he perceived "a sharp swing toward 'careerism' and practicality in academic, career, and life-style choices" (14) that might downplay 'the gay lifestyle'. To this, Markowitz (1995) adds the rise in urban violence, which is felt most explicitly by the gay community, especially in known gay neighbourhoods that may become targets of discriminatory violence. This has been a growing problem in the West End, where more and more city-wide events are taking place (such as the Sea Festival and the popular Fireworks Festival, which brought 100,000 people to downtown Vancouver for last year's finale evening):

"There's far too many people coming down here, and when you bring in a crowd element, there's this collectiveness that happens, this single-mindedness, and sometimes it's got an angle of anger or whatever. It is, there's far too many gay bashing that go on when those things go on." (male interview)

And for gay households especially looking to *buy* real estate, the city of Vancouver is beyond the reach of most of them (as it is beyond the reach of most first-time home-buyers generally). Gay households are therefore being pushed out of places like the West End that are gentrifying rapidly, and in some cases going even beyond inner suburbs like Grandview-Woodland, where real estate is also getting more expensive:

"I don't think it's gonna stop at Commercial Drive. My sister lives in Burnaby, she owns her own house in Burnaby, and there's this pocket of women popping up all around her, it's kind of interesting. And I know a few guys that have gotten places in Port Moody and Coquitlam, you know, couples that go and buy out there because it's affordable and that's where they can live so they do" (male interview)

Mendelsohn's (1995) observations in Detroit and Washington, D.C. concur:

"Today, more and more lesbians and gay men are forgoing the ghettos [sic], the almost *de rigueur* choice for many out men and women only a generation ago. And

they're moving not only to more mixed urban neighbourhoods, but back to the suburbs — a once unthinkable choice for many gay men and lesbians" (81)

But while he also attributes part of the dynamics to economics, he adds an important cultural dimension to his theory:

"The increasingly popular choice to opt out of gay ghetto life suggests a major transformation in the very thing that gay ghettos [sic] seemed designed, in a way, to protect: a personal and cultural identity as distinct from the mainstream as the ghetto itself was geographically distinct from the rest of the city." (81)

The shift can be perceived as cultural insofar as ideological sexual boundaries — between gay and straight society — are dissolving, thus making spatial boundaries less important.

Specifically, he goes on,

"What the move away from the ghettos [sic] points to is something much deeper: a move away from the very notion that for gay people, sexuality alone shapes identity... That growing sense of not being all that different — of sharing in [the] dream of a house, some property, and a baby — has led some to question the very nature of what a 'gay identity' means...whether the concept of gay identity itself, whether personal or cultural, isn't somehow artificial — like the ghettos [sic] themselves, a reaction to external pressures, rather than a natural expression of some irreducible, internal essence" (Mendelsohn 1995: 83)

My own research in Vancouver confirms this, as the following quotes suggest:

"I think it's dangerous for gay men, they've got to learn to — and women — to move away from the community just a little bit. Sometimes they get too involved and everything becomes, gay becomes the primary issue in their lives, and that doesn't make any sense to me: it's just *part* of life." (male interview — original emphasis)

"I've been, pretty much for all my adult life, until very recently, I've been pretty much anti-community: I'm a person first, and my sexual preference doesn't make me different from other people in any sense, and that's just the way that I am, is a person first." (male interview)

"I have a feeling though that there's a lot of women out there like Mandy and I that just wanna live a nice normal life, and you wanna go somewhere where you're not hassled and all. You just wanna go to work and do your job, and maybe do your bit for society, like volunteer here, and do that, but you're not really interested in the more militant lifestyle where you're walking around with the big t-shirt with no bra and a big slogan! Like, it's just not me. And I also don't think that if we want society to accept us as just another part of society, then why do we have to act differently? We should just be melding in, and it's just a fact of life. Right now, it seems to me, in the papers and everything that doing anything with gay people it's all trendy. It's almost trendy to be gay. I'm just waiting for the trendiness to wear off, and all the people that got educated during the trendy phase are all just gonna think, "well, so what, the girls next door are gay?". (female interview)

"we select our friends as being friends and not because of their lifestyles, so we have a variety: we have gay women friends, gay men friends, and straight friends, so I think that's a healthy... Compared to some people who refuse to socialise with gay men or straight people or anything else like that. There's some people that just don't." (female interview)

And past research in Toronto found that

"The majority of young gay men today, unlike those of twenty years ago, accept their sexuality in a way which is much less rebellious, much more, in their own words, 'gay-positive'... The prevailing philosophy is one of personal acceptance and well-being: the self-destructive lifestyle of years past, caused by deeply-rooted feelings of worthlessness and alienation (Altman 1982), is being rejected by this generation, which was raised to feel more positive and open about itself." (Bouthillette 1994: 78)

That change in self-identity, whether in Vancouver, Detroit, Washington, D.C., or elsewhere, was also found to have direct spatial repercussions, in that an outward migration, particularly into straight-identified space, was perceived to be occurring. A male informant characterised the change as follows:

"in the 70s, it was more of, well, you felt safe [in the ghetto], it was really a safety thing. And it was really, really tough to go live out in the suburbs and have this huge secret, and you were faced every day with people saying, "Why aren't you

married? I've got this wonderful daughter for you to meet!", and blah, blah, blah. So there was a real big thing of that where you got away from it down here. So they moved here to get away and to escape and live in this little fantasy world that everybody tried to create. Whereas now, you know, nobody wants that fantasy world, they wanna be settled in suburbs and have more real things around them, so I think that's more the attraction."

'Nobody wants the fantasy world' because that's exactly what it is: a fantasy, a construction (Mendelsohn 1995). Gay people are realising that their self-identity involves much more than their sexuality, and are finding an increasing number of affinities with straight society. They have therefore been moving into straight society's spaces, in search of the same things that straights find there: affordable homes, schools, quiet living, etc.

But change has also been felt from the other side of the fence, and homophobia has been (slowly) diminishing. This has also allowed gay people to integrate more easily into so-called 'straight' space. Clearly, outer suburbs are unlikely to become overwhelmingly gay-identified. Rather, in searching for affordable real estate, gay families moving there are contributing to a more open mixing of differently sexually-identified households. This, in turn, is potentially helping to reduce any misconceptions around homosexuality — including homophobia. Similar dynamics can be seen at work in inner suburbs, such as The Drive, where gay (male) in-migration is also experienced.

While retaining its lesbian/gay elements, The Drive continues to emphasise its mixed character. The goal of lesbian, and then gay, migration has not been to turn the neighbourhood into another gay ghetto, but to preserve its multi-faceted community. Harry Grunsky's café offers a particularly good example of this type of co-operation and complicity:

"when the bistro...is closed, Grunsky is looking for people to come in and use the space on Sunday evenings. "The Grandview-Woodland Area Council is using it for

their annual general meeting," he says proudly of his...business. Hosting the council's biggest political event of the year is clearly a source of pride." (Filipenko 1994: 11)

Consider also Michel Beaudry's (1988) interview with a Drive lesbian, Luna:

"We stand in front of her house, still talking. A wizened Chinese woman pokes her head out the front door of a neighboring home. Luna waves to her and the old woman smiles, shuffles out on unsteady legs and waves back. 'That's what this neighborhood is all about,' she says. 'That old woman can't speak a word of English and I don't know any Cantonese, but we communicate beautifully, anyways. She knows what's going on here. She's far from stupid.' She smiles with her eyes: 'That's why I've chosen to live here. I wouldn't even consider anywhere else.'" (123-5)

There is little sense of any large-scale gay-influenced displacement taking place in Grandview-Woodland, of a broad-sweeping community or culture taking over the space. Rather, once again, acceptance is fostered, and homophobia — already addressed and weakened by the lesbian presence — here too has the potential to be even further lessened.

## 7.2 Conclusion?

I hesitate to call this a 'conclusion' because, in fact, there is nothing in this story to suggest closure. Instead, gay people, rather than (spatially) closing themselves in or ghettoising themselves, are once again forcing the (political) door open, in a quasi-literal sense, this time letting themselves into hetero- and cross-identified space. By doing so, they are achieving two important goals. First, they are breaking down gender barriers and allowing themselves to widen their own identity politics — beyond essentialist notions of gay male or lesbian identity, towards more individually- or politically-defined ways of being. Second, they are engaging heterosociety most directly, on 'straight turf', encouraging them to look beyond their sexuality, at the people they are, the values they

represent, the jobs they hold, the families they have, etc., to dismantle the misconceptions that cause homophobia.

The only definite 'conclusion' I can offer concerns the role of housing in determining gay spatialisation. In terms of the gay male and lesbian ghettos, it is clear that the men's and the women's housing needs were fulfilled in their respective neighbourhoods, and that gay settlement played a significant part in ensuring the reproduction of the (homo)sexualisation of those places. Gay men and lesbians, as men and women (with different socio-economic means, family responsibilities, etc.) have — or at least, *had*, in the context of these initial spatialisations — distinct housing needs that were particularly well met in the neighbourhoods that eventually became gay-identified. It was a balance of (material) housing characteristics and other socio-economic and -cultural attributes (including gay-specific material culture, such as the presence of gay public places) that attracted gay men to the West End and lesbians to Grandview-Woodland. However, it is questionable whether, without appropriate housing, they would have survived and thrived to the extent that they have. Housing is also what drew definite boundaries between male and female gay spaces, as women were less able to afford West End housing, or raise their families there, while gay men could afford the more central location's apartments, which also suited them better (in terms of their typically smaller households).

Similarly, it is housing that is, again, forcing this shift in spatial boundaries. Specifically, it is the increasing cost of urban accommodation that is, most tangibly, pushing gay men and women away from central urban areas, and into straight-identified suburbs. While some resistance is evident, and cross-city/cross-gender migration is occurring between the West End and The Drive — in an effort to retain a measure of gay spatial identity — the real costs of living in the inner city are becoming too much to bear

for some gay people, especially those looking to enter the housing market. These households are searching farther outwards, where most first-time homebuyers are finding viable housing, and establishing themselves in the suburbs. Certainly, the economic pressures to move away from the city have long existed, and declining homophobia has played a large part in making the suburbs less unattractive to gay households. However the fact remains: like everyone else, gay people's settlement patterns have been, and continue to be, in large part dictated by the availability of suitable, affordable housing. Furthermore, because some of the areas that gay people are moving into are straight-identified (and straight-*designed*) neighbourhoods, they may require, if not different structural housing designs, perhaps different neighbourhood concepts. Also, associated neighbourhood amenities will need to reflect a multiplicity of sexual identities, and thus certain community services (such as health, daycare, and commercial services, for instance) will need to instate policies (or at least be open) to respond to same-sex household needs.

Clearly, the classic 'gay ghetto' does not seem to reflect all of gay culture, self-identity, or everyday life anymore. Though it is necessary to trace the ghetto's history and meanings to trace the evolution of the gay identity, it is important to realise that the context that led to its development is no longer current. As we have seen, gay male ghettos and lesbian ghettos have evolved in very different ways, and have served very different purposes. What strikes me as I look back on these progressions is to what extent the two communities have adopted elements from each other, to the point where each is becoming more like the other. Like lesbian-feminist culture, gay male culture is shifting away from sexuality as a defining factor: political ideology and everyday life are becoming increasingly central to gay male identity, thus lessening the need for material spaces that cater to one's sexual needs. Therefore, traditional gay male places (ie. the ghettos) no

longer reflect actual gay male life, and new places are sought. Conversely, within lesbian culture, female sexuality is being more and more celebrated, thus mirroring traditional gay male culture. While sexual lesbian material places have yet to establish themselves in any permanent sense, lesbian events in Vancouver are including more sexual content, such as sex shows (at the annual International Lesbian Week celebrations) or go-go girls (at Flygirl parties); lesbian erotica books and magazines are flourishing; and two Vancouver-based theatre productions (Herotica and Herotica II) have featured short (and explicit) plays about female (gay and straight) sexuality. Gay male culture and lesbian culture, clearly, are becoming less and less distinct. Consequently, it is logical that their spatial choices should change to reflect these blurring distinctions.

This shift can be extended to the blurring that is occurring between gay and straight self-identity. Heterosexuality is still considered too normative, by the majority of people (many gay people included), for it to be questioned to any significant extent. Yet it is beginning to be. Undeniably more significant is the extent to which *homosexuality* has reached a level, within homosociety, whereby it is seen as just *part* of one's identity — and not its sole defining part. As heterosexuals have done for centuries before them, gay people are taking their gayness for granted, emphasising instead those elements of their identity that they consider more relevant: their professional status, class, race, family status, etc. Consequently, they are making spatial choices that, like their straight counterparts, reflect their non-sexually-based identities. And, as noted by Mendelsohn (1995) and others, this is not a return to the closet. Far from it, it is an explicit injection of gayness into all parts of society and of our cities, a reassertion that 'gay people *are* everywhere', and that they no longer wish to hide it. Arguably more effective than any ACT-UP tactic, gay people who live in straight-identified suburbs are an everyday

reminder, a role model, of what being gay is *really* like: a person who is proud of her home, her family, her achievements. A person not much different from the role models we all grew up with. Is this the new queer politics? Given what I have heard from the gay men and women I interviewed, I would say so. Rather than seeking to forge an identity completely outside mainstream straight society, queer people are seeking to place themselves squarely on an equal level with hetero-society, by exposing sexuality as little more than a constructed category. These categories — gay, lesbian, bisexual, straight, transsexual, transgendered, etc. — are negotiated by society *and* by the individuals themselves, yet are based on essential conditions which exist within each individual. Strategic essentialism (Bell & Valentine 1995) indeed emerges as the ideal position for the new queer politics, which by exposing constructedness allows for a de-privileging of (socially-defined) heteronormativity. And one of its main strategies, it appears, is spatial: by openly integrating gay men and lesbians, and gay people and straight people, and thus effacing any clear spatial boundaries in a process of desegregation, queers are working to eliminate the possibility of spatial (and thus social) hierarchies.

In his discussion of the redefining of sexual identity and community, Davis (1995) writes,

"Gay ghettos [sic], however, are still prominent, if not dominant, in American gay, lesbian and bisexual politics. As such, the power of the gay ghetto must be explored, not to celebrate it, but to problematise it and explore the ways in which gay territories remain effective tools for political action and *limit the future and direction of the politics of sexuality.*" (287 — my emphasis)

Clearly, gay ghettos have played a significant role in the formation of a gay identity.

However, identity definition processes are changing, and so must their spatial manifestations. Obviously, this change in sexual politics is an ongoing project, and not a

cataclysmic event. That is why it is difficult to reach any conclusions at this point: until the project concludes or fails, nothing is certain, and we must continue to wait and, if we can, take action ourselves to reduce sexual barriers in our everyday lives.

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