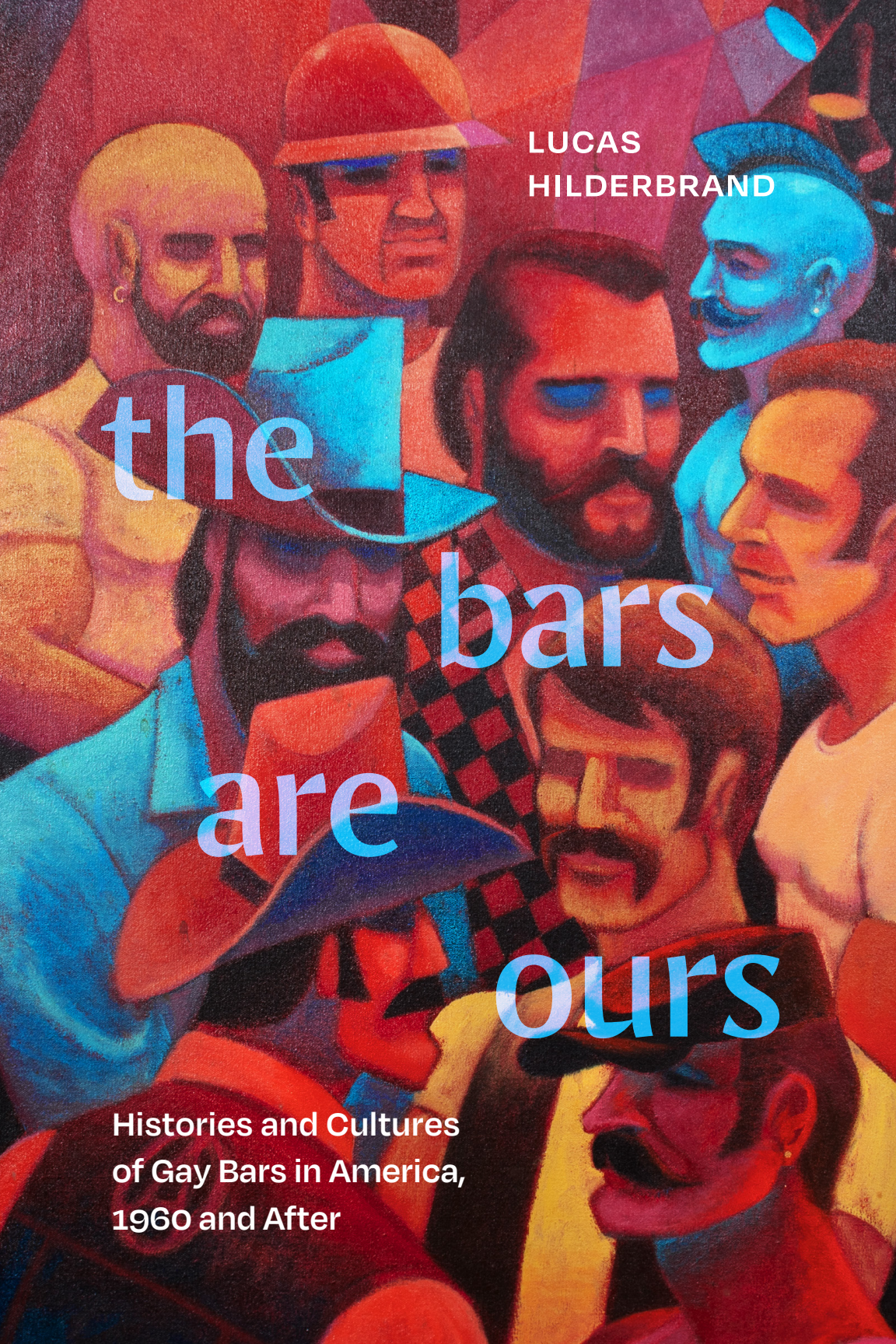
LUCAS
HILDERBRAND
the bars are ours
Histories and Cultures
of Gay Bars in America,
1960 and After

The Bars Are Ours

LUCAS HILDERBRAND

The Bars

Are Ours

Histories and Cultures of Gay Bars in America, 1960 and After

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A toast
to the homophiles
to the liberationists
to the trans sisters who fought harder for these spaces than anyone else
to the butches, femmes, they, them, and hims
to the fairies, the Marys, and the gurls
to the gal pals that escorted gay boys to the clubs
to the drag queens who lead our culture
to the leatherfolk who invented theirs
to the DJs who made music sound better than we knew it could
to everyone who has given all of themselves on the dancefloor
to those who showed up and turned it out
to the bartenders with heavy pours
to the gregarious drunks
to the wallflowers
to the elders who are still going out
to those who have found love, even if only for a night
to those who've gone home alone
to the former drinking buddies
to the friends we reunite with
to those we've lost
This is for all of us and the histories we've lived
The bars are ours

“Inspire me, till I lisp an’ wink”

— Robert Burns, “Scotch Drink”

“The people are thirsty.”

— Kansas City Mayor Thomas J. Pendergast,
flouting Prohibition

“If I can’t dance,
I don’t want your revolution.”

— Emma Goldman (paraphrased)

“Beauty’s where you find it”

— Madonna, “Vogue”

“We’re not equal.
But love is here.”

— Restroom mural, SinFin Cantina,
Guadalajara, Mexico

Contents

Preface
Drunk History, or I Just Wanna Hear a Good Beat
xiii

Acknowledgments
I Feel Love/Can't Get You Out of My Head
xxi

Introduction
We Were Never Being Boring
1

PART I. CULTURES

1. Nights in Black Leather
Inventing a Bar Culture in Chicago
37

Interlude 1
Triangle Lounge in Denver
62

2. Show Me Love
Female Impersonation and Drag in Kansas City
68

Interlude 2
Safe Spaces in Detroit
94

PART II. POLITICS

3. Somewhere There's a Place for Us
Urban Renewal, Gentrification, and Class Conflicts in Boston
101

Interlude 3
Seattle Counseling Service
124

4. Midtown Goddam
Discrimination, Coalition, and Community in Atlanta
127

Interlude 4
Gay Switchboard in Philadelphia
151

PART III. INSTITUTIONS

5. Welcome to the Pleasuredome
Legends of Sex and Dancing in New York
157

Interlude 5
The Saloon in Minneapolis
192

6. Proud Mary's
An Institution in Houston
198

Interlude 6
The Main Club in Superior, WI
220

PART IV. REINVENTIONS

7. Further Tales of the City
Queer Parties in Post-disco San Francisco
227

Interlude 7
The Casa Nova in Somerset County, PA
255

8. Donde Todo es Diferente
Queer Latinx Nightlife in Los Angeles
RESEARCHED AND WRITTEN WITH DAN BUSTILLO
260

Interlude 8
Mable Peabody's Beauty Parlor and Chainsaw Repair in Denton, TX
289

After Hours
Pulse in Orlando
294

Appendix 1
Selected Bars and Clubs
303

Appendix 2
LGBTQ+ Periodicals
313

Notes
317

Bibliography
395

Contributors
425

Index
000

Preface

Drunk History, or I Just Wanna Hear a Good Beat

This preface addresses my academic readers. If you don't have a stake in scholarly questions or methods, feel free to skip ahead to the introduction. But before you do, you'll likely want to take a gander at figure P.1.

Despite the omnipresence of gay bars and nightclubs, until recently we have had little published work that offers a panoramic historical analysis of them. Around 2008, I realized that no academic book had synthesized the cultures and politics of gay bars during the era when they have been most visible, so I set out to write one before they disappeared. A more personal impetus was that I felt starved for nightlife, which previously had been ingrained in my life rhythms, after moving into faculty housing for a new job; research became my peculiar way to manifest a connection to the broader queer world. This book presents fifteen years of researching, writing, and rethinking. My original goal was to complete this book before the fiftieth anniversary of the Stonewall riots in 2019, but these things—as well as school commitments, doom-scrolling, and life itself—take time. In this interval, many gay bars have closed and a few new ones have opened. As it turns out, this book is not an elegy. The gay bar as an institution has not died, nor have its cultures ended.

When I began working on this project and talking to other people, I quickly recognized that everyone had a different personal take on bar history, on what about it matters, and on which bars define those pasts. Bar

histories are inevitably subjective: what was reported, what was collected, what caught one's attention, where one went, who one talked to, if one had fun, and if one got lucky. One's understanding of the past depends on what one's looking for and what structures one's perspective, including taste, politics, generation, and location. Like a disco ball, which is "not made of a single mirror, but numerous tiny mirrors [that] each reflects and refracts light at different angles," historical interpretation and personal experience evoke the "generative flashes of nows in which pasts are present."[1] My title gestures toward plural histories and cultures because no singular experience of the past exists.

Scholars have produced historical work that recovers local pasts, social science studies that chart contemporary shifts, and performance theories that open up queer affects, liveness, mediation, and ephemera.[2] Significantly, much of the essential scholarship thinking with queer communities of color takes up the capacious framework of *queer nightlife* rather than focusing on bars per se, at least in part because bars have histories of exclusion, as I detail in chapter 3.[3] I have worked to negotiate between and beyond these methods. Three intersecting books were published as I was completing this project: Jeremy Atherton Lin's *Gay Bar*, a memoir-driven set of reflections aimed at a popular audience; *Queer Nightlife,* a performance studies anthology on nightlife practices, capaciously conceived; and Greggor Mattson's *Who Needs Gay Bars?,* an ambitious nationwide sociological study of gay bars and their diversity in the present, based upon interviews with bar owners. Two more books have been in the pipeline concurrently with mine: Luis Manuel Garcia-Mispireta's *Together, Somehow,* which examines intimate collectivities on the queer dancefloor, and Amin Ghaziani's forthcoming "Long Live Queer Nightlife," which responds to a proliferation of queer happenings in the wake of gay bars' widespread closures. Each makes a significant contribution, and each has its own orientation that differs from my archival account of gay bar modes and meanings. This wave of scholarship suggests a belated critical mass of attention to gay bars and clubs. As I have argued previously, technologies capture our attention most intensely at moments of ballyhooed newness and apparent obsolescence; the same logic extends to bars and nightlife.[4]

My home discipline of cinema and media studies prepared me to think through the significance of the popular, the pervasive, even the pornographic; I'm drawn to texts, technologies, and infrastructures that achieve cultural saturation but that have been so obvious as to become overlooked. As a media scholar, I have in some senses invented my methods for this

project, but I effectively approach gay bars as a *medium:* a form that gives structure to social actions and worldviews, that poses expressive conventions, and that constrains what's possible given its inherent properties. Analyzing bars as a medium allows us to grapple with their affordances, limitations, and contradictions for cultivating queer sensibilities and for articulating community politics. Bars function as *queer forms*, as Ramzi Fawaz theorizes the concept: "*enabling structures*" that give shape to queer identities, experiences, and politics. Such forms "establish the conditions for something new to appear in the world, including previously unfathomable expressions and interpretations of gender and sexual being."[5] Bars constitute physical venues and cultural expressions—forms in both senses of the word.

Thinking about and with gay bars demands negotiating between bars' material conditions (such as their status as businesses, their built environments, and the various transactions that happen between men inside them) and their ideological functions (expressed in advertisements, the gay press, and activism) as representations of and even *as* the LGBTQ+ community. I understand my access to bygone gay bars as mediated by representations and texts—from gay press reporting, ads, and party flyers to songs that I streamed to simulate how the past might have sounded and felt. I am present throughout this book to situate my interpretations and historiographic vantage point.

In many cases, advertisements are what remain of bars that have closed and buildings that have been razed. Such ads have always been *texts* that construct enchanting images of bars for their prospective clienteles rather than indexically record their actuality. Early on in this research, I became fascinated by an ad featuring a perverse sketch of a lion mounting a macho clone from behind (see figure P.1). This ad, for the Lion Pub in San Francisco, was part of a series that traded in problematic safari and conquest imagery; the campaign ran in the *Advocate* and the *Bay Area Reporter* over the course of a year and was so popular that the bar produced posters and T-shirts from it. As in most bar ads, the space and the people who go there remain out of sight. This ad expressed a *sensibility* rather than documented a place; the slogan "midnight thinking" suggests a logic—even a form of knowledge—unique to the gay bar milieu. Like the ad's scene of bestiality, its come-on, "animals love maneaters," was confounding, titillating, and evocative; the artist lovingly sketched the image so that the lion's curled tongue appears both affectionate and primal. The viewers' identification likely shifted between wanting to be the lion and

desiring to be the man. This ad constructed a dreamworld that radically transgressed sexual taboos and fostered dynamic subject positions. More people would have seen this ad than ever crossed the bar's threshold, so the bar remained in many readers' imaginations a place where men hunt for and submit to whatever pleasures may come. I have been attracted by the ad's audacity and sense of fabulation; it queerly refused plausibility or convention in favor of envisioning wild possibilities.[6]

I have sought to be a rigorous queen in my research without losing sight that people go to bars to have *fun*. Following the philosophy usually attributed to Mae West and Liberace, I believe that too much of a good thing can be wonderful. One might claim that indulgence has been my primary method for conveying bars' vivacity. For more than a decade, I spent days

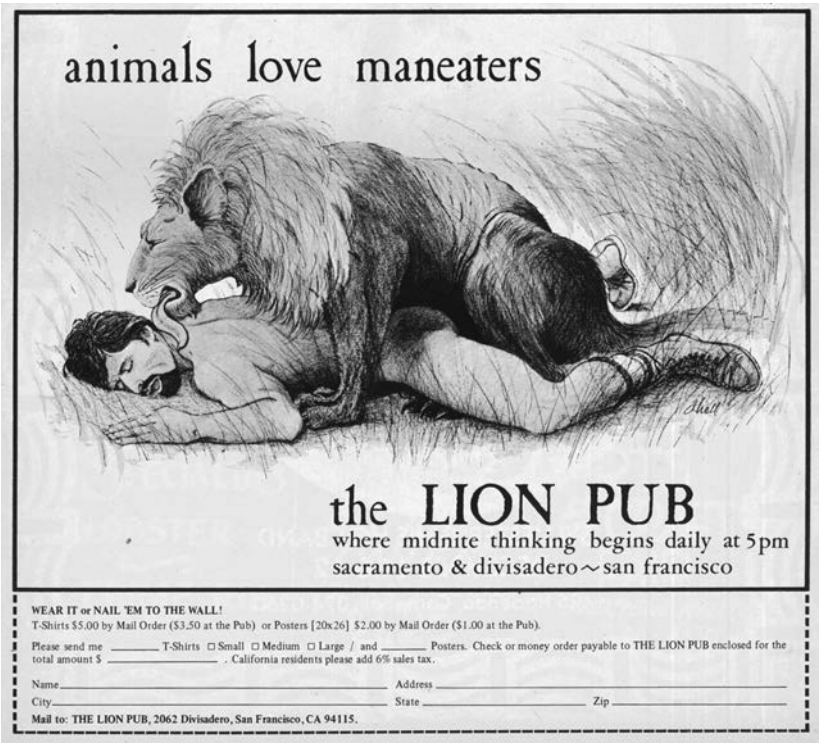

FIGURE P.1 "Animals Love Maneaters" was the most popular in a series of mid-1970s safari- and conquest-themed fantasy advertisements for the Lion Pub in San Francisco. This image appeared in the local and national gay press and was available on posters and T-shirts (see the order form at the bottom of the image). *Bay Area Reporter*, November 26, 1975. Courtesy of ONE Archives at the USC Libraries.

working through materials in community archives and nights exploring unfamiliar cities to try to map the past on to the present landscape. I have relied on the kindness of strangers and near-strangers as gateways to their cities: archivists who welcomed me, colleagues I cold-contacted, people I met on apps, and men with whom I danced to Rihanna at Twist in Miami Beach and to Britney Spears at the Max in Omaha.[7] Most of the bars I write about closed long before I began my research, so I can only infer what they were like by listening to others' accounts. Throughout this book, I draw on anecdotes as evidence of gay bars' meanings. Recounted bar stories tend to be 80 proof, spiked with innuendo and embellishment, but it may be these excesses that precisely reveal the thirsts that bars sought to satiate.[8]

My primary sources for this project come from the archives. Queer archives and collections are usually local, subjective, partial, and idiosyncratic. What makes these archives *queer* is not only the sexuality of their caretakers but also what they *value* as significant expressions of our cultural heritage and what erotic, campy, or glittering forms they may take.[9] Only in queer collections was I likely to encounter newspaper clippings pasted to letterhead for the movie *Beaches* or rhinestoned disco shoes lovingly preserved in tissue paper.[10] When I came across an ad for the Copa Disco in Fort Lauderdale announcing appearances by both Madonna and Divine during the same weekend in 1983, I squeed as I imagined having been there.[11] Other times, when I flipped through photo albums, I found myself looking at pictures of unidentified men from another time in bars that had closed long ago. Such photos showed someone else's memories, like intimacy without familiarity or context; they communicated what I couldn't know for sure yet stimulated something like recognition for me.

Outcomes, rather than intentions, remain speculative in the queer archive.[12] I have encountered numerous fragmentary documents of bar activism in process: flyers soliciting participants for protests, anticipatory reporting in the gay press, proposals for organizations and for policy reform, and handwritten notes and edits on drafts. What I have found far less often are follow-up accounts or any kind of closure that confirmed what actually happened, who showed up, or what changed. Likewise, numerous collections contain matchbooks and trick cards from bars, which include blank lines for information such as name, phone number, type, fetish, or sexual position. Hula's in Waikiki produced matchbooks with a line for designating "island." Others, such as a matchbook from Tiffany's in Detroit, offer space to collect multiple numbers, thereby promoting a culture of promiscuity.[13] These objects point to the *potential* for social

and sexual contacts in bars, but they do not document whether the men ever actually called, how the sex was, or whose heart was broken. As Lin suggests, "Gay history is a palimpsest of *what ifs*," and "gay bars are about potentiality, not resolution."[14]

Queer theory has for decades embraced ephemera over permanence and exploded the concept of the archive to suggest that any text, object, or even affect might operate as an "archive." Archives, including queer archives, have been critiqued for excluding marginalized perspectives as unworthy of documenting and for reinforcing definitions of "evidence" that serve to delegitimate queer, women's, trans, and BIPOC scholarship and lives.[15] Still, I insist that both actually existing queer archives and the gay press provide essential access to how queer life and culture were represented *by* LGBTQ+ people *for* LGBTQ+ people. The gay press (now typically housed in queer archives) remains a largely untapped resource for historians and one of the few sites where the LGBTQ+ past was narrated in its present. In the archives I have found, again and again, that so many of our current critiques, frictions, and activisms among and between queer people were previously incisively debated decades ago; we have much to learn from this well-documented record that has become neglected. We must engage and learn from these collections, even as we remain cognizant of the ideologies that shape and buttress them.

As a study of US gay bars, this book inevitably examines many predominantly white male venues that effectively defined or reflected public gay cultures and histories. In my research, I have found that gay bars by and large really were *that white* and *that male*. To suggest otherwise would be misrepresentative and ahistorical; this book's emphasis on predominantly white male venues derives from my attempt to accurately reflect my research findings. The overwhelming whiteness of this book's exemplary bars—and its images that reflect what bars looked like and who they sought to attract—demonstrate the necessity for the protests and alternative venues in chapters 4 and 8. I attempt, however imperfectly, to study these venues in their full complexity: to recognize their potentials for personal and social transformation while also holding them accountable for their past and present wrongs. Rather than reductively positioning bars as good or bad, however, I look to them to understand how they made gay subcultures intelligible and inspired political debate.

This book takes an admittedly urban framework, both because what we think of as gay bars have primarily existed in cities and because the gay press and community-based archives that have documented gay bars

are likewise usually products of urban densities. Challenging the logics of the urban-rural dichotomy, my generation of scholars argues for the significance of suburban and small-city "micropolitan" formations.[16] Today, outpost gay bars, which serve as the only gay bar in their town or region, have become one of the most pervasive kinds of gay bars; there are more towns with one gay bar than cities with multiples.[17] The documentary *Small Town Gay Bar* demonstrates that such places can also be wilder than what one finds in cities.[18] There are also remote regions of the country where gay public spaces simply do not exist, so patrons must drive hours to access a bar—if they can find one at all.[19] I grew up on the northern plains in a small town without a gay bar; as an adult I have chosen to live in New York City, Minneapolis, and Los Angeles (and have moved back and forth between them). I recognize that queers exist beyond cities, but my own story nonetheless resembles those of many others who looked to urban beacons to imagine and make new lives.

This is but one necessarily partial chronicle of the more complex histories and cultures of gay bars in the United States after 1960. I allowed the serendipity and the *punctum* of the archive to reveal which stories I could tell and in which cities they would be set.[20] Half the chapters developed out of local archival collections (in the cases of Chicago, Kansas City, Atlanta, and Houston) and others out of flurries of articles in the local gay press that I paged through at the ONE National Gay & Lesbian Archives in Los Angeles (in the cases of Boston, New York, and San Francisco). The Los Angeles chapter came out of living there and collaboration, which afforded a hybrid methodology and voice. Some of the bars that I write about wouldn't have been my own choice of scene, but they nonetheless exemplified their cultures, their cities, and their times.

I conducted research in more cities than I could include, and this book does not pretend to be encyclopedic. I do not discuss resort areas such as Provincetown and Palm Springs, nor do I emphasize the most iconic gay ghettos, including the Castro, the West Village, or West Hollywood. Likewise, various genres of bars do not get their own chapters, including lesbian, country-western, piano, hotel, hustler, hipster, video, sports, stripper, wrinkle room, and chicken bars.[21] (However, I do note that my boyfriend, Ernesto, fondly recalls singing "Part of Your World" atop the piano as a pretty young thing at the Townhouse of New York piano bar, which attracted older midtown gentlemen; he was proud that he rarely had to buy his own drinks there.[22]) Throughout, I prioritize attention to the spaces that gay men have created and the community debates that

they raised rather than to external forces that have constrained them. This means that I reference liquor laws, zoning, police payoffs and raids, and organized-crime ownership of bars as context rather than centering these issues. Not everything I learned could be included; for instance, in San Antonio I was told that after World War II, military police raids and inclusion on "off-limits" lists simultaneously prohibited and publicized gay bars near military bases for servicepeople in an era before they could be openly gay.[23] Gay bar history also includes an alarming prevalence of fires from electrical malfunctions and arson—by homophobes, aggrieved patrons, competing entrepreneurs, and bar owners themselves. In New Orleans I conducted research on the June 1973 Up Stairs Lounge fire, which killed thirty-two patrons, but this tragedy has been thoroughly documented elsewhere.[24] Finally, although I have experienced the invasion of gay male bars by straight bachelorette parties, I do not dwell on this or other tensions caused by the dilution of queer spaces in recent decades.[25]

My own bar years span the mid-1990s to the present. My formative exploration of gay bars happened in the company of (then) female-identified queer friends. These outings just predated the transformative effects of both the internet and highly active antiretroviral treatments for HIV/AIDS. What I've found in the archives has often felt familiar, insofar as virtually everything I know of gay bars has had precedents. It appears that gay bars of the recent past and present are ingrained cultural institutions that adapt to current tastes and trends rather than creating wholly new paradigms. For instance, now-ubiquitous karaoke nights—which arguably replaced the old-school piano bars—incorporate the attraction into preexisting spaces.[26] Nonetheless, gay bars can still feel essential and ingenious (see the Denton interlude). I've recognized that my students perennially experience going out with a euphoric sense of discovery. I have tried not to kill their joy but have tried to train them to think critically about these spaces and to recognize that they have histories. I hope I have done the same here for you, my readers.

Acknowledgments

I Feel Love/Can't Get You Out of My Head

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Introduction

We Were Never Being Boring

Gay bars are known for their heavy pours and their life-changing possibilities. For generations of LGBTQ+ people, going to the gay bar has served as a rite of passage: we came out by going out. Whether patrons imbibed rotgut or top-shelf vodka, gay bars have been where queer people have gone to affirm their identities and to seek camaraderie among sympathetic strangers.[1] Our clubs provide the stages for queer world making, and they play better music, too.[2] These have been the preconditions for livable gay lives, communities, and political consciousness. In this book, I contend that bars have functioned as *the medium* for the historical emergence of gay public life in the United States.

Gay bars have operated as the most visible institution of LGBTQ+ public life for the better part of a century, from before gay liberation until after gay bars' reported obsolescence. Gay bars have been essential to many queer people because only here could patrons let down their proverbial hair and be *gay*. In the chapters that follow, I focus on bars that cater to gay men, although their clienteles are often fluid.[3] Bars were where gay male cultures could be imagined and expressed, and where gay male

identities became recognizable in ways that were generative, normative, emulatable, constraining, and exclusionary.[4] As I demonstrate, these venues have fostered distinct subcultures and new sexual practices; they have provoked intracommunity critiques and activist organizing; they have created temples of dancing, fucking, and fellowship; and they have inspired alternative cultural expressions. Bars in general (i.e., not just gay ones) have been conceptualized as informal public "third places" distinct from the home and the workplace that provide "both the basis for community and the celebration of it."[5] They may also be understood as public spheres or even counterpublics for producing debate and dissent.[6] As the primary institution of gay public life, bars have performed each of these roles. I argue that most gay political and cultural formations of the recent past developed out of or in reaction to the bars. Today, LGBTQ+ people still gather at bars to toast political gains and to mourn community losses.

What we call "gay bars" are actually many things, and that capacious term encompasses numerous venues. Historically, some bars attracted congregations of queer people but were not avowedly gay venues. Some bohemian clubs cultivated a nonconformist vibe that attracted artists, queers, and other free thinkers. Some straight bars became ephemerally queer at certain hours or in specific pockets of the space, and some reached a tipping point and *turned* gay when patrons kept showing up and effectively took over place (as with the early leather bars discussed in chapter 1). This book focuses primarily on bars, but the continuities in cultures and practices among bars, private clubs, speakeasies, cabarets, dance clubs, parties, and sex clubs render precise legal distinctions between genres of venues to be of limited importance in lived experience. Queer nightlife also extends beyond these venues as patrons spill outside to parking lots, to transit stops, to bathhouses, and to nearby greasy spoons, pizzerias, taco stands, and bodegas. Coffee shops and all-night diners have long operated as symbiotic spaces by offering late-night refuges for those too young to attend bars and social spaces to continue conversations and stave off hangovers after bars close.[7] Although rarely explicitly gay venues, these were often places where queer convergences claimed the right to public assembly.[8]

The potential for same-sex sex is what makes gay bars *gay*. Yet whereas historically common cruising venues such as bus stations, parks, and department-store restrooms all afford anonymous sex, bars offer *social* contact as well. Bars rely on a mix of familiar faces and new connections. Indeed, the presence of strangers is as important as the company of friends.

A bar needs to be dynamic, familiar, and availing of new experiences, exchanges, and acquaintances characteristic of urban social contact more generally. Some bars may seem to exemplify particular neighborhoods, demographics, fetishes, fashions, or historical moments, but to be vital businesses they must either attract a diversity of clients or manifest a very specific scene. Most bars change character across the week, some over the course of the evening. Gay bars are part of the fabric of their locations by serving clienteles that travel from across an entire city or region and by occupying older buildings rather than newly constructed ones, thereby weaving themselves into preexisting urban landscapes.[9] Gay bars in different cities often resemble one another, even as each individual bar is inevitably subject to the competition and whims of its local market.

Gay bars are both constituted by and refuse their historical conditions. A long-standing function of the bar has been to offer escape from the tedium of daily life or the oppression of and isolation from the broader homophobic society. Gay bars even serve a purpose for those who rarely go to them: it's important to know that they exist and are available. One historian movingly recounts the story of a married woman who would call her local gay bar just to hear the ambient sounds of a parallel queer life.[10] As long-running bars introduce new theme nights, new features, and new ways to stay relevant, they nonetheless sustain attachments to ideas of shared identity and of continuity with local and national gay pasts.[11]

Every element inside these venues mediates social and sexual connections: the layout of the space, the libations, the lighting, the musical choices, the cigarette smoke, the color-coded hankies, and the dance-floor sweat that evaporates and then recondenses.[12] Nights out linger in such temporary residues as tinnitus at bedtime and glitter that hangs on the morning after. Going out involves multiple temporalities while also posing unique vulnerabilities. There are the hours of getting ready, including the disco nap, the evening shower, the snack to sustain energy, and perhaps the pregame cocktail to save money or to relax into the right headspace. Going to a gay bar or club means submitting to assessments of fashion, desirability, double entendre–laced repartee, gender performance, and class. Deciding what to wear becomes a strategy: to dress to impress, to conform, to pass, to get sweaty while dancing, to self-express, or to armor. Gay men can be haughty, and judging other men is a cherished bar activity. For some, the codes of self-presentation can be learned and adopted; for others, they may be self-consciously refused. Femme, gender-

nonconforming, and trans people—particularly of color—are the most vulnerable both to the sneers and stigma of catty gay men and to verbal harassment and assault getting to and from the venue. Calculations of self-fashioning must also take into account the risks inherent in encounters with a taxi driver, at the bus stop, or amid straight people on the street.[13] Stopping by the convenience store to buy cigarettes further exposes queers to the trap of hypervisibility, stares, and potential attack. (On public safety in and near gay bars, see chapter 3; interludes 2 and 7 on Detroit and Somerset, PA;, and "After Hours.") Youths often carpool with friends, piling into a car with a designated driver who drinks slightly less than everyone else. Younger men also often first navigate gay clubs with fag hags and baby dykes (both are terms of endearment) as social buffers until they have established a gay male social circle of their own; some of us continue in this preference for socializing and dancing with women in primarily male spaces.

Gay bars promise conversational wit, lurid gossip, felicitous music, virtuosic drag queens, nubile eye candy, indefatigable dancing, flirtatious physical touch, and maybe romantic love. This fantasy does, just often enough, come true via the alchemy of laughter, endorphins, pheromones, and alcohol and drugs.[14] Live it to Patrick Hernandez's "Born to Be Alive," Crystal Waters's "100% Pure Love," and the Magnetic Fields' "You and Me and the Moon." Yet bars also present exclusion, embarrassment, unrequited overtures, spilled drinks, headaches, and regret. Drown it in Anita O'Day's "The Ballad of the Sad Young Men," Book of Love's "Boy," and Robyn's "Dancing on My Own." Feel it all in "But Alive," from the 1970 Broadway musical *Applause*, which updated *All About Eve* by staging this number in a gay bar.[15] Remember it to "Being Boring," the Pet Shop Boys' 1990 pop chronicle of gay parties across the decades.

For young queers, going out to gay bars and dance clubs can be revelatory, even giving them the feeling that they are inventing queer nightlife itself when they are actually inventing themselves. For aging queens, bars' familiarity can feel tedious, comforting, or just novel enough to be reinvigorating. As an introvert, I have rarely found gay bars to be as genial as safe spaces purport to be, and I am laughably inept at cruising; I'm also usually ready to depart as soon as my happy buzz fades into drowsiness. Even so, almost every time I go out, there's a peculiar moment, detail, song, or encounter that makes me feel like gay bars are where queerness flowers. A good night at a gay bar can be very persuasive, and I keep going back out of that sense of potential.

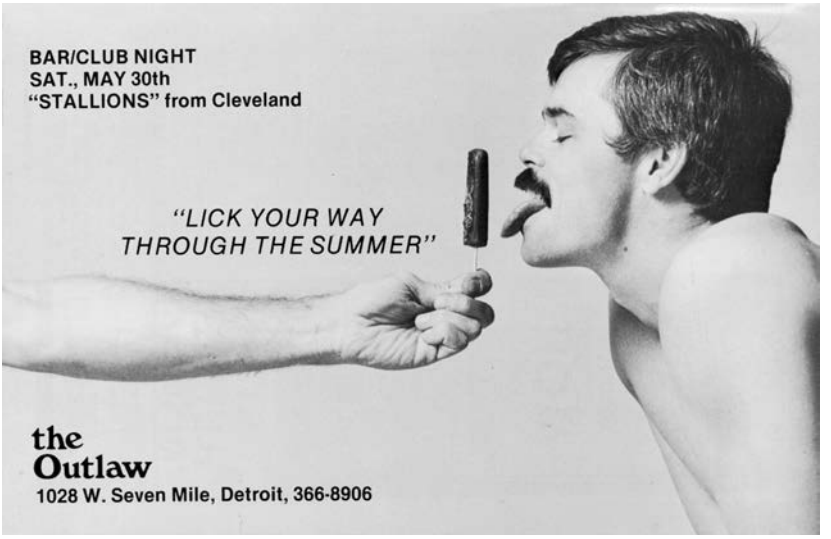


FIGURE I.1 Gay bar ads, such as this one for the Outlaw, drip with double entendres as they promise to refresh their patrons' thirsts and satiate their desires. Operating in the register of fantasy, bar advertisements often shamelessly trade in phallic imagery but rarely visualize the venue itself. (See also figure I.9.) *Cruise Weekly,* May 29, 1981. Courtesy of Bentley Historical Library at the University of Michigan.

Is That All There Is? Gay Bar History

Gay bars are effectively an American development of the twentieth century.[16] In the 1970s the Villa Fontana in Dallas advertised itself as "America's Oldest Gay Bar."[17] Today the White Horse Inn in Oakland and Café Lafitte in Exile in New Orleans each claim to be the longest continuously operating gay bar in the United States; each has been running since at least 1933, the date of Prohibition's repeal. Despite these legacy claims, it would be impossible to definitively identify the first or the oldest US gay bar. Records for gay bars are unreliable because venues were often illicit, unlicensed, local, and short-lived, and, as stated above, their orientations were often more fluid than fixed. Consequently, this book does not emphasize a chronology of firsts. Instead, I look to exemplary instances that help explain the ways that bars have conditioned the invention of gay public life.

Scholars argue that the developments of gay identity and spaces as they exist in the United States have been uniquely the products of the private market, from bars and bathhouses to newsstands, movie theaters, and

mail-order catalogues.[18] Gay liberation developed as "the coemergence of the gay consumer and the gay constituent," which was conceived of as a whole new lifestyle.[19] In a foundational essay of gay history, John D'Emilio makes an even bigger claim: that capitalism, urbanization, and the rise of the wage-labor system changed the fundamental economic structure of the family unit and created the structural possibilities for modern gay identities and communities to emerge. Whereas agrarian families relied upon their children's labor to operate as a self-sufficient unit, the turn toward workers who earned paychecks allowed for new economic and geographic freedoms, at least for men. This had two major effects: men could now choose to live as singles independent of their families, and family relationships (marriage and parenthood) became defined as emotional bonds rather than as economic arrangements. The migration to and concentration of populations in cities fostered the development of commercial venues such as taverns; in these places, men could forge new affectional and sexual relationships. My graduate students challenged D'Emilio's model as unreflective of family patterns in communities of color. I had never previously questioned his argument; upon reflection, I determined that D'Emilio's premise was not invalid but was specific and partial: his account historicizes a predominantly white male formation.[20] Such distinctions in kinship, community structures, and economic access also, in part, explain how gay bars primarily developed as *white* gay male institutions. We must also recognize that all the spaces that LGBTQ+ people claimed that appear in this book have been located on stolen Indigenous lands.

There have been numerous historical studies that trace early gay life and nightlife (the two often intertwine) to the 1920s or to World War II. These offer invaluable, usually local recovery narratives of previously repressed public life.[21] The seminal tome in this genre remains George Chauncey's magisterial history of the "gay world" in New York during the early twentieth century; he argues that queer public life was more visible and integrated into the city during that period than it would be during the next few decades. In this account, Prohibition was *good* for queer nightlife insofar as it meant that venues serving "fairies," "pansies," and other nonnormative clientele were no more vulnerable than straight joints; they all operated beyond the law and through the protection of payoffs. Rather, the *repeal* of Prohibition had a number of significant effects that created the conditions for gay bars to develop as a distinct phenomenon. In the mid-twentieth century, liquor-control boards became the primary force regulating venues serving alcohol, at times explicitly forbidding venues from catering to so-called

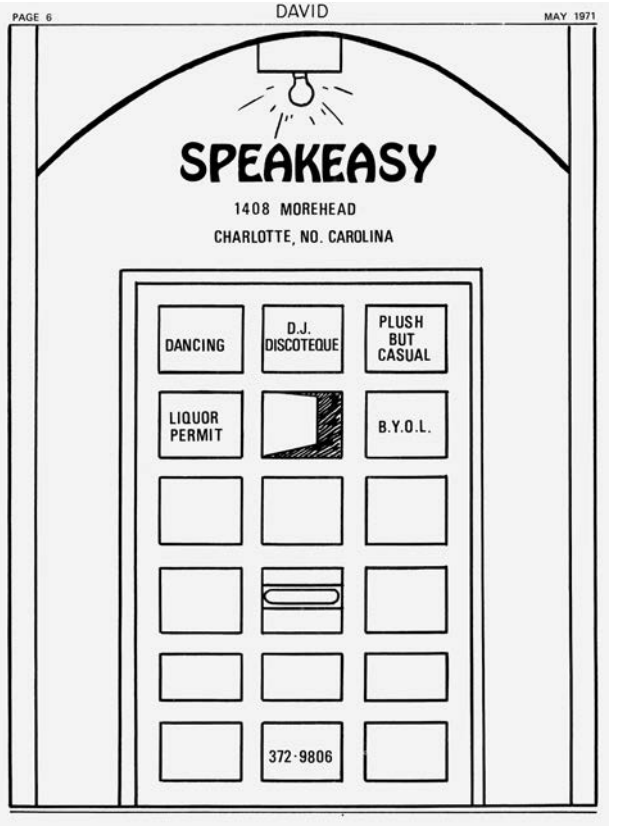


FIGURE I.2 This advertisement for the Speakeasy in Charlotte, North Carolina, evokes a clandestine era of queer nightlife with its image of a door with peek slot to screen admission. The graphic design—with its simple line art and text—is reflective of many gay bar ads in the 1960s and early 1970s. References to the venue's liquor permit and the fact that patrons must bring their own booze ("B.Y.O.L.") reflect the peculiarities of local alcohol regulations. *David*, May 1971. Collection of the author.

sexual deviants. The legal precarity of these businesses in turn made them ripe for mafia control, which lasted in many cities for decades. Significantly, the pressures on bars to disallow *any* perceptible queer clientele created a segregated nightlife scene. Whereas queer gatherings previously could be integrated into anything-goes venues, post-Prohibition homophobic regulations motivated *exclusively* gay venues to coalesce.[22] These venues operated separately from straight bars and often discreetly out of view from the so-called general public.

Historians have argued that World War II significantly remapped US gay life and positioned the gay bar as its primary locus. Gay bars in red-light districts and tenderloins were the most immediate way for servicepeople on temporary leave to access queer scenes in unfamiliar cities.[23] When the war ended, many of these veterans resettled in the cities where they had first found others like themselves. For many queers who grew up feeling isolated in rural areas, small towns, and suburbs, there

was a "great gay migration" to major cities in search of the possibility of a gay life.[24] This built upon preexisting patterns of queer urban migration, further centralizing bars as the primary sites of gay public life and laying a foundation for gay political organizing in the postwar period—a more virulently homophobic time than the prewar era. As D'Emilio asserts, "Alone among the expressions of gay life [of the time], the bar fostered an identity that was both public and collective."[25]

In the postwar period, a relatively stable ecosystem of bars developed despite pervasive societal homophobia. The law and law enforcement viewed "any assembly of homosexuals in one place" as "a virtual conspiracy."[26] Yet, even when licensing agencies or the police shut down specific bars amid politically motivated clean-up campaigns, new venues would soon replace them. Many bar patrons did not disclose their names or carry identification because of the risks of arrest, shakedown, or blackmail. Gay bars offered outlets for closeted people in heterosexual marriages as well as those who had resisted such social conventions. People who ventured to bars were vulnerable to potential loss of employment, housing, family, and social standing when bar raids were publicized; other men did not dare to go to gay bars at all.[27] As demonstrated by the 1957 book *Gay Bar*, written by a staunch but sympathetic heterosexual female gay bar owner, these venues also enforced strict codes of conduct and gender presentation for the men who went there.[28] Patrons comported themselves within the norms of the venue or risked getting themselves eighty-sixed from the one safe-ish place they had.

During the 1950s the differential legal status of bars serving known or suspected homosexuals became a matter for legal challenges and political organizing. In California the State Supreme Court ruled in 1951 that the presence of homosexuals in a bar did not, in and of itself, constitute a violation of the law as long as no other "illegal or immoral acts" could be proven. This ruling "made California the only state in the nation to provide a modicum of legal legitimacy to gay and lesbian bars."[29] (Virginia was the last state to repeal its law prohibiting the operation of gay bars, in late 1991.[30]) However, by the decade's end, another ruling mitigated these legal protections by suggesting that "any activity (not just sexual activity) that could be construed as homosexual" might be considered immoral and thus the basis for fines, license revocation, or closure.[31] San Francisco gay bar owners responded by joining forces. First, they orchestrated a campaign to expose and fight extortion from the police—dubbed "gayola" for gay payola—in 1960. The effects of this effort were mixed; exposing

such shakedowns alleviated harassment by precinct beat cops, but this move made bars more vulnerable to top-down antivice campaigns from the mayor's office or police department leadership. Next, in 1961 gay bar owners formed a tavern guild, a professional organization to share information and legal strategies that would be emulated in other cities soon thereafter. Then, in 1964, the San Francisco–based homophile group Society for Individual Rights distributed a "Pocket Lawyer," a small booklet with information about citizens' legal rights in the event of an arrest during a bar raid or entrapment.[32]

Refuting a progress narrative, two mass-market books by homosexual-identified sociologist Donald Webster Cory (a pseudonym for Edward Sagarin) suggest that gay bars became *less* reputable between the early 1950s and the early 1960s. In 1951 Cory wrote that "one wanders into the bar in the hope of finding the convivial spirit that comes from being with one's own [kind] . . . for here is a gaiety, a vivacity, that is seldom seen in the other comparable taverns, nightclubs, bars, and inns." A dozen years later, he and his coauthor offered a more severe assessment: "The conditions under which gay bars can operate and function are often similar to those under which homosexuals themselves function; namely, insecurity, fear, suspicion, and uncertainty. . . . People may go to bars and enjoy them, but nobody respects them because the things they symbolize are considered vices: liquor, sex, and escapism."[33]

When a 1958 issue of the early homophile magazine *One* featured a story on gay bars, its ambivalence was marked by phrasing them as a question: "What about Gay Bars?" In the cover photo, a patron of color has swiveled to return the camera's gaze with lacquered lips, one arm akimbo, and the other holding a cigarette aloft; other people's faces remain obscured, possibly out of discretion or possibly because they were engaged in other goings-on (see figure I.3). The article's author refers to gay bars as both an "institution" and a "medium," and he narrates an overview of the social dynamics in these spaces.[34]

> Anyone who has "made the rounds," as they say, is readily acquainted with the milieu—the hustlers, the screaming faggots, the queers, the nice ivy-leaguers—sometimes all in easy exchange with one another, while at other times each isolated into groups maintaining their own classification within the bars that reflect their specific personalities. . . . If [patrons of color] feel a little uncertain of their welcome, they will usually monopolize one corner of the bar, and emerge only if invited. . . . the

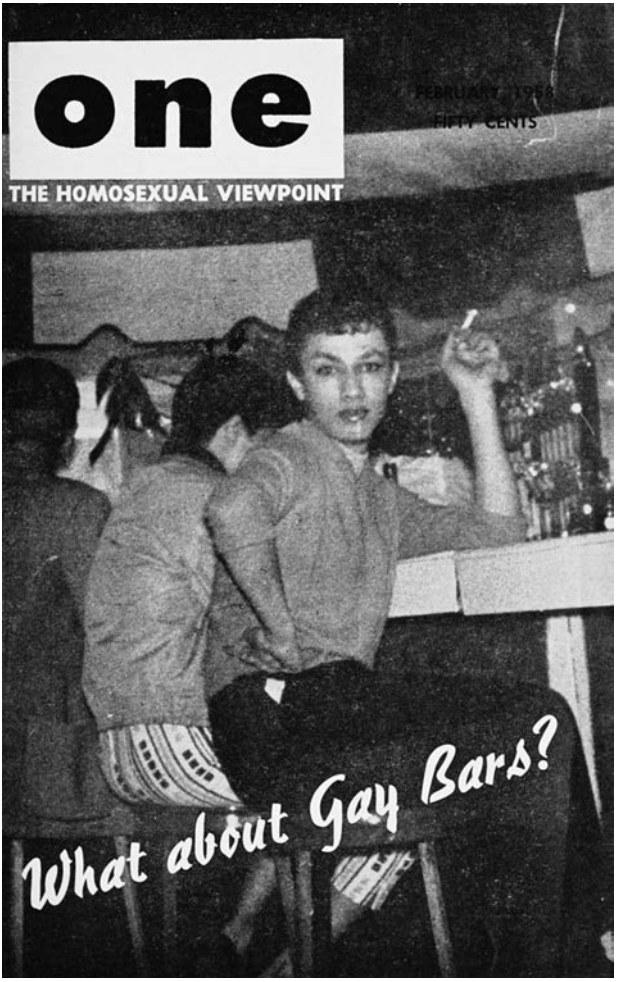


FIGURE I.3 An unidentified but self-assured gay bar patron returns the camera's gaze on the cover of early homophile magazine *One*, February 1958. Courtesy of ONE Archives at the USC Libraries.

> Gay Bar is exceptionally important to many homosexuals, as the one institution where they can be sure of finding some measure of kinship with others.[35]

This account of gay bars makes clear how varied the clienteles of specific bars could be, which manifested in spatialized convergences and dispersals along the lines of class, race, gender, and decorum. Some midcentury bars—described as "piss elegant" by their detractors—aspired to upper-class refinement, as with hotel bars, sweater-queen bars, and piano bars.[36] (The Tavern on Camac piano bar in Philadelphia is the only gay bar where I've felt underdressed without a dinner jacket; this made it feel

like a wonderful anachronism as I sipped a martini.) Other rough-and-tumble dives drew straight rough trade and hustlers, and leather bars still occasionally simulate this titillating patina of danger. *One*'s report also exposes racial tensions in the gay scene that reflected American society at large. Significantly, the author foregrounds this portrait by suggesting that the dynamics in these spaces are *already known* by his readership.

In the 1960s and beyond, journalists wrote about bars in exposés of gay life; psychologists and social scientists likewise went to bars looking for evidence to explain the "pathology" and "social problem" of homosexuality.[37] (See also interlude 3 on Seattle.) Gay bars were often perceived as dens of maladjustment and social deviance; their marginality also made them ripe for developing political dissent and organizing. Before and after gay liberation, bars knowingly satirized their status as dens of ill repute by referencing poor personal choices, sleaze, and shame with names such as the Mistake, Club Hangover, Marie's Crisis, the Toilet, Sewers of Paris, the City Dump, Rumors, and even the Closet. Other bar names brazenly made innocuous terms sound prurient, such as the Sweet Gum Head, the White Swallow, and the Goat Roper. These bars' owners subverted their venues' low cultural status with humor, and their patrons were in on the joke.

This book's chapters begin in 1960 because by this time gay bars were established as the core sites for queer public life. By then, gay bars had developed as unambiguously gay with gay clienteles, owners, and managers and with the symbiotic gay press to publicize them.[38] At this moment, unique subcultures were beginning to coalesce within and through gay bars; the Gold Coast leather bar in Chicago (chapter 1) and the Colony bar and the Jewel Box Lounge in Kansas City (chapter 2) each debuted between 1959 and 1960. Starting in the early 1960s, gay travel guides such as Guy Strait's *The Lavender Baedeker* (from 1963) and Bob Damron's *The Address Book* (from 1965) compiled listings of gay bars in cities across the country in ways that not only affirmed their primacy but also made distinctions between genres of bars. These publications not only helped men find particular watering holes but also demonstrated for their readers that a greater public gay world existed, with multiple ways of being gay.[39] In 1963 John Rechy's *City of Night* became a literary cause célèbre for his unapologetic chronicle of hustling in the homosexual underworld of bars and parks across the country. By 1980, one could imagine a visible "gay America," and Edmund White traveled to see it in his droll *States of Desire*. What changed between those two books was an epochal shift in gay consciousness and public life that could be witnessed at gay bars.

We Found Love in a Hopeless Place: The Stonewall Riots

History, for LGTBQ+ communities, is often periodized as before and after Stonewall: the riots that erupted at the New York City gay bar in late June 1969. By beginning in 1960, this book deliberately moves away from Stonewall as the pivot of *bar* history; that venue did not so much invent a culture—its scene is strikingly similar to accounts of the Colony Bar in Kansas City before it (see chapter 2) and to Jacque's and the Other Side in Boston after it (see chapter 3)—nor was it the first or last gay bar to be raided and to inspire protests in response. Yet the name *Stonewall* has become so iconic that it now references *any* moment that catalyzed gay political activity regardless of chronology; for instance, Los Angeles' Stonewall—organized protests following a 1967 raid on the Black Cat and New Faces bars—*preceded* New York's (see figure I.4).[40] Still, the *legacy* of the events at Stonewall loom so large that any history of gay bars must reckon with it. The riot has been commemorated with annual pride celebrations in June in cities around the world, and milestone anniversaries have been marked by a tenth-anniversary march on Washington (in 1979) and a wave of exhibitions and publications for the twenty-fifth and fiftieth anniversaries (1994 and 2019, respectively).[41]

The Stonewall Inn opened on Christopher Street in the West Village proximate to other gay bars in 1967. The venue kept the name of the previous business that had been in the space, with a story-and-half vertical sign that flanked the front of the building and made the Stonewall flagrantly visible (see figure I.5). The venue purported, in legal terms, to be a "bottle club," where patrons were supposed to bring their own liquor to be served by the staff rather than buy it from the bar. This loophole bypassed legitimate licensing. Serving known homosexuals had been illegal in New York for years, as publicized when the Mattachine Society enlisted a reporter to go on a "sip-in" (a spin on the Black civil rights movement's sit-ins) at Julius', located around the corner from the Stonewall, in 1966.[42] In 1968 a New York judge ruled that gay bars were not illegal per se, nearly two decades after the California precedent. Yet the State Liquor Authority persisted in refusing licenses to acknowledged gay bars, which perpetuated mafia control of the market with unlicensed joints. The Stonewall was widely recognized as a syndicate operation, and its more affluent patrons were reportedly extorted to keep their sexuality secret.[43] Conditions inside the Stonewall were famously unhygienic, and its poorly washed glassware was blamed for hepatitis outbreaks. Drinks

FIGURE I.4 On February 11, 1967, PRIDE (Personal Rights in Defense and Education) led protests against a New Year's Eve police raid of the Black Cat and New Faces bars in Los Angeles, where officers beat patrons and a bartender. Courtesy of ONE Archives at the USC Libraries.

were watered down and overpriced, there was little ventilation, and the air-conditioning didn't work. Nonetheless, it was the largest and "most popular gay bar in Greenwich Village."[44]

Accounts of the bar indicate that it welcomed a cross section of white, Black, and Puerto Rican patrons. It was especially a sanctuary for people on the trans spectrum, for sex workers, and for street kids. Indigent youths would panhandle for the cover charge to seek refuge from the weather or from vagrancy charges.[45] As one patron recounted, "All you had to do was find an empty beer can, so the waiter would think you'd bought a drink, and the night was yours."[46] These patrons were often refused by or were "too much" for other gay venues.[47] As Dick Leitsch of the Mattachine Society reflected, "The Stonewall became 'home' to these kids. When it was raided, they fought for it. That, and the fact that they had nothing to lose other than the most tolerant and broadminded gay place in town, explains why the Stonewall riots were begun, led, and spearheaded by the 'queens.'"[48]

FIGURE I.5 The exterior of the Stonewall Inn, site of the June 1969 raid and riots, photographed in September 1969 by Diana Davies. With a massive sign, the Stonewall was the most visible gay venue in the city at the time; the remnants of an activist message to the community remain visible on the boarded-up window. The bar closed a month later. © New York Public Library.

The 1969 raid on the Stonewall was part of a wave of harassment, including an earlier raid there that same week. The bar had been raided "at least ten times" since opening, but this time around it "looked to many like part of an effort to close all gay bars and clubs in the Village."[49] The first night of the riots, it was hot, there was a full moon, and Judy Garland had just been buried. Garland was a gay icon beloved by an older and whiter audience than the Stonewall's core crowd, but the coincidence of her death became one of the riots' apocryphal causes. Police arrived at peak time; they checked IDs, detaining trans and underage people inside while releasing others one by one. The crowd on the curb grew as people waited for their friends or loitered to watch, and customers leaving the

bar started to catwalk for their audience. A few trans patrons and bar staff were taken away in the first police van without altercation. The situation escalated when the police became more violent in forcing a woman into a police car after she made repeated escape attempts. The crowd started to throw pennies at the police, shouting, "Dirty coppers." Soon, the projectiles included beer cans and bottles. There has been much debate about who "threw the first brick" or "first punch" at Stonewall, with Black butch lesbian Stormé DeLarverie and Puerto Rican trans activist Sylvia Rivera as the most nominated candidates.[50] As the crowd got riled up, the police took refuge inside the bar. Someone uprooted a parking meter and used it as a battering ram on the boarded-up front window; then someone tossed a firebomb through the opening, which was greeted with shouts of "cook the pigs."[51] The police were trapped inside, and the bar—like many gay dives—did not have fire exits. The queens stomped on both civilian and police cars. The ruckus attracted onlookers and joiners-in who converged via the West Village's angled streets, avenues, and subways.[52] Estimates of the crowd the first night vary between two hundred and a thousand. Chants of "gay power" articulated the incident as a political rebellion in the spirit of black power and the pervasive urban uprisings of the preceding years. After the first night, activists wrote in chalk on buildings along Christopher Street instructing people to assemble again at the Stonewall, where there were speeches as well as continued protests. The energy and antics of the uprising continued for days.[53]

The Stonewall riots indisputably signaled a turning point in gay politics. But this was possible only because a public culture of gay bars and political consciousness about their stakes *already existed* when the insurgency erupted. Leitsch observed that whereas Mayor Robert F. Wagner Jr.'s administration (1954–65) had persecuted queer people and spaces to the point that they internalized the expectation of such treatment, Mayor John Lindsay's administration (starting in 1966) had taken a much more tolerant approach that gave the LGBTQ+ community a new enfranchisement.[54] The uprising occurred because the queer community had developed a sense of relative security that was newly threatened. Following the riots, the Stonewall itself became the target of an anti-mafia boycott and closed in October 1969; it reopened decades later as a new business venture that capitalized on the location's fame.

The longer-term effects of the uprising were that it *felt* like something transformative and that it made new liberated queer consciousness, activisms, and publicities possible. As one account proclaimed, "WE WANT

THE WORLD AND WE WANT IT NOW!"[55] The riots at the Stonewall sparked the formation of the Gay Liberation Front and the Gay Activists' Alliance political groups.[56] The GLF took up a revolutionary ethos and organized in solidarity with other leftist movements, whereas the GAA focused more narrowly on gay rights specifically.[57] The GLF began hosting popular dances in August 1969; the GAA likewise had a "pleasure committee" and began hosting dances in June 1970 as the first Stonewall anniversary pride event. The GAA moved operations to a converted firehouse in 1971 and continued dances there until 1974, when the firehouse was destroyed, ironically, by arson.[58] Together, the GLF and GAA dances strategically shifted dance music from jukeboxes to live DJs in order to outfox the mafia (which controlled jukeboxes and other bar concessions, such as cigarette machines) and ultimately popularized the disco phenomenon among gay men.[59] Yet one account suggests that gay bars became even more profitable for the mafia *after* gay liberation expanded their numbers. At times, crime syndicates owned bars directly, at times they invested in bars with a gay owner as a front, and at times they used them for money laundering or drug running; they also relied on them for their various vending, distribution, and supply businesses. Such business arrangements lasted into the 1990s and possibly even later.[60]

Nonetheless, raids persisted. When the police raided the Snake Pit bar following a GAA action in spring 1970, an undocumented arrestee named Diego Vinales jumped out of a police station window because he feared deportation. He impaled himself on an iron fence and moaned in agony; miraculously, he lived. The GAA published a pamphlet in response to the incident: "Any way you look at it, Diego Vinales was pushed. We are all being pushed."[61] The following year, the city witnessed its largest bar raids yet.[62] A decade later, in 1982, police conducted one of the most brutal raids in the city's history on the Times Square bar Blue's, which drew a predominantly Black and Latinx gay and trans patronage.[63] Whereas a similar clientele had fought back at the Stonewall, the version of gay liberation that followed from the riots primarily benefited white gay men. Queer and trans people of color remained politically and socially marginalized in the community.

Even though the Stonewall was closed before the riots were commemorated by what would be known as pride parades, the relation between bars and these annual events has been long-standing. The first few Christopher Street Liberation Day marches started in the Village and made their way to Central Park. In other words, the liberationists deliberately left the gay

ghetto and its bars to occupy more visible public spaces. However, in 1973 the parade reversed direction to *end up* at the bars, thus guaranteeing major revenues; a decade later, this would become the standard route.[64]

A Little Respect: Gay Liberation and After

Gay bars became ubiquitous during the liberation era, and they remained the most pervasive and visible institution of the gay community through the end of the millennium and beyond. During the 1970s, the number of gay bars across the country swelled as more businesses opened to cash in on a growing market. (At this time, researchers estimated that a city population of fifty thousand was generally necessary to sustain a gay bar, although in some regions the minimum threshold could be as high as a combined urban and outlying rural population of two hundred thousand.[65]) But in the wake of Stonewall, bars' roles in gay politics evolved. Gay bar activism expanded from protesting external forces such as alcohol-control agencies, the mafia, and the police to critiquing bars themselves and their outsized role in gay life.

Early 1970s bar activism called attention to financial exploitation and other oppressive conditions at bars. As a 1970 commentary in the Philadelphia's leftist newspaper *Gay Dealer* espoused, "the 'gay bar' is the tool by which the oppressor and his underworld cohorts perpetuate their hatred of us as an oppressed people and the lifestyle in which we desire to express ourselves."[66] In 1970 the Berkeley GLF chapter staged pickets, guerrilla theater, and a sit-in at the White Horse Inn to protest straight exploitation of gay people in bars. The GLF's demands included the right to touch and dance, an end to verbal and physical abuse from owners and staff, the freedom to distribute gay-liberation newspapers, nondiscrimination based on dress, a space for minors, and lowered prices on drinks.[67] The cover of the October 1970 issue of *Gay Sunshine* showcased a photo of the protesters reclaiming the bar on their own terms, flanked by the headline "The Bars Are Ours" (see figure I.6).[68]

That same year the Los Angeles GLF produced a poster encouraging bar patrons to "touch one another" as a civil right. In a homophobic society, same-sex physical contact constituted gay bars' primary threat to dominant cultural values and was often the basis upon which they were policed. Vice officers arrested men who hugged or danced together on charges of public indecency as routinely as they targeted bar owners and

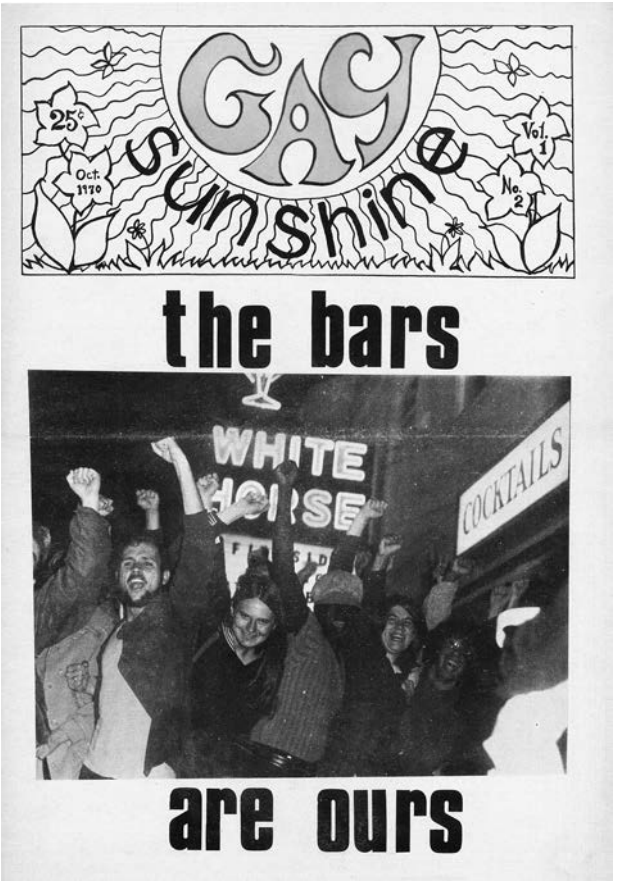


FIGURE I.6 Front-page coverage of the Berkeley Gay Liberation Front's protest of the White Horse Inn in Oakland. *Gay Sunshine*, October 1970. Courtesy of ONE Archives at the USC Libraries.

staff for liquor-license violations. Stories abound that well into the 1960s, when police raided mixed-gender bars, the management would turn on a special light to alert dancers to switch partners; gay men and lesbians then quickly moved to slow dancing with each other. Liberationists sought to move beyond such subterfuge. The LA GLF advised its constituents, "You may hold hands, keep your arm around a friend's shoulder or waist, give a friendly kiss," but "groping, caressing below 'the belt,' soul kissing or sexually carrying-on is not tolerated in either straight or gay bars—*it is illegal*" (see figure I.7).[69] These forms of activism were inspired by and intersected with other social movements, including the civil rights movement and black power, second-wave feminism, and the antiwar and student movements. Records of this time, however, expose the lack of consensus among gay bar patrons. Significantly, bar-goers and activists

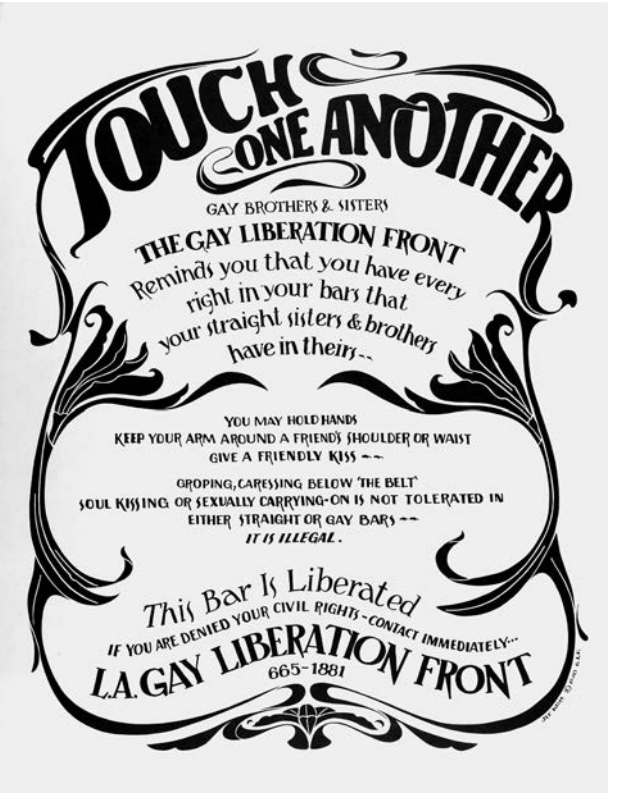


FIGURE 1.7 The Los Angeles Gay Liberation Front produced this flyer in 1970 to advise bar patrons of their right to public displays of affection. Courtesy of ONE Archives at the USC Libraries.

often operated at cross-purposes. A 1974 *Pittsburgh Gay News* editorial titled "Is 'Gay Lib' Hurting 'Gay Life?'" acknowledged tensions between activists who were critical of gay bars and "the vast majority of gay women and men [who] are still enjoying the old 'gay life,' with all of the sometimes negative connotations."[70] (See also interlude 3 about Seattle.)

Bars were critiqued for their dominance in gay socializing and the corollary effects of pervasive alcoholism among their patrons.[71] Oftentimes, consuming alcohol became a precondition for access to queer public venues, and this fact exacerbated self-medicating tendencies among LGBTQ+ people to alleviate feelings of shame. The management at some bars aggressively hassled patrons to keep buying rounds; others more subtly drove patrons to drink with poor ventilation that irritated customers' throats or with music so loud that patrons strained their voices to talk.[72] In many cities, gay bars frequently used to open at 6 a.m.—the earliest allowed by local liquor regulations—and had crowds of regulars at that hour. Set entirely in

a gay bar, the 1971 film *Some of My Best Friends Are . . .* portrays gay binge drinking as sloppy and self-destructive, and it suggests that this behavior was representative of the gay lifestyle at the time.[73] Some bars even mocked emergent efforts to problematize alcohol consumption. Contemporaneous with early publicity for gay addiction-treatment programs, the EndUp in San Francisco ran an ad querying, "Got a drinking problem? We do too! Join us."[74] The practices and meanings of drinking have changed over the decades. As a longtime bar owner in Portland succinctly remarked to me, "Gay people don't drink like they used to."[75]

During the 1970s, as more men came out, the connotations of bars began to shift from being sites of stigma to sites of exuberance. No phenomenon better reflected this new gay world than the emergence of "super-bars," which combined dance floors, drag lounges, leather bars, piano bars, patios, boutiques, and the like into massive complexes where men could fluidly circulate and cruise between spaces.[76] The Farmhouse super-bar in Houston boasted a swimming pool, and the Copa in Key West claimed "a cast of thousands" across its multiple venues within a single compound (see figure I.8).[77] These massive venues offered an embodied sense of new political power in sheer numbers and the heady lure of infinite potential hookups; they also promised to bring everyone together for a full menu of amusements.

In contrast to the super-bars, as the number of gay bars grew in each local market, other individual bars increasingly specialized in particular subcultures, aesthetics, attractions, or demographics; this, in turn, produced trends toward homogenization within specific venues' clienteles. Many bars cultivated milieus that fetishized masculinity and denied entry to women, including trans women; some bars also deliberately excluded men of color in order to attract white men only. Live-and-let-live working-class and rural bars have tended to serve inclusive crowds that are representative of their regional demographics; in contrast, larger city bars have been *less* likely to reflect diverse urban demographics as they compete for discrete—usually affluent white male—segments of the urban market.[78] As lesbian feminist Felice Newman pointedly argued, "The bars are not a gay community, but a substitute for a gay community."[79] The *ours* who could claim enfranchisement at the *bars* in this book were often historically contested.

Dissonant lived realities mark gay bar histories. Bars at times created a false consciousness for their clienteles about who constitutes the LGBTQ+ community—what Ramzi Fawaz has described as "a relic of gay white liberalism's racist claim to universality."[80] White gay men have understood bars primarily as spaces for empowering self-expression; sometimes creating

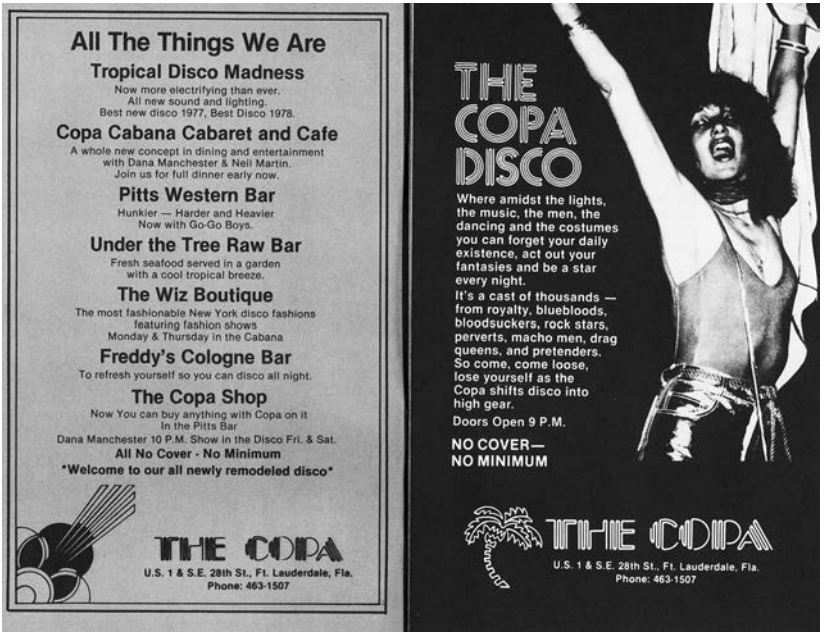


FIGURE 1.8 This double-page advertisement for the Copa super-bar and disco in Fort Lauderdale lists its multiple distinct venues (left) and coaxes dancers to "act out your fantasies and be a star every night." *Knight Life* magazine, November 23, 1978. Collection of the author.

these sanctuaries was predicated on deliberate practices of exclusion—for example, protecting all-male spaces for sexual play. In contrast, queers of color, women, and trans patrons have too often found gay bars to be locations of structural and interpersonal hostility. Bars reflected shifting sexual mores, sexisms, and racism among white gay men—as well as provided the sites for protesting them.

Gay liberation emerged in tandem with the sexual revolution. As such, all-male gay venues often fostered a new ethos of communal permissiveness and celebrated sexual expression (see chapters 1 and 5 and interlude 1 on Denver). For gay men, entering into these bars and nightclubs communicated tacit consent to participate in—or at least witness—erotic scenes and possibilities. This happened at *bars* in part because alcohol and drugs lessen inhibitions. People often went to these spaces deliberately in search of new erotic experiences, even to transgress their personal limits. Anonymous public sex became a staple of men's nightlife and effectively

brought long-standing practices such as tearoom (public restroom) cruising into the open as the main attraction. Even though venues often staged these activities in dimly lit back rooms, these scenes legitimated same-sex desire and unleashed years of repression. In the 1980s, the AIDS epidemic began changing these cultures of public eroticism; it spurred external regulation from cities that closed down many venues and divided gay men over these sites' implications for fueling and fighting the spread of HIV (see chapter 5).

Public sexual cultures often manifested in playful ways, as demonstrated by a mid-1980s account of the famed jockstrap contest at the EndUp. When a member of the crowd asked a contestant, "Are you a natural blonde?," the emcee commanded the contestant to "bend over and let me look at your roots." The contestant complied, "spreading his asshole for all of the world to see." Then, when the audience quizzed another contestant about his favorite masturbation fantasy, "someone in the crowd shout[ed] out, 'Ann Miller tap-dancing!'"[81] In the context of the mid-1980s, when this night happened, voyeurism ranked among the safest forms of sex amid the escalating AIDS epidemic. This event has had parallels that date back decades at bars across the country, most often billed as underwear contests offering a cash prize. These contests attract cocky twinks basking in validation, ballsy butch women seeking attention, and even unhoused men looking to feed themselves. Such exhibitionist stunts reveal the complex erotic and monetary economies of the gay bar scene.

In recent years, public discourses about the necessity of affirmative sexual consent may recast some of the historical practices at gay bars as no longer tenable to some members of the LGBTQ+ community. After decades of being pathologized and criminalized, gay men reclaimed the idea of being sexual outlaws in the 1970s. Lascivious physical contact between strangers was so commonplace as to be expected, even normalized as part of being in gay bars and clubs. For instance, the Manhandler Saloon in Los Angeles effectively *promised* such action with its name and with a logo that included a hand jerking off the stem of its "h" (see figure I.9). My friend Brad campily invoked this pervasive gay bar connotation of lechery whenever he referred to Touchez in Sioux Falls, South Dakota, as "Touches"—despite the fact that it was not a cruisy bar. Of course, unsolicited and unwanted groping has always occurred in these spaces, too; that has never made such advances okay, but typically these incidents have been treated as relatively unfraught by simply brushing aside stray hands and moving on. Today, go-go boys and drag queens are far more

consistently subject to being pawed than patrons in gay venues; depending on the context, such touch may be invited as carnivalesque behavior or may be experienced as assault. No universal norm exists. We are now several years into a transitional period with conflicting, somewhat generational paradigms among queer-identified people that alternately advance ideologies of sexual liberation (freedom to explore and express sexuality) and of sexual protection (freedom from sexual harm and trauma).[82] New practices to protect bargoers from being violated—such as offering consent beads for patrons to opt-in or opt-out—have been introduced at some venues, while others seek to reference, if not quite replicate, public sexual cultures of a seedy past.[83] The bars I examine in this book almost all reflect the liberation ideology, in keeping with the dominant gay political philosophy of their times.

The cultures of public sex and masculinity in the gay scene operated in alternately affirming and exclusionary ways. Masculinity became hegemonic, nearly compulsory, in much of the gay male scene during the 1970s and beyond—and in many ways remains entrenched. This often manifested in misogynist and transphobic ways as men distanced themselves from associations with women, trans people, and even drag queens. For some gay men, coming out and coming into one's own entailed embodying a validating masculinity from which they had previously felt estranged; for

FIGURE 1.9 This logo for the Manhandler Saloon in Los Angeles appeared on matchbooks and marketed lewd touching between strangers. A Chicago bar with the same name operated for forty years, which suggests the enduring promise of public sex for gay men. Collection of the author.

many gay men, it also meant conforming to the new norms of the gay scene, often derided as "clone" culture (see interlude 1 on Denver). Others critiqued and refused such performances of machismo as effemiphobic, coercive, and toxic.

Lesbians frequented both mixed-gender and women's bars. (Plenty of lesbians engaged in restroom sex at bars, too, but they did not build a culture or infrastructure of backroom bars and sex clubs comparable to gay men's.) Yet, even when men and women attended the same venues, they often occupied different spaces within the same place. As the bar scenes expanded in the 1970s, it also became ever-more gender segregated. Given disparities in women's incomes, lesbians were less often able to support their own exclusive bars, and the number of women's bars never achieved parity with men's. Women's house parties have provided another important, more economical but less public form of nightlife. In addition, lesbians were far more likely than gay men to seek out affordable housing with more space to accommodate families; this meant living in neighborhoods beyond boystowns rather than prioritizing proximity to bars. With the rise of second-wave feminism, lesbians often found or made their places within new feminist groups and sites—from coffee shops and bookstores to women's centers—that offered alternatives to bars. Inspired by their feminist sisters, some gay male activists called for similar alternatives to the gay bar, but this rhetoric nevertheless reiterated the bars' continued primacy for gay men.[84] Lesbian bars and mixed venues continued to be *parts* of lesbian culture and socializing (and in many cases may still have drawn larger crowds), but—and this is key—after the 1960s, bars no longer retained the symbolic centrality for lesbians that they continued to have in shaping gay male culture and politics.[85]

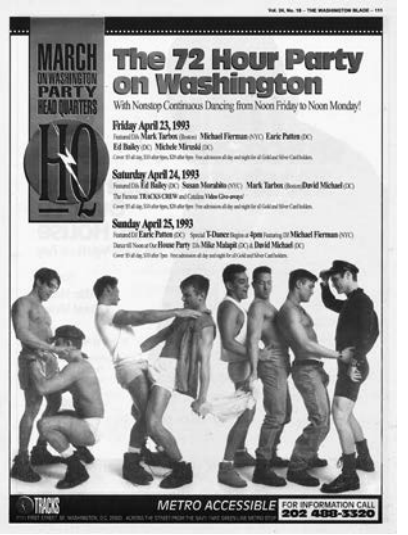
Discrimination and segregation were common realities of the gay bar scenes across the country. Some bars were overt in their bias, such as when staff denied entry to would-be patrons; this was comparatively easy for community organizers to document and protest (see chapter 4). More venues, however, fostered and reproduced their maleness and whiteness in more subtle ways that were nonetheless still palpable to anyone made to feel unwelcome. Bars thus became the medium through which pervasive white gay male sexism and racism were made visible and combated.

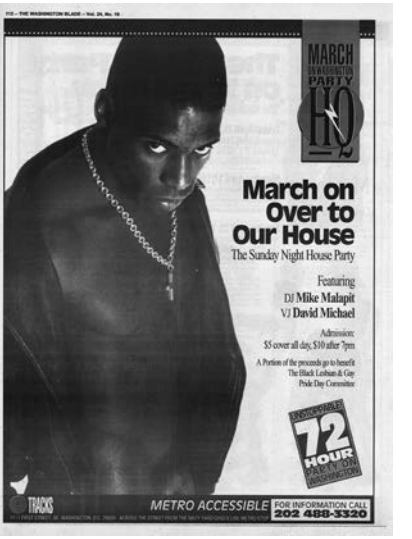
Many cities have sustained majority black and Latinx gay bars, respectively, as well.[86] Black gay bars operate as alternatives to the overt discrimination and microaggressions at white gay bars, and they offer self-determined community spaces unbothered by what is happening in white

venues (see chapter 4). In Washington, DC, for instance, many of these black gay spaces operated as private social clubs.[87] Likewise, Spanish-language Latinx gay bars reinvent the gay bar in hybrid and culturally specific ways (see chapter 8). Yet queer-of-color bars have never operated in numbers proportionate to white bars. Rather, queer-of-color communities come together and make space well beyond, not just in relation to, gay bars.[88]

Circa the late 1980s to early 1990s, some DJs and club promoters deliberately worked to advance co-gender and racially mixed queer parties (see chapter 7). These were radical propositions at the time and have still never become the dominant model. Inclusive political organizing and the gay bar converged perhaps most spectacularly in 1993 when the nightclub Tracks hosted the 72 Hour Party on Washington to coincide with the March on Washington for Lesbian, Gay, and Bi Equal Rights and Liberation. The march featured a diverse roster of platform speakers and advanced demands for nondiscrimination protections, increased AIDS research and treatment funding, reproductive rights, and an end to all forms of racism. In promoting its party, Tracks proclaimed, "With nights that cater to women and minorities, TRACKS is Washington's most politically correct dance club." This rhetorical move suggested an embrace of multiculturalism and simultaneously signaled that its parties were demographically segmented. A series of full-page advertisements in the *Washington Blade* promised that the club would double its usual 25,000 square feet, yet despite such scaling up, it planned different parties for predominantly white gay men (which stood in as an event for the LGBTQ+ community in general), for Black men, for women, and for march volunteers, respectively (see figures I.10 andI.11).[89] These events demonstrate the contradictory logic that continues to structure much of LGBTQ+ nightlife: in order to serve diverse communities, many venues divide the week among demographically separate nightly parties.

Sociologist Greggor Mattson's research suggests that gender-integrated bars became the biggest growth segment starting in the 1990s and that, as the overall number of LGBTQ+ bars diminished from the 2010s onwards, venues increasingly self-defined as queer bars, everybody bars, or even straight-friendly bars.[90] Yet my research has confirmed, again and again, that the primary strategy to correct for the whiteness and maleness of gay bars in major cities has been the creation of differentiated nights or alternative venues—that is, separatism—for women, Black, Latinx, Asian, and/or other underserved segments of the larger LGBTQ+ community (see chapters 4 and 8, and "After Hours").





FIGURES I.10–I.11 Two of five consecutive pages of ads for Tracks nightclub's 72 Hour Party on Washington, programmed to coincide with the March on Washington for Lesbian, Gay, and Bi Equal Rights and Liberation in 1993. The club boasts about its inclusive politics yet scheduled separate nightly parties marketed to different demographics, such as a white gay male party that stands in as an event for the LGBTQ community in general, its weekly Sunday night house party marketed to Black men, and its weekly women's party, which was not part of the 72-hour party. Strikingly, in the ad on the left, white gay men appear clothed and immersed in social and erotic collectives, whereas, in the ad on the right, a Black man appears almost nude and isolated as he solicits the attention of the reader. *Washington Blade*, April 23, 1993, courtesy of the Jean-Nickolaus Tretter Collection in GLBT Studies, University of Minnesota Libraries.

The social dynamics in gay bars have always reflected and informed how gay men interact when they come together. As early as the 1970s, bars were critiqued for creating alienating meat markets among gay men.[91] In the 1980s, video bars were similarly viewed skeptically by critics for constructing spaces that discouraged social interaction due to their video-jockey mixes and broadcasts of *Dynasty* and *The Golden Girls* (see figure I.12). These venues redirected men's gazes from scoping out one another to collectively staring at mounted screens decades before smartphones would do the same in more individualized ways.[92] Yet history repeats itself. Forty years after the first gay commentaries on bars' dehumanizing tendencies, I would find myself outside the Green Lantern bar in Washington, DC,

FIGURE I.12 "Before they put in video, we had to stand around and look at gorgeous guys. Now we stand around and look at *Golden Girls*." Bill Barbanes's comic comments on the 1980s rise of video bars, contemporaneous with the first decade of the AIDS epidemic. *New York Native*, May 12, 1986. Courtesy of ONE Archives at the USC Libraries. Reprinted by permission of the artist.

having an unusually intense conversation with a charming stranger about gay loneliness and intimacy.[93] He made fun of me for giving guarded responses to his questions and avoiding eye contact, yet this interaction has imprinted on my thinking about social dynamics in gay bars. In the 2010s men also flocked back to gay bars to laugh and gasp in unison at communal viewings of *RuPaul's Drag Race*; these bar screenings, in turn, grew the series' fan base and entrenched references to the show as the new gay male lingua franca (see figure I.13).

The past and recent present seemed to converge one evening in Chicago in 2017, when my friend Frederic took me to an old-school neighborhood bar called the Granville Anvil. We sat at the bar, which is constructed in a loop so that each person seated at the countertop can make eye contact with everyone else. (I first experienced this layout at the Drinkery in Baltimore.) We noticed that most of the patrons were looking at their phones instead. Belatedly, we realized that people were queuing songs for the digital jukebox from their devices—a new technology I hadn't en-

FIGURE I.13 Communal viewings of *RuPaul's Drag Race* became one of the most popular staples of gay bar culture in the 2010s and beyond. Season 2 promotional image. Courtesy of World of Wonder Productions.

countered before. As a new song came on, a thirtysomething South Asian American queen acidly exclaimed, "I do not object to Barbra Streisand. However, I do object to *shitty* Barbra Streisand!" This policing of the gay canon signaled intergenerational fighting words flung at one of the undetermined older white men at the bar whose diva worship he considered undiscerning. However, the tension diffused a few songs later when the Bee Gees' "How Deep Is Your Love" came on.[94] Looking around, it appeared that everyone had closed their eyes as they sang along in a moment of communal reverie to sounds of decades prior.

Perhaps the most radical change during my own bar-going years has been among the most ephemeral: the air itself. As a lesbian acquaintance once quipped, before New York implemented its indoor smoking ban in the early 2000s, at the East Village's crammed Wonderbar "you had to light up a Marlboro for a breath of fresh air." It's difficult to convey how intensely clothes used to reek of permeated smoke after a night out before governments implemented smoking regulations, or how assaultive it felt to

enter a bar in a city where indoor smoking was still allowed. (Full disclosure: I used to be a social smoker, which meant I rarely drank without smoking but usually bummed my cigarettes like a leech.) Smoking regulations also shifted the social geographies of bars to front sidewalks and to back patios, creating parallel universes where friends might disappear for long periods and, in the usual absence of music, find spaces more conducive to conversation (see interlude 2 on Detroit).

I Will Survive: The Demise and Endurance of Gay Bars

Although I claim a specific historical starting point of 1960 for this book, its endpoint remains purposely open-ended because gay bars have not ceased to exist, despite the pervasive refrain that they have become passé. When I started researching this book, people kept telling me that the gay bar as a cultural institution was dying. June Thomas soon wrote a series of articles for *Slate* effectively eulogizing bars.[95] A decade later, Jeremy Atherton Lin's book *Gay Bar* garnered significant attention for offering a tribute to bars at a moment when it seemed like we might lose them; the book's subtitle, *Why We Went Out*, felt pointedly past tense.[96] Yet the gay bar's death has been prematurely declared before (see plate 1).

The gay bar economy has always seen turnover, from fly-by-night mafia operations to faddish spots that shutter as soon as the next new thing comes along. In the 1970s, the heyday of the gay bar boom, many people without a lick of business experience opened bars that quickly folded amid an oversaturated market. During the 1980s, gay bars endured the existential threats of the AIDS epidemic and changes in drinking behaviors (see chapter 6) as well as the first post-liberation generational rift in the community (see chapter 7). As Mattson avers, "Gay bars are not dying, they're evolving."[97] I agree and have resisted framing this book as a declension narrative.

The culture and sites of drinking in the United States changed profoundly after World War II. Whereas in the late 1940s Americans consumed "about ninety percent" of their alcoholic beverages at public venues, by the early 1980s that figure had plummeted to "about thirty percent." The number of drinking establishments correspondingly shrank during this period.[98] The general turn away from public drinking toward domesticity in mainstream society was likely a product of reorientations toward the nuclear family, the single-family home, and suburban sprawl—life choices

that were unavailable or untenable to many queer people. These trends continued between the 1970s and 1990s: the frequency with which people went to bars and nightclubs further declined by approximately half, as did the total number of such venues. These figures correspond to numerous data sets indicating pervasive societal disengagement from civic participation in the second half of the twentieth century.[99]

Strikingly, as bars in general declined, the number of gay bars grew exponentially. Given that gay bars would have figured in the overall tally of bars, the drop in straight bars was even more precipitous than the statistics initially imply. The stark divergence in these parallel bar scenes indicates that bars served a different and essential purpose for LGBTQ+ people—even if the majority of LGBTQ+ people never actually frequented bars.[100] Statistically, the number of gay venues crested in the later part of the twentieth century, followed by a precipitous decrease in recent decades. Mattson's research has found that half of all gay bars closed between 2012 and 2021. Sixteen percent closed between 2019 and 2021, most due to the COVID-19 pandemic. This recent statistic is strikingly consistent with the peak years of bar closures during the AIDS crisis (14 percent from 1987–92) and with trends in the years preceding 2019.[101] That fifty percent have closed is not nothing, but it's not *everything*, either. Significantly, the latter-day perceptual and numerical decline of gay bars belatedly aligns with decades-old patterns in straight society.[102]

Gay bar cultures necessarily adapt to their political and social contexts. Looking back, the HIV/AIDS epidemic had a transformative and traumatizing impact on LGBTQ+ public life, politics, cultures, sexuality, and sociality.[103] Bars saw their patronage dwindle during the early years of the epidemic as some of their core patronage died and as a larger share felt unsafe socializing in public because the disease's transmission and epidemiology were not yet understood. From the mid-1980s onward, bar activism increasingly entailed sponsoring charity fundraisers for HIV/AIDS service organizations or other causes; some bars also hosted safer-sex demonstrations and distributed condoms. This gave gay bars a new role to play in the gay community and helped redefine what they meant. Certainly not all venues were benevolent, but many were. In addition, bars and clubs resumed their escapist role, whether to allow men to pretend for a moment that the HIV/AIDS crisis wasn't happening or to release the emotional weight of it all by dancing (see chapters 5, 6, and 7).

I've encountered multiple explanations for the more recent diminishment of gay bars, including competition from the internet and hookup

apps, gentrification and the straightening of gayborhoods, mainstream acceptance and assimilation of LTBTQ+ people, and younger generations' disinterest in the scene. I've seen evidence affirming and countering each of these theories, and I believe there is a confluence of each. The internet, social media, and hook-up/dating apps have changed social norms, when and how people come out, and how people access community and sexual partners. Repeated cycles of gentrification and redevelopment have made urban areas more difficult for small businesses and residents alike to afford. Significantly, the mass adoption of cruising apps coincided with the mortgage crisis and Great Recession of the late 2000s, signaling that social and economic forces converged. Broader social acceptance of LGBTQ+ people has opened up more life choices for gay people, including getting married, having children, living in suburbs or small towns, and going to chain restaurants. This might be called progress or assimilation, depending on one's ideological perspective. Gay bars have long featured drag performances and movie nights, but nightly programming increasingly has become a business necessity for venues to coax patrons off their couches.[104] Speaking of couches' gravitational pull, the developing legalization of marijuana poses as much recreational competition to bars as any other factor. Even younger queer scholars have turned to staying in and domesticity.[105]

Importantly, bar closures have happened in uneven patterns, demographically and geographically. Closures have disproportionately impacted bars catering to lesbians and queers of color, both of which have historically served clienteles with lower disposable income. Strikingly, however, the highest closure rate has been among cruise bars that cultivate cultures of public sex; these venues have faced stiff competition from hookup apps.[106] The map of closures does not show the same picture everywhere, nor are the reasons all the same. In Cleveland, for instance, bar closures have followed decades of disinvestment, not gentrification.[107] In contrast, in Dallas I encountered a thriving bar district, where I marveled at the two-story lesbian club Sue Ellen's (which featured hard hip-hop on the dance floor and live bluegrass upstairs the night I visited) and the bustling Western bar Round Up Saloon (where urban cowboys twirl elegantly while men watch from surrounding viewing platforms), among other venues. There in Big D, I was told that the Cedar Springs Merchants Association had studied the effects of gentrification on other cities' gayborhoods and organized to prevent overdevelopment via chain stores and condos in order to protect the Oak Lawn bar strip.[108]

Although the absolute number of gay bars has waned, gay bars' roles have not been directly replaced by other institutions. I also maintain that virtual platforms cannot replace the experience of dancing in a crowd of sweaty, sexy, intoxicated people or of getting lost in kissing while the rest of the bar fades from consciousness.[109] What's more, men routinely use apps such as Grindr and Scruff *inside* bars like an augmented reality game to find out who's available and what they're into. Queer people may feel more comfortable than ever in mixed and straight venues, but neither same-sex dancing nor blow jobs abound in these spaces.[110] Some gay bars carry on in crisis, and others remain popular enterprises that define specific cities, scenes, and subcultures. Some bars may seem like holdovers from an earlier era but continue to serve a clientele of regulars who may not be valued by other venues. Newer ventures have opportunities to reconceive what queer spaces might be.

At the zenith of the gay liberation era, Liza Minnelli bellowed, "What good is sitting alone in your room?"[111] In 2020 we had no other choice. Much of the writing and revision of this book took place as gay bars faced their greatest challenge yet: the COVID-19 pandemic. Cities instituted stay-at-home orders, business revenues halted, and epidemiological uncertainty created widespread anxiety about public socializing. Numerous bars rank among the business casualties of the pandemic, but others were saved when they drew donations via crowd-sourcing campaigns. The pandemic's longer-term effects on nightlife practices may not be fully recognizable for years to come. I don't want to overdetermine this history with a presentist perspective, but this context inevitably colors my analysis. Personally, I found that pandemic-era attempts to simulate nightlife—with Zoom virtual happy hours and dance parties—exacerbated lockdown alienation rather than alleviated it; such practices instantly demonstrated the irreplaceability of mutuality, shared physical presence, and spontaneous social contact. As this period extended, I was often alarmed by Instagram posts showing gay clubs crowded with unmasked men; it felt too soon and too risky even though I wanted bars to recover. The pandemic produced a widespread longing to return to bars, at times acted upon as a matter of personal liberty. My own initial return visits to bars were an affective jumble of trepidation, then relief, and then unease again when the crowd thickened. Curiously, this moment also yielded a wave of new club bangers by Dua Lipa, Agnes, and Beyoncé with the releases of their poignantly titled albums *Future Nostalgia, Magic Still Exists,* and *Renaissance*, respectively.[112] More

broadly, I observed a commonly voiced desire to return to normal and to resume what was familiar rather than to rethink or reimagine something new. The gay bar as an institution carries on, as contradictorily as ever.

Yo, D.J., Pump This Party: This Book

The Bars Are Ours explores what has been productive and world making about gay bars and clubs, how they produced structures of exclusion, and how they have figured as mediums to work through these contradictions. The chapters that follow are roughly chronological and focus on specific case-study cities, although each strives to scale between past and present, local and national. Local contexts uniquely matter because, unlike other twentieth-century minority equal rights movements, the lesbian and gay movement during its first decades primarily focused on achieving local change rather than federal protections.[113] The formation of gay communities has often been lived and understood at the local and even neighborhood level. (On the bars' role in local political debate and organizing, see chapters 3, 4, and 6 and interlude 1 on Denver.) Yet each local gay community would have understood itself in relation to an emergent national gay culture and political organizing. For most of the period covered in this book, men in the bars would have had access to a national gay press as well as local gay publications.

Many of the cities in this book have long been recognized as gay capitals, such as New York City and San Francisco, or were boomtowns in the late twentieth century, such as Atlanta and Houston. Gay men moved to these cities to be gay, in search of work opportunities, or both. By the 1970s, there was also a recognizable gay tourism market, which means that men often traveled between these cities, and bars were typically how travelers accessed local gay scenes. Bars were often the first attractions listed in gay travel guides, and local gay newspapers included directories of local bars for newcomers.[114] Bars also sustained the early gay press through advertising and inspired much of its early reportage. In recent decades, gay bars have pivoted to rely primarily on social media for marketing rather than on the gay print press, a fact that has mirrored and accelerated the decline of print culture. Although Gotham and Frisco loom large in the queer cultural imaginary and have set many historical precedents, I deliberately start this book's case-study chapters in the heartland to insist

that queer cultures did not flourish only on the coasts. Interludes 6 and 7, which look to Superior, Wisconsin, and Somerset County, Pennsylvania, offer representation of small-city and rural bars as well.

Schematically, the chapters proceed two-by-two in pairs that address cultures (leather in Chicago and drag in Kansas City, chapters 1 and 2), politics (gentrification in Boston and racism in Atlanta, chapters 3 and 4), institutions (iconic gay clubs in New York City and Houston, chapters 5 and 6), and reinventions (queer parties in San Francisco and Latinx spaces in Los Angeles, chapters 7 and 8). I focus on leather and drag in chapters 1 and 2 as the two most iconic cultural formations specific to gay bars. They may seem dichotomous in their celebrations of masculinity and femininity, yet both reveal gender as performed, and both revel in queer practices of community-building. Leather bars today often reference a particular heritage of 1970s sleaze, whereas drag may appear to be timelessly gay; in fact, both leather and drag became codified as gay bar cultures in the 1960s. As I demonstrate in chapters 3 and 4, in Boston and Atlanta gay bars functioned as the mediums to make class tensions and racial bias visible within these gay communities, respectively; stakeholders protested the bars' clientele or door policies and sought government intervention, but these specific, local instances were understood to be indicative of nationwide concerns about gentrification and discrimination. Yet these chapters also document that particular venues became sanctuaries serving otherwise marginalized segments of the LGBTQ+ rainbow. Chapters 5 and 6 examine the sex clubs, discos, and bars in New York City and Houston that effectively defined gay public life, provided models that other clubs aspired to, and exemplified what a gay bar could be. The last two chapters look to San Francisco and Los Angeles for Generation X queer parties and Latinx venues, respectively, that created alternatives to the hegemony of white gay male bars and clubs as they had developed in the liberation era. Other artifacts, documents, news stories, and nights out that compelled me to write about them became the basis of the book's interludes, and each one models different knowledges and experiences of gay bars. I close this book with an epilogue about Pulse in Orlando, where a mass shooting on Latin Night produced international grief and, amid the mourning, testimonies about the continued importance of queer clubs. These histories indicate that bars may have never been utopias, but they have been ours.

Notes

Preface

The title of this preface references *Drunk History* (created by Derek Waters and Jeremy Konner, Comedy Central, 2013–19); and Deee-Lite, "Good Beat" (Dmitry Brill/Herbie Hancock/Kier Kirby/Towa Tei, Elektra, 1990).

1 Allen, *There's a Disco Ball*, 1.

2 Thank you to Joshua Javier Guzmán for helping me articulate this.

3 See, for instance, Delgado and Muñoz, eds., *Everynight Life*; Rivera-Servera, *Performing Queer Latinidad*; Vogel, *Scene of the Harlem Cabaret*; Moore, *Fabulous*; Chambers-Letson, *After the Ball*; Khubchandani, *Ishtyle*; Adeyemi, Khubchandani, and Rivera-Servera, *Queer Nightlife*; and Adeyemi, *Feels Right.* See also Yuzna, *Fun* and Colucci and Yereban, *Party Out of Bounds*.

4 See my book *Inherent Vice*, 34–35.

5 Ramzi Fawaz, *Queer Forms*, 10, 6, 36.

6 A kitschy earlier ad for the Forthsooth the Dragon bar beckoned patrons to "spend a Knight inside a warm mouth." Advertisement, *Advocate*, December 8, 1971, 12.

7 On Rihanna, Britney Spears, and other gay bar music, see my piece, "I Wanna Go, or Finding Love in a Hopeless Place."

8 I have fleshed out my archival research with numerous personal conversations to understand local contexts, but these have not been as formalized as oral history interviews.

9 The queer archive is also evidence of lives lived and lost; many collections comprise the personal effects of men who died of AIDS that were some-

times donated because their families did not know how to make sense of what gay men left behind. Sometimes these men were recloseted when donations were made anonymously.

10 *Beaches* (dir. Garry Marshall, 1988). Phil Johnson papers, AR0838, box 38, now the Resource Center LGBT Collection of the University of North Texas Libraries. Lollie Johnson Papers, MS 117, box 4, University of Texas at San Antonio Libraries Special Collections.

11 Ad, *David*, May 24, 1983. On evoking the past on the dance floor, see Gregory W. Bredbeck, "Troping the Light Fantastic."

12 Speculative historiography has become a major new model for understanding otherwise underrepresented or undocumented pasts, as exemplified by Saidiya Hartman's work. Hartman poses the question, "How can narrative embody life in words and at the same time respect what we cannot know?" She developed the practice of "critical fabulation" to narrate such lives and histories where the archive fails to offer evidence or insight. (See Hartman, "Venus in Two Acts," 3, 11.) Hartman's book *Lose Your Mother* stands as one of the most powerful reckonings with the past and what one can understand of it that I have ever encountered; Hartman's subsequent *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments* is more overtly speculative.

13 Larry Blagg gay club matchbook covers and ephemera, 7738, Human Sexuality Collection, Cornell University Library.

14 Lin, *Gay Bar,* 112, 247.

15 Muñoz, "Ephemera as Evidence." Ann Cvetkovich has coined the alluring phrase "an archive of feelings" to expand the forms that queer archives might take. Cvetkovich, *Archive of Feelings*. My thinking about the "evidentiary paradox" of queer archives—that queer lives and expressions existed even when and where they were not supposed to—has been most shaped by Anjali Arondekar's "Without a Trace." On queer archives, see also Frantz and Locks, *Cruising the Archive*; Stone and Cantrell, *Out of the Closet*; Arondekar, et al, "Queering Archives"; McKinney, *Information Activism*; Cifor, *Viral Cultures*; Marshall and Tortorici, *Turning Archival*; and my essay "Historical Fantasies."

16 Tongson, *Relocations*; Mattson, "Small-City Gay Bars"; Brown-Saracino, "How Places Shape Identity." On gay suburbanite identity, see also Brekhus, *Peacocks, Chameleons, Centaurs*.

17 Mattson, *Who Needs Gay Bars?,* 7, 106–113.

18 *Small Town Gay Bar* (dir. Malcolm Ingram, 2006).

19 On queer rural life, see also Loffreda, *Losing Matt Shepard;* Gray, *Out in the Country*; and Allen, *Real Queer America*. Jack Halberstam and Scott Herring have critiqued urban centrism in queer studies, employing the term *metronormativity*. Halberstam, *In a Queer Time*, 36–38; Herring, *Another Country.* On the geographies of where LGBTQ+ people live, see Hasenbush, et al., "LGBT Divide."

20 Roland Barthes describes the punctum as the detail that transfixes or even wounds the viewer. Barthes, *Camera Lucida,* 25–27.

21 So-called wrinkle rooms attract an older clientele. *Chicken* was the 1970s term for pubescent boys; *chicken hawk* was the term for their pederast admirers. The Horny Bull in Tampa and the Other Side in Los Angeles advertised themselves as chicken bars. In the wake of late 1970s right-wing moral panics that conflated homosexuals with pedophiles, a paradigm shift turned away from chicken bars toward LGBTQ+ youth centers to specifically protect younger queer people from predatory elders.

22 "Part of Your World" from *The Little Mermaid* (Howard Ashman/Alan Menken, 1989).

23 Gene Elder, conversation with the author, January 11, 2012.

24 For early reporting, see George Schwandt, "Holocaust in New Orleans," *Advocate*, July 18, 1973, 2; and multiple articles in *Advocate*, August 1, 1973, 1–7. For historical accounts, see Townsend, *Let the Faggots Burn*; Delery-Edwards, *Up Stairs Lounge Arson*; and Fieseler, *Tinderbox*. A trove of primary documents is gathered in the Skylar Fein Upstairs Fire Collection at the Historic New Orleans Collection.

25 Baldor, "No Girls Allowed?" See also Doan and Higgins, "Demise of Queer Space?"; Ghaziani, *There Goes the Gayborhood*; Orne, *Boystown*; Hartless, "Questionably Queer"; and Jason Farber, "How 'Gay' Should a Gay Bar Be?," *New York Times*, June 25, 2017, ST10.

26 See Tongson, "Karaoke, Queer Theory."

Acknowledgments

The title of the acknowledgments references Donna Summer, "I Feel Love" (Summer/Giorgio Moroder/Pete Bellotte, Casablanca, 1977) and Kylie Minogue, "Can't Get You Out of My Head" (Cathy Dennis/Rob Davis, Parlophone, 2001).

Each paragraph in this section references a song or songs, in the following order: Bonnie Tyler, "Total Eclipse of the Heart" (Jim Steinman, CBS, 1983); Bronski Beat, "Why" (Steve Bronski/Jimmy Somerville/Larry Steinbachek, London, 1984); The Staple Sisters, "I'll Take You There" (Al Bell, Stax, 1972); Edith Piaf, "La Vie en Rose" (Piaf/Louiguy, Columbia, 1947), and Grace Jones, "La Vie en Rose" (Piaf/Louiguy/Mack David, Island, 1977); Janet Jackson, "When I Think of You" (James Harris III/Terry Lewis, A&M, 1986); Missy Elliott, "Work It" (Melissa Elliott/Timbaland, Elektra, 2002); RuPaul, "Supermodel (You Better Work)" (RuPaul/Jimmy Harry/Larry Tee, Tommy Boy, 1992), and Britney Spears, "Work Bitch" (William Adams/Otto Jettman/Sebastian Ingrosso/Anthony Preston/Ruth-Anne Cunningham/Spears, RCA, 2013); Garth Brooks, "Friends in Low Places"

(Dewayne Blackwell/Earl Bud Lee, Capitol Nashville, 1990); and The Postal Service, "Brand New Colony" (Benjamin Gibbard/Jimmy Tamborello, Sub Pop, 2003).

Introduction: "We Were Never Being Boring"

The chapter title references Pet Shop Boys, "Being Boring" (Chris Lowe/Neil Tennant, Parlophone/EMI, 1990).

The subheads in this chapter reference the following songs: Peggy Lee, "Is That All There Is?" (Jerry Leiber/Mike Stoller, Capitol, 1969); Rihanna featuring Calvin Harris, "We Found Love" (Harris, Def Jam, 2011) ; Erasure, "A Little Respect" (Vince Clarke/Andy Bell, Mute/Sire Records, 1988); Gloria Gaynor, "I Will Survive" (Freddie Perren/Dino Fekaris, Polydor, 1978); and Bizarre Inc, "I'm Gonna Get You" (Andy Meecham/Dean Meredith/Carl Turner/Toni Collandreo, Sony, 1992).

The following abbreviations for periodical titles and the names of archival sites are used in the notes to this introduction: *BAR* (*Bay Area Reporter*); *GCN* (*Gay Community News*); *NYN* (*New York Native*); *NYT* (*New York Times*, daily newspaper); ONE (ONE National Gay & Lesbian Archives at University of Southern California Libraries, Los Angeles); *VV* (*Village Voice*, New York City downtown alternative weekly newspaper); *WB* (*Washington Blade*); and *WP* (*Washington Post*, Washington, DC, daily newspaper).

1 Muñoz, *Disidentifications*; *Sense of Brown*, 11.

2 On queer world making, see Berlant and Warner, "Sex in Public"; Muñoz, *Disidentifications*. Buckland further develops this concept in *Impossible Dance*.

3 Male-centric spaces historically have operated with the assumption that their patrons were cisgender males.

4 My thinking on the role of gay bars is informed by Ryan Powell's articulation of the "elaboration of gay male life" via cinema. Powell, *Coming Together*. The emergence of gay men as "sexual subjects" is a political formation that has been critiqued in much of queer theory. See, for instance, Eng and Puar, "Introduction."

5 Oldenburg, *Great Good Place*, 14. Straight bar and drinking cultures in the US have also been studied, historically and sociologically. See, for instance, Barrows and Room, *Drinking*; Cavan, *Liquor License*; Palmer, *Cultures of Darkness*; Grazian, *On the Make*; Hunter, "Nightly Round"; and Sismondo, *America Walks into a Bar*.

6 Habermas, *Structural Transformation*; Calhoun, *Habermas and the Public Sphere*; Clarke, *Virtuous Vice*; Warner, *Publics and Counterpublics*.

7 For an early history, see Chauncey, *Gay New York*, 163–76.

8 See, for instance, accounts of the Compton's Cafeteria riot in Stryker, *Transgender History*, 63–66. On queer spaces, see Knopp, "Sexuality and the Spatial Dynamics"; Bell and Valentine, *Mapping Desire*; Betsky, *Queer Space*; Ingram, Bouthillette, and Retter, *Queers in Space*; Valentine and Skelton, "Finding Oneself, Losing Oneself"; and referenced work by Brown-Saracino, Doan, Ghaziani, and Greene.

9 My thinking here is indebted to Jane Jacobs's analysis of the social structures of urban spaces. Jacobs, *Death and Life*. On urban social contact, also Delany, *Times Square Red*.

10 Cartier, *Baby, You Are My Religion*, xii.

11 My thinking here is influenced by Hall, "New Ethnicities" and "Cultural Identity and Cinematic Representation"; and by Gilroy's *Black Atlantic,* 101–2.

12 My (re)thinking about media and mediation is influenced by Jue, *Wild Blue Media*; and Liu, "Queer Theory and the Specter." On communal sweat, see Sarkar, "Industrial Strength Queer."

13 Luna, "Jock Straps and Crop Tops."

14 Although I do not dwell on drugs in this book, I would be remiss not to acknowledge that marijuana, LSD, poppers (amyl nitrate), Quaaludes, cocaine, Special K, ecstasy, GHB, and crystal meth have all been favored substances in queer bars and clubs. Most of these enhance sensations, reduce inhibitions, or act as uppers.

15 Patrick Hernandez, "Born to Be Alive" (Patrick Hernandez, Columbia/CBS, 1979); Crystal Waters, "100% Pure Love" (Waters/Teddy Douglas/Thomas Davis/Jay Steinhour, Mercury, 1994); The Magnetic Fields, "You and Me and the Moon" (Stephin Merritt, Merge Records, 1995); Anita O'Day, "The Ballad of the Sad Young Men" (Fran Landesman/Tommy Wolf, Verve, 1962); Book of Love, "Boy" (Theodore Ottaviano, Sire Records, 1985); Robyn, "Dancing on My Own" (Robyn/Patrik Berger, Konichiwa, 2010); Lauren Bacall, "But Alive" (Lee Adams/Charles Strouse, 1970); *All about Eve* (dir. Joseph L. Mankiewicz, 1950).

16 Historians have identified precursors such as Paresis Hall and the Slide in downtown New York, which date back to the 1890s. T. R. Witomski, "1300 Years of Gay Bars," *Stallion,* July 1982, 48; Chauncey, *Gay New York*, 37–40.

17 Ad in *Advocate*, November 5, 1975, 16.

18 Altman, *Homosexualization of America*, 20–21, 85*;* Warner, "Introduction," xvi–xvii; Binnie, "Trading Places"; Gluckman and Reed, *Homo Economics*; Chasin, *Selling Out*; Sender, *Business, Not Politics*; Johnson, *Buying Gay*. For a parallel history of sex-toy stores and the development of a sex-positive feminist culture, see Comella, *Vibrator Nation*.

19 Bronski, *Pleasure Principle*, 146. See also my essay "A Suitcase Full of Vaseline, or Travels in the 1970s Gay World."

20 D'Emilio, "Capitalism and Gay Identity."

21 McGarry and Wasserman, *Becoming Visible*; Chauncey, *Gay New York*; Beemyn, *Creating a Place for Ourselves*; Mumford, *Interzones*; Vogel, *Scene of the Harlem Cabaret*; Heap, *Slumming*; Ryan, *When Brooklyn Was Queer*; Kaiser, *Gay Metropolis;* Stein, *City of Sisterly and Brotherly Loves;* The History Project, *Improper Bostonians*; Boyd, *Wide Open Town*; Atkins, *Gay Seattle*; Hurewitz, *Bohemian Los Angeles;* Faderman and Timmons, *Gay L.A.*; de la Croix, *Chicago Whispers*; Howard, *Men Like That*; Van Cleve, *Land of 10,000 Loves*; Kelsey, "Cleveland Bar Scene in the Forties." On specific bars, see Branson, *Gay Bar*; Paulson and Simpson, *Evening at the Garden of Allah*; Brown, *Evening Crowd at Kirmser's*; and Perez and Palmquist, *In Exile*.

22 Chauncey, 9, 28, 305–6, 347, 348.

23 Bérubé, *Coming Out under Fire*, 113.

24 Weston, "Get Thee to a Big City." See also Bronski Beat, "Smalltown Boy" (Steve Bronski/Jimmy Somerville/Larry Steinbachek, London, 1984).

25 D'Emilio, *Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities*, 32.

26 Leonard, "Gay Bar and the Right," 190.

27 Chauncey, *Gay New York*, 335–51, 25.

28 Branson, *Gay Bar*.

29 Agee, "Gayola," 474.

30 Thomas Heath, "Law Banning Gay Bars Challenged in Virginia," *WP*, August 28, 1991, A6.

31 These cases were *Stoumen v. Reilly* (1951) and *Stoumen v. Munro* (1959). See Will Snyder, "Sol Stoumen," *BAR*, February 24, 1987, 16; Agee, "Gayola," 473–75; Siegel, "Right to Boogie Queerly." On the policing of gay spaces generally, see Lvovsky, *Vice Patrol*.

32 Campbell, *Queer × Design*, 26–27.

33 Cory, *Homosexual in America*, 120–21; Cory and LeRoy, *Homosexual and His Society,* 108, 120.

34 For historical accuracy, here and throughout the book I maintain the original language that gay men used to refer to other gay men, even if certain terms now appear offensive; however, I have removed dated racial terms and slurs that refer to communities of which I am not a part.

35 Robert Gregory, "The Gay Bar," *One,* February 1958, 5–8.

36 Hotel bars that drew queer clienteles included the Astor Hotel Bar in New York City, Top of the Mark in San Francisco, the Biltmore Hotel Men's Bar in Los Angeles, and the Mayflower and Statler hotels in Washington, DC. *Sweater queen* is vintage gay slang for an effeminate, class-aspirational gay man who wears fluffy sweaters; this type contrasted with butch gay men and straight trade (who have sex with men for money). On piano bars, see Miller, *Place for Us*, 28–64.

37 See Achilles, *Homosexual Bar* and "Development of the Homosexual Bar"; Hoffman, *Gay World*; Hooker, "Homosexual Community" and "Male Homosexuals and Their 'Worlds'"; Harris and Crocker, "Fish Tales"; Hoffman, *Gay World*; Humphreys, "New Styles in Homosexual Manliness"; Harry, "Urbanization and the Gay Life"; Harry and DeVall, *Social Organization of Gay Males*; Lee, "Gay Connection"; Levine, *Gay Men*; Leznoff and Westely, "Homosexual Community"; Masters, *Homosexual Revolution*; Milinski and Black, "Social Organization of Homosexuality"; Read, *Other Voices*; Reiss, "Social Integration of Queers"; Reitzes and Diver, "Gay Bars as Deviant Community"; Sage, "Inside the Colossal Closet"; Stearn, *Sixth Man*; Taub and Leger, "Social Identities"; Warren, *Identity and Community;* Weightman, "Gay Bars as Private Places" and "Towards a Geography of the Gay"; Weinberg, "Male Homosexual"; Weinberg and Williams, *Male Homosexuals*; and Weltge, *Same Sex*. See also Love, *Underdogs*.

38 Meeker, *Contacts Desired*, 214.

39 See Knopp and Brown, "Travel Guides, Urban Spatial Imaginaries and LGBTQ+ Activism." Underground gay guides date from at least 1949. Hugh Hagius produced a compilation of facsimiles in *Swasarnt Nerf's Gay Guides for 1949.* See also Meeker, *Contacts Desired*.

40 "Tavern Charges Police Brutality," [Los Angeles] *County Courier*, January 19, 1967, 1 and 3; "The Case of the Black Cat Raid," *One,* April 1967, 6; Jim Highland, "Raid!," *Tangents*, January 1967, 7; John Bryan, "Monster of a Protest Set for Saturday," *Los Angeles Free Press*, February 10, 1967, 1; "Pride Demonstration," *PRIDE Newsletter*, February 1967, 1; "3,000 Swarm Strip for 4th Big Protest," *Los Angeles Free Press,* February 17, 1967, 1; Faderman and Timmons, *Gay L.A.*, 155; Goldberg, "Riot at the Black Cat." After the protests, the gay-rights group PRIDE (Personal Rights in Defense and Education) launched the *Advocate*, a local newspaper that later became the leading national gay magazine. A raid on the Patch in Los Angeles in August 1968 prompted another declaration of gay rights and flower-power protest before Stonewall. See also Kuda, "Chicago's Stonewall."

41 Armstrong and Crage, "Movements and Memory." See also D'Emilio, "Stonewall: Myth and Meaning"; Manalansan, "In the Shadows of Stonewall"; McGarry and Wasserman, *Becoming Visible*; Duberman, *Stonewall*; Stein, *Stonewall Riots*; New York Public Library and Jason Baumann, *Stonewall Reader*; and Riemer and Brown, *We Are Everywhere*.

42 Thomas Johnson, "3 Deviates Invite Exclusion by Bars," *NYT*, April 22, 1966, 43. See also Leonard, "Gay Bar and the Right." Julius's is still serving and now distributes cards about its role in gay history; it has also hosted a twenty-first-century party called Mattachine. Signaling reclamation across genders and generations, artist Ginger Brooks Takahashi recreated a line drawing of men gathered at Julius that still hangs on the bar's walls; Brooks Takahashi's revision, however, tags the image with stickers announcing

presence: "an enby was here" and "a lesbian was here." The original image is signed "Lowry, 1978." Ginger Brooks Takahashi made her first facsimile in 2000 and created the version described here, titled *Julius Bar, 1978/2022*, in 2022.

43 Charles Grutzner, "Mafia Buys Clubs for Homosexuals," *NYT*, November 30, 1967, 1, 50. See also Randolf Wicker, "Gay Power Challenges Syndicate Bars," *Gay*, June 21, 1971, 1, 13; Howard Blum, "The Gay Bar Business: Systems of Exploitation," *VV*, February 22, 1973, 1, 76, and Blum, "The Mafia & Gay Bars: A Percentage of Every Drink," *VV*, March 22, 1973; and Carter, *Stonewall*, 91–100, 262–66.

44 Duberman, *Stonewall*, 182.

45 Leitsch, "Stonewall Riots: The Gay View," 176–77.

46 Thomas Lanigan-Schmidt, "1969 Mother Stonewall," 106.

47 Vito Russo, quoted in Carter, *Stonewall*, 74. Angelo d'Arcangelo is dismissive of the Stonewall in his tour of West Village watering holes. D'Arcangelo, *Homosexual Handbook*, 127–40.

48 Leitsch, "Stonewall Riots: The Gay View," 177. Even though the Mattachine Society, which Leitsch represented and was addressing, was viewed as outmoded compared to the new gay militancy, Leitsch's early accounts recognize the stakes of the actions and who spurred them.

49 Leitsch, "Stonewall Riots: The Police Story," 173; Leitsch, "Stonewall Riots: The Gay View," 175.

50 A biracial butch woman, DeLaverié hosted, sang, and stage-managed the Jewel Box Revue from January 1955 until September 1969 (see chapter 2). DeLaverié is the subject of Michelle Parkerson's documentary short *Stormé: The Lady of the Jewel Box* (1991) and of Parkerson's article "Beyond Chiffon" and Elizabeth Drorbaugh's "Sliding Scales." Black trans activist Marsha P. Johnson is also often mentioned, but she said that the bar was already on fire when she arrived that night. See the Johnson and Wicker interview with Eric Marcus in New York Public Library and Jason Baumann, *Stonewall Reader*, 135.

51 Leitsch, "Gay Riots in Village," 169.

52 Carter, *Stonewall*, 11.

53 Mark Segal, "From *And Then I Danced*," 123; Leitsch, "Gay Riots in Village," 170.

54 Leitsch, "Stonewall Riots: The Gay View," 175.

55 Ronnie Di Brienza, "Stonewall Incident," 155.

56 Correspondingly, the liberation publications *Come Out*! (published by the GLF), *Gay Power*, and *Gay* began out of this foment. Numerous books likewise documented the emergent politics and cultures of gay liberation, including Teal, *Gay Militants*; Altman, *Homosexual*; Humphreys, *Out of the Closets*; and Jay and Young, *Out of the Closets* and *Lavender Culture*.

See also the collected political writings in Blasius and Phelan, *We Are Everywhere*.

57 See Guy Nassberg, "Revolutionary Love: An Introduction to Gay Liberation," *Gay Flames* 11 (1971); and Kissack, "Freaking Fag Revolutionaries."

58 Miller, *Out of the Past*, 349.

59 Haden-Guest, *Last Party*, xxvii; Ralph Hall, "Gay Liberation Front," *Gay Power*, no. 5 (1969), 18; Kathy Braun, "The Dance," *Come Out*! 3 (April/May 1970): 3.

60 Crawford, *Mafia and the Gays*. I have not sought to verify the specifics of mafia involvement or to determine the mafia's reach in other cities.

61 Bell, *Dancing the Gay Lib Blues*, 40–41. See also John Francis Hunter, "The Iron Spikes," *Gay,* April 13, 1970, 16.

62 "Largest Bar Raids in N.Y. History," *Gay,* August 16, 1971, 1, 16.

63 Bell, "Black Tie and Blood," *VV,* October 12, 1982, 1, 11; Andy Humm, "Midtown Cops Go Berserk in Gay Bar," *NYN,* October 11, 1982, 1, 7; Eric Lerner, "Police Enter Blue's Again: Investigations Opened," *NYN,* October 25, 1982, 8; Lerner, "Militant Blue's Rally Draws 1,100," *NYN,* November 8, 1982, 8; Peg Byron, "Blue's in the Night," *NYN,* September 10, 1984, 9–11; Hanhardt, "Broken Windows at Blue's."

64 Carter, *Stonewall,* 252. Thank you to my anonymous reader for clarifying this chronology.

65 Harry, "Urbanization and the Gay Life"; Harry and DeVall, *Social Organization of Gay Males*, 140–43.

66 "Gay Bars," *Gay Dealer* 1 (1970): 3.

67 Leo E. Laurence, "Shit on a White Horse," *Berkeley Barb*, September 24, 1970.

68 "The Bars Are Ours," *Gay Sunshine* 1, no. 2 (October 1970): 1.

69 GLF poster, collection of ONE.

70 "Is 'Gay Lib' Hurting 'Gay Life?'" *Pittsburgh Gay News*, April 13, 1974, 4.

71 Gay Alcoholics Anonymous groups existed at least as early as 1971, as referenced in Donald Robertson, "Something for Everyone in San Diego," QQ, November–December 1971, 21. See also Ron Skinner and Kevin McGirr, "Gay Bars and the Use of Alcohol," *GCN*, May 11, 1974, 8, and "Alcoholism: Conflict and Alcohol," *GCN,* May 25, 1974, 8; Frank W. Scott, "Through a Glass, Darkly," *Pittsburgh Gay News*, February 1, 1975, 15; Randy Shilts, "Alcoholism," *Advocate*, February 25, 1976, 16–19, 22–25; Thomas O. Ziebold, "Alcoholism and the Gay Community," *The Blade* (Washington, DC), April 1978, 14–15; Margie Cohen, "Alcoholism in Our Community," *GCN*, February 21, 1981, 8–9 (and related stories on same spread); the special issue of *Journal of Homosexuality* on gay alcoholism, edited by Ziebold and Mongeon, especially Nardi, "Alcoholism and Homosexuality"; Weinberg, *Gay Men, Drinking, and Alcoholism*; and McKirnan and Peterson, "Alcohol

and Drug Use." In 1986 the Pride Institute opened as a residential recovery center for LGBTQ patients.

72 Evans, "Gay Business vs. Gay Liberation," *NYN*, March 1, 1982, 10, 31; Read, *Other Voices*.

73 *Some of My Best Friends Are . . .* (dir. Mervyn Nelson, 1971). For a visceral account of mid-century gay binge drinking, see also Barrows, *Whores, Queers and Others*, 39–40.

74 Ad, *BAR*, April 3, 1974; Whitman-Radclyffe Foundation ad, *BAR*, May 29, 1974. One bartender fondly recalled that his patrons' sustained imbibing demonstrated admirable rigor; Abramson, *For My Brothers*, 94–95.

75 Embers (Portland) owner Steve Suss, conversation, September 16, 2012.

76 Randy Shilts, "Big Business: Gay Bars and Baths Come Out of the Bush Leagues," *Advocate*, June 2, 1976; Sage, "Inside the Colossal Closet," 17; Terry McWaters, "Gay 'Goes Public': The Super Forums," QQ, February 1976, 36–37. Theo Greene terms latter-day versions of this phenomenon "nightlife complexes." Greene, "'You're Dancing on My Seat!'"

77 Ads, *Advocate*, September 13, 1975, 48; and *Knight Life*, November 23, 1978, n.p. See also Tim Barrus, "Barhopping with *Stallion:* The Copa," *Stallion*, September 1985, 64.

78 On working-class bars, see Chauncey, *Gay New York*, 41; Kennedy and Davis, *Boots of Leather*; Fienberg, *Stone Butch Blues*; Kahn and Gozemba, "In and Around the Lighthouse"; Harris and Crocker, "Fish Tales"; and Cartier, *Baby, You Are My Religion*.

79 Newman, "Why I'm Not Dancing," 140.

80 Fawaz, *Queer Forms*, 203. Nonethelees, Fawaz cautions against wholesale dismissal of white gay male cultural texts. "We rail against rigid conceptions of racial, gender, and sexual identity, but then deploy the most unshakeable identitarian logics to everything we set our gaze upon. . . . The desire to demolish every work of queer culture that comes our way for its perceived representational failures seems to me wildly ungrateful." Fawaz, "Bros Before 'Nos,'" *Los Angeles Review of Books,* November 4, 2022, www.avidly.lareviewofbooks.org/2022/11/04/bros-before-nos/.

81 Mike Hippler, "Dancing in Jockstraps," *BAR*, May 2, 1985, 14–15. Ann Miller, for my uninitiated readers, was a star of classical Hollywood musicals.

82 Thank you to Kristen Hatch for helping me articulate this.

83 On consent, see also Mattson, *Who Needs Gay Bars?*, 52, 208.

84 See, for instance, Arthur Evans, "Gay Bars Can Liberate; They Need Not Oppress," *Advocate*, August 15, 1973, 37–38.

85 Bouthillette, "Queer and Gendered Housing," 213–32. See also Wolf, *Lesbian Community*, especially 43–48. On lesbian bars, see Kennedy and Davis, *Boots of Leather*; Wolfe, "Invisible Women in Invisible Places"; Enke, *Finding the Movement*; Faderman, *Odd Girls and Twilight Lovers*; Kahn

and Gozemba, "In and Around the Lighthouse"; Harris and Crocker, "Fish Tales"; Hankin, *Girls in the Back Room*; Cartier, *Baby, You Are My Religion;* Nestle, *Restricted Country*; King, "Audre Lorde's Lacquered Layerings"; Morris, *Disappearing L*; Tolentino et al., "Sum of All Questions"; Bess and Lynch, *Our Happy Hours*; Gieseking, *Queer New York*; Adeyemi, *Feels Right*; and Mattson, *Who Needs Gay Bars*?, 157–200. In 1987, US lesbian bars peaked in number at 206. Mattson, *Who Needs Gay Bars*?, 161. Gieseking's book-length project titled "Dyke Bars*" is in progress. See also Kaucyila Brooke's lesbian-ongoing bar–mapping project, *The Boy Mechanic*, which covers 1996 to the present, www.theboymechanic.com; and the virtual lesbian-bar–archive project the Last Butch, www.lastbutch.com.

86 There have been comparatively fewer queer Asian and Asian-American bars and parities. See Eric C. Wat, *Making of a Gay Asian Community*; Martin F. Manalansan, *Global Divas*; and Kareem Khubchandani, *Ishtyle.*

87 Bill Alexander, "Gay Bar Wars," *WP*, February 5, 1981, DC5; Holmes, *Chocolate to Rainbow City*, 116–17, and "Beyond the Flames," 314–18; Bost, "At the Club" and *Evidence of Being*; Beemyn, *Queer Capital*, 206, 208, and 219.

88 For thinking beyond the centrality of (white) gay bars, see Johnson, *Sweet Tea*; and Greene, "Whiteness of Queer Urban Placemaking." Churches and the house ballroom scene provide important structures within the black gay communities. See McCune, "Transformance"; Allen, "For 'the Children' Dancing the Beloved Community"; Bailey, *Butch Queens Up in Pumps*; and Jackson, "Social World of Voguing."

89 Ads, *WB*, April 23, 1993, 110–14.

90 See Mattson, *Who Needs Gay Bars*?

91 Charles Reich and James Roediger, "Beneath the Bar Facades: A Look at Why We Don't 'Connect,'" *Advocate*, May 4, 1977, 37–41; Michael Musto, "Every Night Fever," *Christopher Street,* May 1978.

92 See Joseph Arsenault, "Video on the Barroom Wall," *NYN*, November 22, 1982, 24; Glenn Person, "Dancing with the Video Jockeys," *NYN*, August 15, 1983, 36; Scott P. Anderson, "Video Bars," *Advocate*, August 18, 1983, 50–52; Allen White, "Dynasty Fever Sweeping SF Gay Bars," *BAR*, November 23, 1983, 1, 14; Tracy Baim, "Making Video Tracks at Sidetrack," *Gay Life*, May 16, 1985, 9; and Cante, "Pouring on the Past."

93 This conversation responded to Michael Hobbes, "Together Alone: The Epidemic of Gay Loneliness," *Huffington Post*, March 2, 2017, https://highline.huffingtonpost.com/articles/en/gay-loneliness.

94 Bee Gees, "How Deep Is Your Love?" (Barry Gibb/Robin Gibb/Maurice Gibb, RSO, 1977).

95 June Thomas, "The Gay Bar: Part I–VI," *Slate.com*, June, 27–30, 2011, https://slate.com/human-interest/the-gay-bar.

96 Lin, *Gay Bar*.

97 Mattson, *Who Needs Gay Bars*?, 9.

98 Oldenburg, *Great Good Place*, 9.

99 Putnam, *Bowling Alone*, 101–2.

100 Bar impresario Frank Caven estimated that, circa 1979, only 10 percent of gay men went to gay venues. David Bauer, "Lords of an Underground Empire," *D Magazine*, June 1, 1979, accessed online at www.dmagazine.com/publications/d-magazine/1979/june/lords-of-an-underground-empire/.

101 Mattson, *Who Needs Gay Bars*?, 4, 280, 319

102 Putnam, *Bowling Alone*, first published in 2000 and revised and updated in a 2020 edition.

103 The most visible early losses to AIDS were white gay men in the coastal gay meccas; many of them were prominent on the scene at exclusive discos or other influential venues. Attention to these white gay men skewed perceptions of the epidemic, which prompted homicidal xenophobia from conservative politicians and myopia from medical researchers, health-care providers, and white gay men themselves as they overlooked the transmission and impacts of HIV/AIDS among women and communities of color. With the belated development of more effective treatments in the mid-1990s, the disease transitioned from epidemic to endemic status, which has yielded even more stark demographic disparities for treatment access and life chances. The lives, losses, and traumas of white gay men still need to be commemorated, grieved, and processed, but we must also recognize the epidemic's wider and continuing impact on people of color in the US and on people globally. The disease was and is political as much as medical. For recent work that revisits and reframes the AIDS crisis, see Bell, et al., "Interchange: HIV/AIDS and U.S. History"; Cheng, Juhuasz, and Shahani, *AIDS and the Distribution of Crises*.

104 Mattson, *Who Needs Gay Bars*?, 25–26.

105 See Lee, "Staying In"; and Vider, *Queerness of Home*.

106 Mattson, *Who Needs Gay Bars*?, 204.

107 Mattson, *Who Needs Gay Bars*?, 5.

108 Michael Doughman, conversation with the author, February 4, 2017. See also Whittemore, "Dallas Way"; and Smart and Whittemore, "There Goes the Gayborhood?" Caven Industries, which owns Sue Ellen's and multiple other legacy venues on this strip, later participated in a high-rise development deal. Mattson, *Who Needs Gay Bars*?, 277.

109 Excellent performance studies theorizations of the queer dance floor include Bollen, "Queer Kinesthesia"; Buckland, *Impossible Dance*; Rivera-Servera, "Choreographies of Resistance"; Román, "Dance Liberation"; and Rodríguez, *Queer Latinidad*, 154–55, and *Sexual Futures, Queer Gestures*, 99–138. For a new ethnographic study, see Garcia-Mispireta, *Together, Somehow*.

110 Restrooms can feel like spaces of violation because of voyeurism in the men's room and guys crashing the women's room. Bar lavatories can also be disgusting in their disrepair or the mess of careless customers; one 1973 ad for the Norreh Social Club in Pittsburgh even boasted of "working restrooms." Ad, *Pittsburgh Gay Times*, December 1, 1973, back cover.

111 Liza Minnelli, "Cabaret," from the film musical *Cabaret* (John Kander/Fred Ebb, Probe, 1972).

112 Dua Lipa, *Future Nostalgia* (Warner, 2020); Agnes, *Magic Still Exists* (Universal Music Sweden, 2021); Beyoncé, *Renaissance* (Parkwood, 2022).

113 Button, Rienzo, and Wald, *Private Lives, Public Conflicts*, 64; Ghaziani, *Dividends of Dissent*, 48.

114 There are now multiple digital mapping projects to pinpoint bygone venues and reveal densities of past queer spaces. Examples include the Philadelphia LGBT Mapping Project Google Map, https://thegayborhoodguru.wordpress.com/2016/08/31/the-philadelphia-lgbt-mapping-project-google-map; Lost Gay Bars of San Francisco, www.google.com/maps/d/u/0/viewer?ll=37.75885902236967%2C-122.42642&spn=0.094288%2C0.052295&hl=en&t=h&msa=0&source=embed&ie=UTF8&mid=1AYGvzYQJgwzr3V32LiZF_2RcAzI&z=12; Queer Terrains, https://one.usc.edu/qt; and Queer Maps, https://queermaps.org.

Chapter 1. Nights in Black Leather

The chapter title references *Nights in Black Leather* (dir. Richard Abel, 1973); and Bette Midler, "My Knight in Black Leather" (Jerry Ragovoy, Atlantic, 1979).

The subheadings in this chapter reference the following: *The Wild One* (dir. László Benedek, 1953); The Shangri-Las, "Leader of the Pack" (George "Shadow" Morton, Jeff Barry, and Ellie Greenwich, Red Bird, 1964); The Rolling Stones, "Paint It Black" (Mick Jagger/Keith Richards, London, 1966); Madonna, "Vogue" (Madonna/Shep Pettibone, Sire, 1990); "Pits and Perverts" (this was the name of a 1984 benefit concert organized by Lesbians and Gays Support the Miners during the UK miners' strike, as dramatized in the film *Pride* [dir. Matthew Marchus, 2014]); and Soft Cell, "Fun City" (David Bell/Marc Almond, Some Bizarre, 1982).

The following abbreviations for periodical titles and the names of archival sites are used in the notes to this chapter: Gale (Gale Primary Sources Database: Archives of Sexuality and Gender); and LA&M (Leather Archives & Museum, Chicago).

1 Located in Burbank. Ad, *Entertainment West*, December 23, 1970, 23.

2 Playing off this tribal connotation, Geoff Mains later termed people who engage in "leathersexuality" "urban aboriginals." Mains, *Urban Aboriginals*.