

**PERSONAL NARRATIVES: DISCOVERING SAN FRANCISCO'S CHANGING  
SPACES FOR QUEER WOMEN**

A Thesis submitted to the faculty of  
San Francisco State University  
In partial fulfillment of  
the requirements for  
the Degree

Master of Arts

In

Geography

by

Eliza Jane Bailey

San Francisco, California

August 2021

Copyright by  
Eliza Jane Bailey  
2021

## Certification of Approval

I certify that I have read *Personal Narratives: Discovering San Francisco's Changing Spaces for Queer Women* by Eliza Jane Bailey, and that in my opinion this work meets the criteria for approving a thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree Master of Arts in Geography at San Francisco State University.

---

Nancy Wilkinson, Ph.D.  
Professor,  
Thesis Committee Chair

---

Courtney Donovan, Ph.D.  
Associate Professor

# **Personal Narratives: Discovering San Francisco's Changing Spaces for Queer**

## **Women**

Eliza Jane Bailey  
San Francisco, California  
2021

Between the 1960s to the late 1980s, lesbian/dyke bars, nightclubs, and cafés (BNCs) thrived in San Francisco. The 1990s brought a significant decline in lesbian-targeted businesses worldwide, and San Francisco's last lesbian/dyke BNC for 18 years, The Lexington Club, closed in 2015. This decline in lesbian-oriented businesses could be due to many factors; common assumptions include finances, societal acceptance of queerness, and an increase in queer resources providing women with expanding social networks. To gain a clearer understanding of the city's once-thriving lesbian/dyke BNCs, why they mattered, and why they have disappeared, this study used in-depth, open-ended interviews with queer women, non-binary, and transgender individuals who have lived in San Francisco and have socialized at queer BNCs. Responses showed that finances, greater societal acceptance of queerness, and San Francisco's large presence of queer masculinity played roles in the decline of BNCs targeted toward queer women – there were variations in opinion on whether this shift is positive or negative.

## **Preface and Acknowledgements**

This thesis topic was born out of my personal connection to San Francisco's queer community as a lesbian who lives here. Upon moving to San Francisco five years ago, and in my studies as a human geographer in undergraduate and graduate coursework at SFSU, I found myself wondering why the city's lesbian/dyke BNCs disappeared; I learned this was a common question among San Francisco's queer community. Sparse literature exists that attempts to answer these questions, so I sought to write my own. I would like to note I am a white cisgender lesbian woman, and therefore come from a position of privilege within multiple power structures. It is crucial to listen to Black, indigenous, and transgender queer voices in any discussion on queer liberation or geography.

My first acknowledgement is to the Ramaytush Ohlone peoples, part of the Muwekma Ohlone Tribe, on whose unceded territory (Yelamu) I live, work, and study. I implore readers to donate monthly to local indigenous organizations working to return land to native people such as The Association of Ramaytush Ohlone, Sogorea Te' Land Trust, and Confederated Villages of Lisjan. Thank you to all the wonderfully supportive people in my life who helped make this happen:

To Nancy Wilkinson, who enriched this project with her immense knowledge of the field of geography, immaculate advising skills, and dedication to her students' success. To my mother, Kathryn Davy, who dedicated countless hours of support throughout this entire project and has always been an inspiration. To my father, Andrew Bailey, and my brother, Leland "Alec" Bailey, for their love and support in all my endeavors. To my best friend, Auriette Sides, who has been one of my biggest cheerleaders for over 20 years, and whose strength and determination is influential.

## Table of Contents

<b>List of Tables .....</b>	<b>vii</b>
<b>List of Appendices.....</b>	<b>viii</b>
<b>Introduction.....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Chapter One: Background, Literature Review, and Methods .....</b>	<b>4</b>
1.1 Background.....	4
1.2 Review of Relevant Literature .....	8
1.3 Methods.....	14
<b>Chapter Two: Findings and Discussion .....</b>	<b>16</b>
2.1 Participant Information .....	16
2.2 The Importance of Queer Spaces.....	18
2.3 The Most Important Queer Places in San Francisco.....	34
2.4 Other Queer-friendly Neighborhood Bars, Nightclubs, and Cafés.....	44
2.5 Special Events for Queer Women.....	46
2.6 Other Important Spaces for Queer Women in SF.....	49
2.7 Factors Leading to the Decline of Lesbian/Dyke/Women’s BNCs .....	51
2.8 Hopes for SF’s Queer BNCs for Women in the Future .....	71
<b>Chapter 3: Summary and Conclusions .....</b>	<b>74</b>
<b>References.....</b>	<b>78</b>
<b>Appendices.....</b>	<b>83</b>

**List of Tables**

**Table 1 — Highest Concentrations of Gay and Lesbian Households (Ghaziani 2015)..... 10**  
**Table 2- Participant Information ..... 17**

## **List of Appendices**

Appendix A: Further Participant Information.....	<b>83</b>
Appendix B: Other Lesbian/Dyke Brick and Mortar BNCs Mentioned By Participants .....	<b>87</b>
Appendix C: Other Mixed Queer BNCs Mentioned by Participants.....	<b>88</b>
Appendix D: Other San Francisco Gay Men’s BNCs Mentioned by Participants .....	<b>89</b>
Appendix E: Other Queer-Friendly Neighborhood Bars, Nightclubs, and Cafes.....	<b>91</b>
Appendix F: Other Weekly/Monthly/Yearly Events Mentioned by Participants.....	<b>92</b>



## Introduction

Queer bars, nightclubs, and cafés (BNCs) have a long history of supporting queer women in San Francisco, but the last of these places closed in 2015. There are a few popular assumptions to explain this decline: gender differentials in finances, women’s desire to raise families in more spacious housing, increased societal acceptance of queerness, and the prevalence of internet sites as alternative meeting places.

San Francisco is frequently regarded as being home to one of the largest queer populations in the world. In particular, the Castro District gained fame in the 1970s as a gay enclave and a magnet for queers, particularly those whose queerness was not accepted in their family settings. Yet, while The Castro is often referred to as a “gay Mecca,” today that is typically only true if you are a white cisgender man. While a significant number of queer women once lived in various San Francisco neighborhoods — first in North Beach and Telegraph Hill, then in the Mission District, Noe Valley, and Bernal Heights – and while lesbian/dyke BNCs were quite popular from the late 1960s to the late 1980s, these establishments were unable to achieve the longevity of many gay men’s BNCs. As of 2015, there were no “brick-and-mortar” lesbian/dyke BNCs in San Francisco (this term describes traditional businesses serving customers in a building as contrasted to an online business, according to Merriam-Webster, 2021). Indeed, many queer women have apparently left San Francisco for Oakland or other parts of the East Bay (Swan, 2014). Queer parties for women still happen in San Francisco, typically as weekly or monthly events at mixed gay or straight BNCs, but complex factors play into the

social dynamics of these events and BNCs — particularly class hierarchies based on gender experience, sexuality, race, and socioeconomics.

This study explores the lived experiences of 20 queer folks who have lived in San Francisco and visited the city's queer bars, nightclubs, and cafés at least occasionally. Participants were all queer but were not required to have been assigned a specific gender at birth nor to be of any certain sexuality; they included women, non-binary and genderqueer folks, and transgender folks, however, these should be considered umbrella terms — queer folks can exist in infinite ways. Participants' ages ranged from the early 20s to early 70s.

To ascertain what factors have made queer women feel comfortable in San Francisco's BNCs between 1970 and now, I asked participants what factors make the city's BNCs feel welcoming or unwelcoming to them and their friends as women, non-binary folks, and trans folks. This study also sought to explore whether and why participants felt queer BNCs are important, which queer BNCs (if any) were essential to them, what factors they think influenced the decline of queer BNCs in San Francisco, and their hopes for the future of these kinds of places.

In human geography, the terms space and place each have their own meanings. According to my findings as a human geography student and Tuan (1977), “spaces” are locations that act as containers in which human activities occur and are more or less abstract; “places” are “spaces” with attached meaning that are created by human experiences — centers where people can satisfy their biological needs such as food and water. Meaning can be given or derived from an area in two main ways: directly and intimately i.e., through one's senses such as vision, smell, taste, and hearing, and indirectly and conceptually through symbols, arts, and more (Tuan, 1977).

Since participants in this project's lived experiences expand beyond having their biological needs met within the walls of one specific place, this study looks at San Francisco's spaces where queer women have felt comfort and safety in their queerness.

Multiple participants specified that BNCs for queer women were historically referred to as "lesbian," "dyke," or "women's" spaces; the most used phrases were "lesbian bar" or "dyke bar." Generational differences in language, experiences, and viewpoints were evident in this study. All opinions and experiences expressed by participants in this project are valued. This study is not intended to be inclusive of all aspects of the lived experience of queer women in San Francisco's bars, nightclubs, cafés, but only to provide an overview of essential queer spaces and to highlight significant trends that were noted by participants.

## Chapter One: Background, Literature Review, and Methods

### 1.1 Background

San Francisco has a reputation for being historically queer friendly; however, Susan Stryker and Jim Buskirk (1996) found it difficult to get a conceptual handle on the history of sexuality in the Bay Area, partially due to the extensive destruction of public records in the great earthquake and fire of 1906. They report that for decades after the 1849 Gold Rush, a disproportionately large portion of San Francisco's population was men, a fact which made male prostitution a popular industry.

San Francisco's earliest known gay bar, the Dash – located at 574 Pacific Street – featured “female impersonators” and was open until 1908. From 1920s Prohibition speakeasies until the late 1980s, San Francisco's queer BNCs were a thriving counter-culture scene where gay men and lesbians/dykes could socialize. In the 1950s and 1960s, queer BNCs were frequently targeted by police raids, which often resulted in the destruction of bar property and arrests for “frequenting a house of ill repute” or “crossdressing.” In 1962, bar managers organized the Tavern Guild to phone each other with warnings to coordinate resistance to police and Alcohol Beverage Control (ABC) harassment and bar raids. Gay bars were trying to become legitimate businesses that deserved freedom from arbitrary harassment and provide community support such as voter registration. (Graves & Watson 2015)

Between the 1930s and late 1960s, queer women and men socialized in the same San Francisco BNCs (Boyd, 2003). In the mid-1950s, now-famous lesbian activist partners Del Martin and Phyllis Lyon, along with 3 other lesbian couples, co-created Daughters of Bilitis, a lesbian social club turned activist; they published *The Ladder*, a lesbian lifestyle magazine

targeted to closeted women in rural areas (Graves & Watson, 2015). Daughters of Bilitis and *The Ladder* played major roles in helping queer women learn who they were and where they could find others like them in places like San Francisco.

Lesbian/dyke BNCs found their individualism by the 1970s after identifying that popular homophile (a term formally used to refer to anything gay) movements were not benefitting San Francisco's community of queer women; gender separation became more prominent within queer BNCs. During this era, well-known lesbian/dyke bars Maud's, Amelia's, and Peg's opened and thrived. Lesbian-oriented events were created, and lesbians demanded more inclusion in annual Pride celebrations and political organizing. This ushered in the heyday of lesbian/dyke culture and social life in San Francisco. Rachel Swan (2014) described the social and political geography of queer women in the Bay Area in an SF Weekly article:

During the 1980s and '90s, gay women flocked to San Francisco for its cheap rents and open-minded spirit. The Mission and Noe Valley were checkered with lesbian-themed bookstores, bars, gyms, and discotheques. Groups of single women shackled up together in giant housing collectives, drank coffee companionably at the women-only Artemis Café, opened small businesses along the Valencia Street corridor. They formed ad hoc political groups to fight ordinances like the 1978 Briggs Initiative, which tried preventing gay people from being hired as teachers. Constantly embattled, they had more reason to stick together and form tight-knit districts than their counterparts today.... And many of them came to San Francisco to ply an industrial trade, which, 30 years ago, was a viable career option for any city resident.

Swan makes the point that San Francisco's queer women of the era stuck together out of economic and social necessity; my participants frequently mentioned this as their reality. Swan (2014) reported that in 2012, 24 percent of San Francisco's queer population was women, and a significant portion of the Bay Area's queer women now live in Oakland due to its cheaper rents. However, San Francisco's famous gay men's neighborhood, The Castro, was still the country's

number one hub for gay men according to Kolko's 2012 Trulia study, even though it has become significantly more expensive (Swan, 2014). Few other written lived experiences exist on queer women in San Francisco between 2000 and 2021.

The butch/femme dichotomy has at least 100 years' worth of history in San Francisco and was a driving force in the popularity of famous post-prohibition queer bars, particularly in North Beach, where visitors loved paying to watch "male impersonators" (defined as masculine women dressed in suits) and their high-femme counterparts perform (Boyd, 2003). Butch/femme has gone through different phases of popularity with queer women in San Francisco. The butch/femme binary reappeared with San Francisco's queer women, non-binary, and trans people in the 1990s and has since continued to have a recurring presence in the community. Simultaneously, more queer people formerly identifying as lesbians or queer women have come out as gender nonbinary or transgender, or both.

This study was mainly conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic and state-mandated lockdowns. The operational statuses of the establishments mentioned are based on publicly available online resources paired with oral histories from 20 queer folks who have lived in San Francisco. The pandemic has had a massive impact on queer BNCs in ways that expand beyond economics and are challenging to assess. While the United States was quarantined, people were forced to grapple with police brutality towards Black bodies, which led to worldwide protests and further police brutality against protesters. During this nationwide "racial reckoning," San Francisco saw many racist and other problematic business practices called out. Business management and owners were given the opportunity for public accountability; some participated, and some declined — two San Francisco BNCs — Jolene's and Badlands — were among these,

as discussed later. As this study is focused on the comfort of queer women in San Francisco's queer BNCs, my participants frequently raised the topics of racism and transphobia as important factors for which queer spaces make them feel comfortable.

Since this project uses oral histories from people who experienced San Francisco's queer BNCs over 50 years, there are variations in terminology. For example, when referring to each participant, I use the exact term they used in the quote I am referencing, even when I quote them indirectly. Most historical content regarding queer spaces for women uses the terms "lesbian," "dyke," or "women's" BNCs, terms that are frequently used in this thesis. To maintain historical integrity, I also use the term "lesbian/dyke" when referring to past BNCs that were labeled as such. However, contemporary terminology such as "queer women," "non-binary folks," "genderqueer folks," and "transgender (trans) folks" is used elsewhere to encompass folks who are integral to queer women-friendly BNCs but may not be women. Furthermore, "transmasculine" refers to folks who tend to be trans/non-binary/genderqueer and whose gender identity is typically in the more masculine range; transmasculine folks were often assigned female at birth (AFAB). Transfeminine folks tend to be trans/non-binary/genderqueer folks whose gender identity is typically in the more feminine range and were often assigned male at birth (AMAB).

Although variations (and what some readers may view as inaccuracies) in participants', authors', and my own terminology can seem confusing at times, it is crucial to use the exact terms used during the interview and referenced in previous literature. Terms and ideas used here should not be considered an exhaustive catalogue of queer identities – there are infinite ways to be queer. It is also imperative for readers to understand that all of the aforementioned identities

are not mutually exclusive and can coexist simultaneously (i.e. someone can be nonbinary and transgender) and that gender and sexual identities do not imply certain pronouns or appearances.

The term “community” is used frequently in this thesis – Stryker and Buskirk (1996) prefaced *Gay by the Bay* with a sentiment that applies here:

“Community,” another term we use frequently in this book, presents its own difficulties. There has never been a monolithic queer community in the Bay Area. Rather, there is a bewildering variety of interesting subcultural scenes, separatist enclaves, political factions, ethnicities, genders, and classes. By speaking of *the Bay Area* [in this case, San Francisco] queer community in this book, we are not seeking to deny the seriousness and complexity of these many divisions, or to pretend that we are representing the full diversity of queer lives and histories. We do mean to suggest, however, that living in the same geographical location creates a set of overlapping experiences within local queer cultures.”

## 1.2 Review of Relevant Literature

Gill Valentine was a pioneer in exploring the geographies of sexualities, often through a queer framework. Her groundbreaking book, *Mapping Desire: Geographies of Sexuality* (Valentine & Bell 1995) positioned geography and sexuality together in a way unprecedented in academia and is regularly cited in articles regarding queer geographies and placemaking. Author Jon Binnie expanded the field of geographies of sexuality with his writings on queer space, beginning with a 1999 review of *Mapping Desire* co-authored with Valentine. Bell, Binnie, and Valentine highlighted the creation and importance of increased visibility of queer life in Western cities during the 1970s-1990s while dissecting the relationship between sexuality, gender, and placemaking. They each explored worldwide phenomena involved in the creation of queer space, usually using qualitative methods. Geographers began following in Bell, Binnie, and Valentine’s footsteps and further explored the field of queer geographies and their intersections, including



the meaning of queer space and its scale. Most literature on sexuality and space speaks of queer spaces rather than specific queer places, which informs this study.

Once queer geography was an established field, others started to explore specific regions critical to queer visibility, such as San Francisco, New York City, Canada, and the United Kingdom. In 2005, Nan Alamilla Boyd wrote a detailed account of the history of queer San Francisco to 1965 called *Wide-Open Town: A History of Queer San Francisco to 1965*. In the chapter of the book titled “Lesbian Space, Lesbian Territory: San Francisco’s North Beach District, 1933–1954,” Boyd recounts the lived experiences of San Francisco queer women creating lesbian spaces in post-prohibition North Beach and how their public expressions of queerness helped shape society’s understanding of queer people. North Beach became one of the United States’ prominent gay enclaves and sexual tourist attractions while the San Francisco Police Department (SFPD) simultaneously policed queer bodies via laws against cross-dressing and gathering in queer BNCs. Boyd’s work is widely cited in articles that study lesbian/dyke placemaking and how it differs from that by gay men.

Amin Ghaziani found that lesbians tend to live in enclaves separate from men but found a few examples of mixed-gender queer neighborhoods (2015). He cites Oakland as one of the “lady-loving capitals of the west” and provides U.S. Census maps and charts to prove that San Francisco is not. His charts (see table 1 on the following page) on San Francisco show that while same-sex male couples hold 14.2% of all households in San Francisco’s Castro district, only 1.9% are females (Ghaziani, 2015). Ghaziani (2015) suggests that lesbians are trailblazers to new neighborhoods, and he cites multiple reasons why lesbian neighborhoods are separate from gay

men’s neighborhoods, including more safety hiding out in rural areas, a desire to have children but a higher cost of urban family housing, and income differences.

**Table 1 — Highest Concentrations of Gay and Lesbian Households (Ghaziani 2015)**

Highest Concentrations of Gay and Lesbian Households

Same-Sex Male Couples				Same-Sex Female Couples			
zip code	location	% of all households	median price per sq. foot	zip code	location	% of all households	median price per sq. foot
94114	Castro, San Francisco, CA	14.2%	671	02657	Provincetown, Cape Cod, MA	5.1%	532
92264	Palm Springs, CA	12.4%	146	01062	Northampton, MA	3.3%	187
02657	Provincetown, Cape Cod, MA	11.5%	532	01060	Northampton, MA	2.6%	189
92262	Palm Springs, CA	11.3%	136	02130	Jamaica Plain, Boston, MA	2.4%	304
33305	Wilton Manors, Fort Lauderdale, FL	10.6%	206	19971	Rehoboth Beach, DE	2.4%	187
90069	West Hollywood, Los Angeles, CA	8.9%	481	95446	Guerneville, north of San Francisco, CA	2.2%	197
94131	Noe Valley/Glen Park/Diamond Heights, San Francisco, CA	7.4%	564	02667	Wellfleet, Cape Cod, MA	2.2%	340
75219	Oak Lawn, Dallas, TX	7.1%	160	94619	Redwood Heights/Skyline, Oakland, CA	2.1%	230
19971	Rehoboth Beach, DE	7.0%	187	30002	Avondale Estates, suburban Atlanta, GA	1.9%	97
48069	Pleasant Ridge, suburban Detroit, MI	6.8%	107	94114	Castro, San Francisco, CA	1.9%	671

Source: 2010 U.S. Census, analyzed by Jed Kolko, Trulia Trends

Julie Podmore looked deeper into the territorial practices of lesbians in urban settings to gain a more critical perspective on the relationship between sexuality and space (2006). Podmore dissects Castells’ (1983) assertion that the prevalence of male-dominated gay enclaves can be attributed to men’s “territorial nature” and disposable income. She explores how LGBTQ+ neighborhood development was impacted by local neighborhood dynamics, ideologies internal to the lesbian community, and political and spatial relationships with gay men (Podmore, 2006). “Men often produce highly visible gay enclaves within urban settings while lesbian communities

tend to be more “invisible” due to their formation through social networks rather than commercial sites” (Podmore, 2006).

In her 2006 book *Sex and Sensibility: Stories of a Lesbian Generation*, Arlene Stein, Professor of Sociology at Rutgers University, compared the lesbian community in San Francisco during the 1990s to the 1970s. She found that the lesbian community of the 1990s was becoming more fragmented, in that they formed smaller subcultures instead of one large bar-centered lesbian/dyke community. Women were organizing into niche lesbian/dyke groups for parents, “career women,” women of color, transgender individuals, and so forth. Once queerness was more socially accepted, and the lesbian/dyke population became increasingly diverse, San Francisco’s lesbian bars suffered. By 1991, Amelia’s (the last lesbian bar at the time) had closed; this was thought to be a result of this new sense of diversity within San Francisco’s community of queer women that allowed them to express their queerness in a variety of spaces. Some of Stein’s interviewees offered another common explanation: that women simply did not hold the same economic power that men do and thus were unable to sustain lesbian-focused businesses.

Other scholars have examined recent changes in lesbian/dyke communities in other places. In the chapter, *Dyked New York: The Space between Geographical Imagination and Materialization of Lesbian-Queer Bars and Neighborhoods*, Jen Jack Giesecking et al. (2016) look at the intersectional dynamics of Park Slope — a historically lesbian-queer neighborhood in Brooklyn, New York — between 1983 and 2008. Giesecking et al. interviewed multiple past and present residents of the Park Slope neighborhood; they wanted to see how queer women of Park Slope (past and present) geographically imagined their neighborhood may differ from the dominant narratives of general LGBTQ (Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transgender Queer) spaces. The

authors highlight gentrification's effect on rising rental prices and marginalized populations including queer folks. Former residents described Park Slope as a physical community for lesbians to congregate. While current residents no longer see it as a gay village but an "invisible" lesbian/dyke scene due to the lack of brick-and-mortar lesbian/dyke spaces, many queer women maintain a psychological attachment to the neighborhood's role in queer history. The authors found that although New York's landscape has significantly changed, the way in which these women viewed the relationship between the bar and neighborhood remained consistent; interviews gave the authors insight into how lesbians and queer women continue to claim spaces in the face of even more limited economic, social, and political power (Giesecking et al. 2016).

Yvette Taylor (2008) considers working-class lesbians' experiences with commercial spaces in the UK, focusing on how individuals felt regarding scene boundaries and how class and gender intersections affected that. She found that some lesbians participated in the commercialized scene, and some stayed away from it due to its "cosmopolitan gloss" (Taylor, 2008). Gendered and class-based expectations and inhibitions led to creating counter-spaces that allowed for different lesbian styles, appearances, and identities, which developed into more inclusionary spaces across time and space. Taylor found that her interviewees often expressed a sense of loss and nostalgia when speaking about spaces that were becoming more "cosmopolitan." Interviewees also mentioned many binaries such as now/then, political/apolitical, marginal/mainstream, and metropolitan/provincial, producing an uneasy situation *in* and *out* of space (2008).

San Francisco is not the only city experiencing a decrease in BNCs for queer women. Despite the continued existence of queer women in urban areas, cities like Montreal and

Brooklyn have far fewer lesbian/dyke BNCs than previous decades (Giesecking, Podmore, 2016, 2006). While there are case studies in Montreal and the United Kingdom that ask participants why their lesbian/dyke spaces seemed to disappear (Podmore, 2006), there is a lack of scholarly research on diminishing lesbian/dyke BNCs in contemporary San Francisco. Nan Alamilla Boyd provided a detailed account of the origins of lesbian/dyke space in and around San Francisco's North Beach neighborhood during the 1930s-1950s, but we are left as readers to wonder how that evolved and where space for queer women currently exists in San Francisco. It is well documented that in the 1970s and 1980s, queer women opened a significant number of businesses popular with lesbians in The Mission District — businesses such as bars, night clubs, coffee houses, feminist bookstores, and sex toy stores. Many of these shops were concentrated near Valencia Street, an area dubbed "The Valencia Corridor." Newspaper and magazine articles express a general agreement within the Bay Area's queer community that lesbian/dyke brick-and-mortar spaces in San Francisco have disappeared, especially after the closing of The Lexington, the city's "last lesbian bar" (Salamon, Kost, 2015).

The studies mentioned here each looked at queer placemaking. They asked, "what happened to these lesbian/dyke hubs? What factors led to the closure of businesses oriented to queer women? What social or economic factors are affecting lesbian/dyke communities in urban areas?" Most of the studies found that economics and class each play a major role in the creation of and the demise of queer women's BNCs — significant economic pressures caused BNCs catering to queer women to close in most major cities. A common conclusion is that even though lesbian/dyke BNCs have significantly changed in most major U.S. cities, queer women's

relationships to their community remains consistent — they continue to develop and maintain safe spaces. My study will explore these questions in San Francisco.

This thesis expands on the work of Stein (2006) and Boyd (2003) by looking at the cultural changes from the 1970s to 2020 and how they affected safe spaces for queer women in San Francisco. Little has been written about San Francisco’s queer BNCs for women since Stein’s 2006 account of women in the 1990s. Significant changes have happened to the LGBTQ community since the 1990s including a drastic shift in cultural awareness and acceptance of the community and new queer resources such as access to meet other queer folks via the internet. The data I gathered from interviews with 20 queer women help to identify how and why safe spaces in San Francisco moved from queer BNCs to other forms of safe spaces — weekly and monthly parties at mixed and straight BNCs, internet meet-up groups, and other community-based activities.

### **1.3 Methods**

This is a case study of the rise and fall of lesbian/dyke BNCs in San Francisco. I chose to rely on oral history because not much has been written about these establishments. I distributed a survey to identify qualified candidates for in-depth interviews, i.e., not a cisgender man, over 18 years of age, lived in San Francisco at some point, visited San Francisco’s queer BNCs with some regularity, and interested in being interviewed. I reached out to people affiliated with queer and lesbian institutions in San Francisco, such as San Francisco Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (SF PFLAG) and multiple queer bar websites, either by directly emailing them a flyer or by filling out “contact me” forms on their websites. I also emailed individuals recommended to me by other participants. Finally, some of my participants were faculty and students at SFSU

who reached out to me and offered to participate. I thus chose my participants using purposive and snowball sampling. The recruitment email included a link to the survey, which began with an implied consent form; a Google spreadsheet automatically recorded survey responses. I noted qualified participants' interest in being interviewed and sent them Informed Consent Forms. Participants sent back signed consent forms via SFSU DocuSign, Adobe Sign, and as attached PDFs through email. Once I received a participant's signed informed consent form, I scheduled an interview with them. I interviewed participants using the online meeting software, Zoom. I conducted 20 in-depth, open-ended audio interviews; 18 interviewees gave me permission to record their interviews; during the first two interviews I only took hand-written notes without recording. I took handwritten notes during all the interviews. I transcribed interviews on Microsoft Word and uploaded transcription documents to Atlas.ti, a qualitative method coding software. I created seven codes on Atlas.ti based on common themes in the data:

1. Importance of Safe Spaces for Queer Women/Non-Binary/Trans Folks
2. SF's Queer/Queer Friendly BNCs/Events,
3. Factors Leading to Decline in QBNCs/Things Changing,
4. Geography: Where Participant Lived/Socialized,
5. Inclusivity/Safety/Community,
6. Identity: Gender/Sexuality/Class/Age
7. Things That Stayed the Same in SF

I went through each interview and highlighted quotes and tagged them with one or more relevant codes. The Atlas.ti software organized the quotes by their codes for use in my findings and discussion section.

## Chapter Two: Findings and Discussion

### 2.1 Participant Information

There are myriad ways that women self-identify and indeed my interviewees used an array of terms regarding their gender and sexuality. Several participants used multiple terms for their gender, and therefore are marked under multiple categories. Of the 20 participants, 16 referred to themselves as women (6 as “cisgender women” or “cis women,” one as a “cisgender androgynous woman.”) Eight participants used she/her pronouns, but not all of these referred to themselves as “woman.” Three participants used they/them pronouns as well as she/her. One participant shared that he is a trans man, while another described their gender as “butch dyke lesbian genderqueer,” and another said there are too many gender experiences to list just one as theirs (this participant used she/her/they/them pronouns.) In terms of their sexuality, many participants used multiple terms for themselves and therefore are marked under all applicable categories. Of the 20 participants, 11 referred to themselves as lesbians, five referred to themselves as queer, four referred to themselves as bisexual or bi, two referred to themselves as pansexual or pan, and one referred to themselves as a queer heterosexual.

The table below shows participant information provided in their own words; participants were all assigned pseudonyms. Some descriptions were too long to fit on the table and are described in the table’s footnotes.



Table 2- Participant Information

<b>Participant Information (Further Details in Appendix A)</b>						
<b><u>Pseudonym</u></b>	<b><u>Age</u></b>	<b><u>Gender</u></b>	<b><u>Sexuality</u></b>	<b><u>Time in SF</u></b>	<b><u>When in SF</u></b>	<b><u>Current City</u></b>
<b>Cynthia</b>	30s	Cis woman (she or they)	Queer/bisexual/ pansexual	8 years	2010s	Oakland, CA
<b>Elena</b>	70s	woman	lesbian	20 years	1970s - 2000s	Lafayette, IN
<b>Erin</b>	60s	she/her	lesbian	?	1970s & 2000s	Richmond, CA
<b>Ivy</b>	20s	woman	Bi/pansexual	5 years	2010s - present	San Francisco
<b>Jane</b>	60s	butch dyke lesbian gender queer	Lesbian	34 years	1970s-2020	Walnut creek, CA
<b>Kieran</b>	50s	I'm a trans man	Queer heterosexual	36 years	1980s-present	San Francisco
<b>Lauren</b>	50s	woman	lesbian	17 years	1980s-2000s	Oakland
<b>Lori</b>	40s	She/her/they/them <sup>1</sup>	Queer	26 years	1990s-present	San Francisco
<b>Marlena</b>	60s	Cis gender woman, she/her/hers	Lesbian <sup>2</sup>	20 years	1990s-2020	Walnut Creek, CA
<b>Miranda</b>	20s	woman	queer	8 years	2010-2018	Oakland
<b>Molly</b>	60s	Woman	Lesbian	N/A	N/A	Metro Los Angeles
<b>Nadia</b>	50s	She/hers	Gay	26 years	90s-present	San Francisco
<b>Natalie</b>	70s	Woman-Female	Lesbian	33 years	1980s-2010s	Walnut Creek, CA
<b>Pamela</b>	60s	woman	Gay	40 years	1980s-present	San Francisco
<b>Rebecca</b>	30s	Cis-gender female (she/her)	Bisexual <sup>3</sup>	7 years	2000s-2010s	Pacifica, CA
<b>Sadie</b>	60s	I'm a (cis-gendered) woman	Lesbian	6.5 years	1970-1980, 1990-2010	El Cerrito, CA
<b>Sharon</b>	60s	Female	Lesbian	18 years	1970-2000	San Mateo
<b>Tamara</b>	30s	she/her	Queer	6 years	2010-2020	Oakland
<b>Tatiana</b>	30s	cisgender woman, she/her	Lesbian	2 years	2010-2020	Redwood City, CA
<b>Tegan</b>	40s	Cis Gender Androgenous woman	Bisexual Lesbian	5 years	1990-2000	Oakland
<b>Footnotes:</b>	<sup>1</sup> "Too many [gender identities] to list" <sup>2</sup> "I previously identified as Queer until Del Martin explained that the women's community fought hard to have Lesbian added to Gay. Basically the "L" in the LG and BT came later." <sup>3</sup> "Straight-passing" (partner is a cis male)					

## 2.2 The Importance of Queer Spaces

For many folks across the United States, San Francisco provided a safer space to be queer than their hometowns; this was reflected in my interviews. Tegan (all participants are identified by pseudonym — see table 1) moved to San Francisco after she got her teaching credential in North Carolina. She could never picture herself being safe as an “out” queer person teaching at a rural school, mainly because there were no protections in North Carolina for gay teachers. Tegan knew people who could not even make it through her credential program at the University of North Carolina Greensboro because they were queer. In Kieran’s hometown of Dayton, Ohio, his coming out as a lesbian in high school was not a common move; he struggled in Michigan before finding solace in San Francisco. Sadie described dropping out of college at Arizona State University, wanting to come out as queer and feeling like San Francisco would be the best place to do so. Lauren enjoyed the freedom that San Francisco had to offer compared to Philadelphia or Sacramento where she grew up and wanted to be part of the social movement happening there. A partner convinced Elena that they needed to leave their upstate New York village; Elena knew nothing about San Francisco’s queer-friendliness but was quite grateful she ended up there.

Rebecca’s first experience at a gay BNC was at a bar in Sacramento during her undergraduate studies. She knew she was bisexual but felt it was not allowed because of the stigma that, in Rebecca’s words, “bisexuals are sluts.”

I remember there was a masc presenting woman and she was very blatantly checking out another woman on the dance floor. I remember seeing that and being like, ‘she can do that?!’ Like, ‘She can dress like that? And she totally checked that girl out; why isn’t she checking *me* out?’ It was just the space for someone to act their normal selves, and it was like, ‘that’s an option?!’

Conversely, Ivy grew up in San Jose and knew out queer folks from a young age; however, she says that moving to San Francisco is what helped her figure out her queerness because she could see more diverse queer experiences. She explains:

Maybe part of it is age, but in San Jose when my friends were coming out, they had a specific experience, but versus when I was in San Francisco, I saw more diversity in what coming out and being queer looked like that I didn't see a lot in San Jose.

According to Lori, San Francisco BNCs provided queer folks the possibility to discover their queerness in a way that may not be as easy elsewhere. During our conversation, she conveyed that being able to express various genders and sexualities is "so important." She specifically discussed the importance of expression in the context of her experience with leather bars:

One of the reasons why I really liked hanging out at the leather bars and South of Market was I felt like it was sort of an exploration of my own masculine identity and where that was. And I was able to kind of be in these spaces where I felt really...not confused, but ambivalent, and interested in my own relationship to sort of my attraction to maleness and my own interest in embodying it in a certain way.... We sort of like learn by emulating people.... And of course, over a period of time, this is how we sort of develop our own identities....

As with multiple other participants, the topic of butch/femme came up during my conversation with Lori. She recalled watching the butch/femme dichotomy reappear multiple times since the 1990s in San Francisco bar culture. Lori felt that her attraction to masculinity, as a masculine-of-center person herself, was not initially well accepted in San Francisco's lesbian/dyke community, and that affected her comfort levels at certain queer BNCs. She feels, however, that no other city fosters female-masculinity quite like San Francisco:

There was a really, really strong butch/femme culture in the 90s in San Francisco. And that started to change to something slightly more androgynous, or way more androgynous. And then [butch/femme] sort of came back a little and goes back and

forth.... there is a uniqueness to the maleness that we find in queer women in San Francisco that I think is really different than other places...there's something about here where we were able to explore that more. And I think a lot of the 'trans F to M [female to male] movement' is really important here....I was really afraid I was gonna get punched in the face also because it's really intense to hit on — as a more male-of-center person or butch person — another butch person...they get mad sometimes....I also think that no one has butches or female-maleness like San Francisco does; I don't know why. But I think it's so awesome here.

Although San Francisco fosters an inclusive environment for queer people, there are still risks that come with every nightlife environment that includes alcohol. Marlena told a story about an incident at the nightclub The Café that centered on the disturbing threat of drugs and date rape:

There was an article in Curve for women to be careful at The Café because they would get date rape drugs in their drinks. I heard so much about it. I happened to be walking by, and there was a woman really drugged, and [the person she was with] was on his phone calling the other guys, and I followed them, and she kept falling down, and he picked her up and threw her over his shoulder, and so I called the police and followed them, and they had to bring an ambulance and a fire truck because she was so drugged. When I watched the cop car come, the guy started walking the other way, so I knew I had gotten it right.

For most of the 20th century, bars, nightclubs, and cafés were often the only place to meet other queer people (Boyd, 2003). Lesbian/dyke bars, in particular, were spaces that held a variety of meanings to many queer women. Sadie spoke about why she thinks lesbian/dyke bars were important,

It's important for our own identities to have a safe...a place where we feel safe calling ourselves what we want to be called, I guess. I am comfortable with 'queer,' and I use that a lot, but I use that in the context of just being welcoming to everyone.

Natalie said, "I mostly went to women's bars — lots of them and lots of opportunity."

Jane referenced a book to which she heavily related, *Baby, You Are My Religion: Women Gay Bars and Theology Before Stonewall* by Dr. Marie Cartier. Jane and Dr. Cartier share the

distinctive perspective that lesbian/dyke BNCs were like churches, “She’s saying [gay bars were] like our churches.” She then read the back of the book to me and compared it to her own belief that 20th Century gay bars for women were like churches. Jane continues,

*‘Baby You Are My Religion* examines how these bars became not only ecclesiastical sites but also provided the fertile ground for the birth of the struggle for gay and lesbian rights before Stonewall’ . . . I mean, it really was where everything happened. . . . [the book] argues that American Butch-Femme bar culture of the mid-20th century should be interpreted as a sacred space for its community. Before Stonewall, when homosexuals were still deemed mentally ill, these bars were the only place where many could have any community at all.’ The bars were like our world. Literally, they were like our churches. I think now, like coming out, where would you go? How would you meet people? I guess it’s all online, but literally we were like community centers. I remember places like Maud’s would have turkey dinner on Christmas and Thanksgiving. It was literally like a community center.

I spoke with Dr. Marie Cartier, the author of *Baby, You Are My Religion: Women Gay Bars and Theology Before Stonewall*, and she explained that the significance of historical queer BNCs are dependent on geography; she compares the difference between being gay in a rural area versus an urban one, “one of the important things for me is, it is a different reality,” Marie posits,

There is no being gay in the US — there is being gay in Norfolk Virginia in 1972 versus being gay in SF in 1972 — it is completely different — there is being gay in Austin Texas in 1960 and being gay in New York City in 1960 — those [different realities] still exist. Gay People are oppressed, and these small-town gay bars need to band together and support each other. It becomes simplistic identity of just being gay — then when you move to the big city, there is the room and the freedom to have these different variants. Say you’re in Paris, Texas, it’s enough to just say ‘I am gay’ with other gay people.

According to my participants, tensions arose within San Francisco’s lesbian/dyke community (and nationwide) in the 1970s around the intersection of classism and gender presentation through the butch/femme dichotomy — a set of sexual and emotional identities among lesbians that emerged in the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century (Theophano, 2004). Since the 1930s,

butch/femme has been a prominent influence in the social dynamics between queer women in San Francisco's queer BNCs, particularly lesbian/dyke bars. Theophano (2004) defined butch/femme:

To give a general but oversimplified idea of what butch-femme entails, one might say that butches exhibit traditionally "masculine" traits while femmes embody "feminine" ones. Although oral histories have demonstrated that butch-femme couples were seen in America as far back as the turn of the twentieth century, and that they were particularly conspicuous in the 1930s, it is the mid-century working-class and bar culture that most clearly illustrate the archetypal butch-femme dynamic.

Butch/femme has been an integral part of queerness to many in the lesbian, dyke, nonbinary, and trans communities, including some of my participants. However, to others, butch/femme meant participation in the patriarchy and a more androgynous appearance became popular with queer women. A divide formed in the 1970s between feminists fighting against butch/femme and "bar dykes," as Jane calls them, who steadfastly embraced gender roles and lesbian/dyke bar culture. Jane recalls,

When butch/femme started happening, we used to call them 'the bar dykes' and 'the feminists;' it was like the big class difference. And I kind of spanned both worlds. I grew up middle class, but I dropped out of college and started driving a cab. So, I would be hanging out in the bars.

The bar dykes were kinda — there were a lot of Black women and the butch/femme, and in the '70s butch/femme was really taboo. And feminism at the time kind of included Black women, but they kind of felt excluded from the mainstream [feminism].

"Things are different now," according to Erin,

"people seem to have a lot more freedom to express themselves in very different ways. We didn't have a lot of options — we rebelled against the butch/femme thing — it has come back, and a lot of young women take on those roles."

Jane quoted a section of Cartier's *Baby You Are My Religion*, where Dorothy Allison defends butch/femme in her pieces *The Women Who Hate Me* and *Trash*.

“The book reads, ‘as a white southern working-class woman, Allison writes how bars and butch/femme were part of not just her lesbianism but also her class identity. And of how impossible it is for her to not be working-class.’”

Jane expands by saying that she relates to the period when lesbian/dyke BNCs were the only places for queer women to gather:

So, Amelia's was kinda for everybody, there were some bars that are — Cartier explains, ‘The gay bar is that transformative space. It allows/allowed a certain section, the queerest of the queer — the butches, high femmes, and drag queens — the ability to *be*.’ It's all there was [bars], it was literally the only place to go.

Jane continued to quote Dr. Cartier:

‘the gay bar becomes the mecca and worth fighting for...It meant more than a place to drink, more than a place to meet friends, more than an end to loneliness, more even than a place to meet others like you; it meant an end to the extreme loneliness and depression that came from not knowing. Not knowing others like you but from not knowing you yourself. If the bar did not exist, there was no physical space where you existed as a queer person. To walk out of it forever would mean killing that part of yourself that could only exist in the bar.’ It [BNCs] literally was the only place where queer life existed. There was nothing else. That's another thing with the bar; when queer life became more mainstream, we didn't need to go to bars. The bars used to be the only place where you could walk through those doors, and queer life existed.

To some queer women, trans folks, and nonbinary folks, butch/femme means more than participating in patriarchal gender roles – it can mean fitting into (while rebelling against) a heteronormative society, affirmation of gender experiences, or more. Dr. Cartier shared what she noticed about butch/femme during her Ph.D. research on the topic and in her life as a queer college professor. She found that folks with contested bodies need to find each other somewhere, and in those shared spaces, contested bodies often mirror one another as they search for their

own identity. Dr. Cartier still notices butch/femme expressions occurring in 2021 and touches on the significance of butch/femme to some queer Black and Latinx women:

I have definitely seen the butch/femme culture, especially among women of color; I don't think it ever goes away. Butch/femme was the only way to be in the 40s, 50s, 60s, and early 70s and the only way for people to find each other. Joan Nestle has written about this. [Butch/femme] was the way for the community to construct itself, a way to create identity and find each other. Part of the pride of the butch was that you were female but [presented] masculinity but claiming being female. The [current] availability of gender identities has definitely changed how biological women claim masculinity. I think a lot of things have changed — one of the things I talk a lot about in the book is 'sacred space theory' — people have to find places to exist.....the gay bar was literally the only place where you could find other people like yourself — where you could see yourself mirrored — where you could do what [Judith] Butler says is the 'transformative nature of the gays'— see and be seen and construct your identity.

We self-identify based on an identity that we see that we want to be part of i.e., a community we want to be part of. We don't self-identify by ourselves in a room into an identity that leaves us alone. The gay bar was the only place where people actually could see an identity that they wanted to—in my book, I say that the gay bar helped people be baptized into that. Today, there are a whole lot of ways to talk about identity. To move into a space — where we can — like what happens to butch women—it gives them an identity space where people still want to claim. I'm 60; it's a different reality for me although I know that I have students who proudly claim being butch — I find often, and I don't have statistics on this, those people are — if they are claiming butch and claiming a female identity — many times they are Latinx, but I don't have stats on that. I find that it is more often white beings that are not claiming a butch identity in the female body but are claiming a trans identity. That's just from the outside. I think that butch/femme in the Black community — “stud” [a term sometimes used for more masculine-of-center Black queer women and non-binary AFABs that has been appropriated by white and other non-Black women] — different ethnic communities have had butch/femme as a running identity.

I asked participants about their experiences with and opinions regarding the historically noticeable segregation within San Francisco's queer community based on gender. Their responses included discussions on the intersects of sexuality and gender along with race and class. Elena, who lived in San Francisco between the 1970s and the 1990s, asserted, “a lot of the women didn't go to the boys' bars. Except in the Castro, down on Market.” She later added,



San Francisco has been that way — more divided. The gay men’s issues weren’t the same as the women’s issues, and maybe it was because San Francisco lesbians were pretty political and early on, Daughters of Bilitis [the U.S.’s first lesbian social club — formed in San Francisco in 1955 — which quickly turned into a civil and political rights organization] worked with the Mattachine Society, one of the men’s [gay —then dubbed ‘homophile’] groups, and Del Martin wrote that we had to leave because [she said] ‘we can’t be a part of you — you are not addressing our issues.’ The men thought their issues weren’t the gay issues, and lesbians were like, ‘that *is* women’s issues.’ They didn’t care.

Sadie also noticed that there was tension in San Francisco based on gender,

In my experience in the mid-70s, before the big explosion of the second wave of feminism before AIDS [acquired immunodeficiency syndrome] — there was a big divide — it was sexism. Gay men, like all men, didn’t care about hanging out with women. Gay men especially didn’t need to — they didn’t need to find their spouses — why would they be welcoming to us? Like any other man.

Jane strictly went to lesbian/dyke BNCs during her time going out in San Francisco. She asserts that gay men did not want women in their BNCs and the feeling was mutual:

Men’s bars, they didn’t want the women — there was this whole thing where women needed three pieces of ID to go into the men’s bars. Like they wanted it really separate. I mean, it was pretty separate back then — we didn’t want them, and they didn’t want us. I mean, the bars were very — I don’t remember any mixed — when I was in Philadelphia when I came out, there was a mixed bar. I can’t think of any bars [in SF] that were mixed men and women, that doesn’t mean there weren’t, but I can’t remember. The places I went to were lesbian bars.”

Tegan recalls that what she saw in the mid-90s was an effort by women to “mansplay” — wanting to be able to take up space [typically dominated by men] and not be small. It was claiming space.”

Even millennial queer women (women who came of age in the early 2000s) are aware of the historical gender divide within San Francisco’s queer community.: “a woman would have to have three forms of ID to go into a gay bar in order to exclude women and trans people. There

are folks that don't want those divisions." Tatiana, who is in her 30s, shared why she thought there was a historical divide between queer men and women.

My sense for myself and for other queer women, I don't want to speak for nonbinary folks — we don't always get along with gay men. That is not always fun for us. If we are going to try to create a space that is for us and fun for us — it looks different for different segments of the queer community. Black friends and friends of friends had bad experiences — overt racism; the ones I am thinking of [are] cis gay Black men — I think that was a thing that some friends that were cis gay men were more inclined to go to queer parties or ones that were more for women's space because the Castro is for so few people. There's like the 'Castro™, Gay Inc,' and kind of like 'everything else.' 'Everything else' has now become more specific — parties that are Black queer or queer Asian, or ones that are, however they can communicate more inclusive of trans people. I think that is part of the tension over that it seems to me. People are having discourse over it.

Sadie did not think the BNCs she frequented were welcoming to *all* queer women, but primarily white women.

The different eras had different experiences. I did occasionally date women who were not white and got invited to different spaces through those relationships — they were heavily women of color — not white women. In the 70s, my friends and I liked 'A Little More' and the reason was it was a little more diverse. They played salsa and other Latin music, and there was that kind of dancing, and there was a more diverse crowd. We made forays to the East Bay and went to the White Horse that was more diverse and still is — I was just there a year ago, and it was still very diverse. In the 70s, my sense of lesbians and women's bars, dyke bars — I knew that you didn't have to be white to be a dyke, but my experience in these spaces was heavily white. Then in the 90s, it was different — these weekly/monthly clubs — very diverse racially. It's hard to tell economically, the club scene was very mixed. I am casting my mind to see — because I am white — it's easy not to check your privilege. Does everybody look like me? I am much more aware now.

Sharon also recognizes her position as a white lesbian in San Francisco's queer community and recalls a couple of lesbian/dyke BNCs that were more racially diverse than others.

I am a white woman, and I have a certain privilege — more spaces may seem more welcoming to me than to a person of color — this is unfortunate. The bars back in the late 80s (male and female) all had a vibe. 'A Little More' bar tended to attract more black and brown folks, Filipina women. Clementina's [formerly called The Baybrick Inn] seemed

to be students and was pretty diverse, but they all had their own personalities (probably the gay bars too).

She added that The Stud was the most inclusive bar she ever visited. Natalie also mentioned, “this was a white-oriented culture, no Black women, a few Latinas.” Miranda enjoys the diversity of Oakland’s queer spaces, something she did not experience while living in San Francisco,

I can definitely say I see a separation — like I could straight up say right now that I know for a fact that when I would go to these parties, very rarely would I see Black people. ...When I came to Oakland and started to go to more queer parties and whatnot, I saw definitely a bigger diversity.

In the early 1980s, the gay community in San Francisco, New York and Los Angeles witnessed a sudden rise in illness and related deaths. Researchers at the University of California San Francisco (UCSF) were at the forefront of research for what was later identified as acquired immunodeficiency syndrome, AIDS, a syndrome caused by the human immunodeficiency virus, HIV (UCSF AIDS Research Institute 2016). The gender division within San Francisco’s queer community lessened during this crisis. Lauren recalls that “gay men and lesbians were separate until Rock Hudson died [of AIDS] in 1985.” She says that when the (HIV/AIDS) epidemic affected the gay community, “dykes were the only ones left; they fought with ACT UP.” Tegan also felt that San Francisco’s queer gender divide eased in the 1990s after the AIDS crisis, “AIDS had to do with a lot; it was devastation to the community. A lot of lesbians supported AIDS movements.” Tegan believes that to create inclusive community events, you need everyone. Other queer women in the 90s shared this sentiment and started welcoming queer and straight men in their spaces. Erin also referenced the AIDS crisis being a factor in reducing San Francisco’s apparent gender separation within the queer community. “I did not go to straight or

men's bars — just women's bars. They were quite divided, and it seemed [that] that divide lessened with AIDS, women became caretakers of the men.” Elena saw a shift back toward separation in San Francisco's queer community after the initial AIDS crisis brought down gender divisions, but by that point, there were no lesbian/dyke BNCs left to patronize:

There were a lot of women that started volunteering and helping and lesbians that were nurses that were doing a lot of work for men with AIDS but afterward it kind of went back to the way it had been but by then it was too late because most of the women's bars had closed down.

When Kieran came out as a dyke, he said some women within San Francisco's queer community were attempting to censor dyke sexuality,

There was a lot of policing of dyke sexuality in the 70s and in the 80s that, you know, ‘don't use a strap-on [dildo] because that's emblematic of the patriarchy. Don't do butch/femme because that's emblematic of the worst of copying heterosexuality’ and, you know, just lots of policing of like what's acceptable, dyke sexuality — it's very loving, S&M is not permitted and very much ‘no toys’ and ‘no butch/femme,’ and ‘equal,’ and ‘no makeup,’ and ‘no trappings of femininity because they're oppressive.’ So, very different. That's what I came out into.

Multiple participants, including Kieran, referred to a period in the late 1970s and 1980s when lesbian/dyke feminists were adamantly against anything related to men, including sexual practices, and having (particularly male) children. Kieran expanded his recollection of this period by describing how San Francisco's queer women, nonbinary, and trans folks participated in a widespread movement of embracing their queer sexuality during the 1980s and 1990s.

Sadie first lived in San Francisco during the 1970s when she and her friends had zero interest in mingling with men, even if the men were queer. When she returned to San Francisco in 1997, she noticed a significant difference in gender acceptance in the queer community.

[I revisited] some of the bars in the Castro, which still felt very much like men's bars but not so exclusionary anymore. You could meet a friend for a drink at one of those places. And I'll be honest, this time around I have many more male friends that I did not have in the 70s.

Lori also thinks that things change,

There was a time in San Francisco, I mean even in my own community, where it was really a struggle for people to accept people who were transitioning and it's changed a lot, a lot of that happened, like in those walls at The Lexington Club. People were upset about people transitioning." ... You have to show people that this is still our community, and our community is changing, and you have to go through that process of change. And we have to learn about ourselves.... [queerness] doesn't have to be "oh this one thing," I mean, it doesn't mean that you're still not a queer woman or still are or all those things, I think we get so afraid of stuff sometimes. And why aren't we exploring... San Francisco has been, in its spaces, like a big breeding ground for a lot of what the larger culture is now starting to see. And the acceptance of trans identity, the acceptance of queerness... I think a lot of that happened in the Bay Area. I really do. I mean, the beginnings of it, the chiseling away [at transphobia]. And I think that that's one of the biggest changes in the spaces here, and that's something to be super proud of.

Sadie is concerned that a cost of trans visibility is the erasure of the lesbian/dyke identity,

Frameline Film Festival... This is one of our big social activities. We buy tickets for films, stand in line, girl-watching and enjoying the crowds. I have gotten dates standing in line. Each year, the festival has a trailer... That welcomes you to the festival. Every year it's different. There were a couple of times in the last five years; there appeared to be no cisgendered women. There were trans women, and trans men and cis men and women, and my friend and I are 'like wait! Where are the lesbians?' In terms of presentation, it feels like there is much more trans visibility and much less lesbian visibility. I am not opposed to that, trans visibility is very important, and anti-trans bias is really important to fight against that, sometimes it feels like that is at the cost of a decrease in lesbian or cisgender female identity.

To determine what makes a space feel safe, participants were asked what factors make BNCs feel comfortable to queer women. Multiple people stated that being greeted by a bartender and being acknowledged by patrons made them feel welcome in queer BNCs. Elena does anthropological research on queerness and recognizes the diversity of queer social life.

It breaks up into different groups. Each group is going to feel a different comfort level. Appearances — there is a wide range and an overlap. It is hard for me to say. It seems like people don't want to identify the commonality. In Chicago, they are predominantly gay men bars — some guys are friendlier than others. It would take time to fit in and become familiar. In Indiana, there was one bar that was more women, and that was attractive.

For Tegan, what makes a BNC feel welcoming to her as a queer woman is simple: “If the bartender looks at you. If you don't get served or if someone gets served before you, giving you dust.” Erin agrees that BNC staff is key to comfort; she adds that seeing other queer patrons helps as well, “the bartender; walking in and seeing women together. There is a bar in Albany on San Pablo, a few times a month, it has women's events. They had a women's music night — that was nice — good bartender, and the music and the friends make you feel comfortable.” “It has to have reputation,” which is created over time, according to Cynthia, who goes off recommendations from friends when choosing a queer BNC. “I've noticed places that put up signs like ‘no homophobia tolerated here!’ that makes a difference.” “The bathrooms that are [gender] inclusive is important.” She would prefer an emphasis on dancing, a photo booth, or a patio, a place to communicate versus just drinking. Cynthia spent time in “all kinds of places.” She adds, “bars have been a very small part of my life.” Instead, she spends most social time at potlucks, cooking, outdoor hiking, and doing art. “The arts world is an important place — queer art events matter, film festivals, museums, activism.” What makes a queer BNC feel comfortable to Rebecca is a place where all of her friends, regardless of gender, can feel welcomed:

I think about being at El Rio, and no one cared that we were in a group that had two straight guys...And I think this goes for the entire LGBT community, in all aspects — welcoming trans folks, welcoming bi folks, and not just being the whole “cis, single-orientation” thing, and I think that's something that is international, that just the community just needs to come together in general.

Rebecca also appreciates the opportunity to enjoy the contrasts between loud and upbeat queer spaces and more casual ones where you can sit and chat. She explains,

As much as I appreciated being able to go to ‘dance bars’ and get trashed and dance in sweaty mosh pits, sometimes I just want to have a margarita and chitchat with people and checkout people. So, there’s the ‘let’s chat’ and more casual vibe that I get with El Rio and that I got with Jolene’s versus the sweaty mass of bodies that I got from places like Badlands.

Although she wants all genders and sexualities to feel included in the queer spaces she visits, Rebecca also recognizes certain traits that add to her comfort:

It’s kind of the catch-22 because I think of spaces where I feel comfortable is seeing women holding hands with other women or the stereotypical markers of the side shave or not being able to sit in a chair properly. So, it’s that catch-22 of ‘I need to see other women,’ to feel welcome there.

For a BNC to feel welcoming to Nadia as a queer woman, it needs to have more than just drinking alcohol as an activity. When BNCs focus only on alcohol, she says it makes it harder for her to support local queer businesses.

The environment needs to include more than just beer — it has to include wine and food. It has to include spaces that are not hard masculine — it has to have a somewhat softer environment. Maybe we can bring our kids. We have to stop separating it. That place Home [2100 Market St., closed] feels like it hits everything. It would feel good to go there once a week, and it would be different each time. I think as gay people, we have been shuffled toward hard alcohol and drinks (especially for gay men), and there’s this thing like ‘[food and alcohol] should never mix,’ but there has to be a mix because we have to support our bars and stuff.

Miranda feels that the unintentional hiring of a diverse staff at BNCs signals a welcoming environment for queer women. She finds it weird when BNC ownership or management make an “extra move” to only hire a specific type of person:

That seems really like you're fetishizing them or really trying to make sure that [you're showing], "I'm not racist because look, I hired someone who's Black to do this." But just the genuine like "these are the best people to be here because they're amazing" --who are from all different backgrounds--that makes me feel comfortable first and foremost.

Secondly, Miranda feels most comfortable in queer BNCs without "weird, cliquy favoritism."

She has noticed that at many of the queer parties she has attended, the production team would favor certain DJs, or other entertainers, instead of patronizing a variety of local talent. She recalls thinking to herself,

'That DJ sucks, and you have them every weekend. I swear to God if someone plays fucking Whitney Houston one more time.' I love Whitney Houston, but you know what I'm saying? ...seek out local things, local breweries, local food...you could team up and make that a bigger thing — that feels really good...seeing the space that I'm in support other people; that it truly is a community, it's not competition...I feel like bringing in the right crowd feels really good and safe and is overall just always hands down a good time.

Miranda also thinks it is important to understand where and around whom you feel safe,

There was a period of time where I just kind of stopped going [out] because there was no change to me...I was just also seeing the same people and not particularly people who I even particularly like. These are people who sometimes I find to be problematic or who I know things about, sometimes that they're not safe...I just felt like there wasn't really any changes and it was disappointing, and it kind of caused me just to not really go out. Or if I did, I wasn't seeking out queer spaces. I would just go to any random, really empty dive bar with a pool table.

Miranda adds the importance of queer people understanding when a space is *not* for them,

I definitely have been [to Folsom Street Fair] a few times, and a lot of that is just not what I'm into. And I totally have so much respect for any and everything that people are into as long as it's not harmful or like perverted, I mean like child's play, that type of stuff — no. But everything else I'm like, "baby do yo' thang! Not my thing." I'm just kind of like, "that's fun for you, not fun for me." I kind of just stay out of those spaces, which I feel like I wish more people would do that — if it's not for you, stay out of the space. Like if you're a fucking white Chad, do not go into a queer bar...it's not for you; just know that...be self-aware enough to know like, "why are you here? Why are you taking up space?"



Participants were asked if they felt labeling a BNC as “lesbian” or “dyke” was necessary in 2021. Sharon has not been to a queer bar in a while, but she thinks their historical importance to queer women translates to the present.

It is still a focal point for some folks — any BNC would have a draw for gay folks to be with friends and feel a sense of community and they are a refuge for a lot of folks at different times in their lives. When we travel, we look for gay bars to check out the scene. These spaces are still important and necessary for the community and for individuals.

Ivy is bi/pan and thinks spaces labeled for queer women are necessary, and they just don’t necessarily need to be a BNC.

I mean, I do [think they are necessary]. I guess something else — I got sober a couple of years ago after I turned 21, so I went out less, but I have been to the Castro Country Club, which is where they have AA meetings, and it’s on 18th and Castro. Thinking about that space as a queer space. I do think it’s still necessary, just because it is always safe to have that label.

Rebecca was asked if she felt the gender separation within the queer community has lessened, and she responded, “oh no. Not at all.” Her hopes for the future — “I would love more female-centered spaces.” Molly believes queer BNCs targeted toward women are still needed:

What do those bars give us? I think lesbian bars give queer women something that no other space gives them. Do we still need that? Yeah — we still need that — it is really important. I am super grateful that I came out as lesbian in the early 80s at the height of all of that. I don’t know what it would be like to come out right now. Coming out is always great I mean eventually — coming into yourself, but it was great to come into lesbian (unclear) and that whole culture. It was really like dropping down a rabbit hole.

Elena teaches anthropology at a university where her queer students shared that they do not feel the need to go to a lesbian/dyke or gay bar, but when she showed them the documentary *Last Call at Maud’s* depicting the closing of an iconic San Francisco lesbian bar,

They said, ‘that looked like family and like a special space and I wish there was one like that now.’ They don’t know what they are missing, and when they do find out, it looks like a special community.

Elena is not optimistic that lesbian/dyke bars will regain the popularity they enjoyed in the mid-20th Century:

That’s hard to predict. The 40-70s was lesbian friendly, and there were lesbian bars. I am pessimistic about it. I don’t think it’ll come again. It could come again — it happened in the 70s to have lesbian-only bars — that was new for SF.... I’m not sure it’s gonna happen again.

### **2.3 The Most Important Queer Places in San Francisco**

Lesbian/dyke bars, nightclubs, and cafés (BNCs) have declined significantly in most major cities. For the better part of the 20th Century, lesbian/dyke BNCs, particularly bars, were the only place queer women could find each other, so their presence in the queer community was crucial. Prohibition fostered thriving underground queer communities across the United States; for San Francisco, that community initially gathered primarily in The Tenderloin and North Beach (Boyd, 2003). In the 1970s, queer women could not typically afford to live in the newly minted “gayborhood,” The Castro, so they often sought cheaper rentals in the neighboring Mission District, a diverse neighborhood with a large Latino population (Graves & Watson, 2016). By the late 1970s and early 1980s, many lesbian/dyke businesses had opened on the Valencia Corridor, the nickname for the area along or around Valencia Street between 18th and 23rd Streets (Graves & Watson, 2016).

During this period, there was a shift in San Francisco’s queer community regarding gender expression and sexual preferences. During the 70s, feminist lesbians tried to destroy the

butch/femme dichotomy — the notion that queer women should perform heteronormative gender roles through the binary of masculinity and femininity. Sadie recalls, “we thought of that ‘butch/femme’ dichotomy as a remnant of Patriarchal oppression — that you had to identify with these very strict gender roles. And we were, what I like to refer to as ‘old-timey lesbian feminists,’ which meant a particular thing, but it *did not* mean butch and femme.” In opposition to butch/femme, many lesbians began to present as more androgynous and expected others to follow suit.

Elena wants the conversation around feminists and butch/femme in the 1970s to be more nuanced. She has done her own anthropological research on butch/femme and lesbian/dyke bar culture between the 1940s to 1960s.

I didn’t know a lot of the history. When we came to SF in the 70s, we were like “where are all of the older lesbians?” We were looking for people like us, and that wasn’t true; the butch/femmes didn’t come to the bars. We didn’t know they were there— and they were still there. Rikki Streicher herself was one of the older lesbians, and she was right there in front of us, and we didn’t think of her as one of the older lesbians. Probably you heard that the lesbian feminists really turned on the butches and femmes and drove them out of the lesbian community. I tried to nuance that story — there were lesbian feminists, but there were also a lot of just feminism in the sense of being women, it doesn’t really translate anymore with the trans women, but the sense of being women was so strong, and there was such a proud thing to be a woman and be a lesbian. To me, it wasn’t necessarily anti-butch/femme; it was just pro-women.

Erin noticed that butch/femme meant more than simply gender or sexuality; classism also comes into play. She believes that butch/femme is classist, especially in the working-class community where “if you wore a certain number of men’s clothing, you would get arrested.” By the 1990s, it was evident that younger queer women were embracing masculinity and even transness like the lesbian/dyke community had never seen before, often while incorporating a butch/femme dynamic. Sadie continued,

Eventually I left, and when I came back in '97, I was really shocked at the embracing of the butch/femme, as not just as something that you *could* identify with, but something that you *ought* to. I still have friends, friends that — the whole range of ages, from their 20s to their 60s — they'll be talking about themselves, let's say, as a butch, and they'll say, 'yeah, like you and me, Sadie. We butches. Blah Blah Blah.' And that is completely based on the fact that my partner has long hair — as far as I can tell, it's only based on the fact that she has longer hair than me. I would say it's disappointing to me that that was so big and seems to still be hanging on. And I still am always gonna probably have short hair, and I'm always gonna wear jeans and the occasional flannel shirt. So, it doesn't bother me so much what people think. I guess the part of it that bothers me is that people think that you have to choose.

Fewer women called themselves “lesbians” or “dykes” and began to reclaim “queer” (previously used as a slur) as a label for a more inclusive queer identity. Some older lesbians who rebelled against butch/femme in the 1970s did not quite understand younger women reclaiming butch/femme roles and the term “queer.”

Brick-and-mortar BNCs were the testing ground for culture, says Lori, who spent every day in queer bars welcoming to women. Each lesbian/dyke bar in San Francisco had a unique atmosphere. According to Sharon, San Francisco's queer BNCs during the late 1980s (for both men and women) all had a vibe: “The bar A Little More tended to attract more Black and brown folks and Filipina women. Clementina's seemed to [serve] students and was pretty diverse, but they all had their own personalities.” Lauren, Pamela, and Sharon each also said Clementina's [formerly the Baybrick Inn], located on Folsom near 8<sup>th</sup> (Cockrell, 1987). was a fun lesbian/dyke bar that was considered by my participants as more upscale than some other San Francisco lesbian/dyke bars. Sharon believed that The Stud was the most inclusive bar she ever went to.

San Francisco's shift from brick-and-mortar lesbian/dyke bars to weekly and monthly events for queer women became noticeable in the late 1980s when Amelia's became the last lesbian/dyke bar left open in the city. For the six years between Amelia's closing in 1991 and

The Lexington Club opening in 1997, there were no brick-and-mortar lesbian bars so weekly, monthly, and yearly events were where queer women, nonbinary folks, and trans men could gather in a queer party setting that was not dominated by cisgender men. There are plenty of other ways queer people find community with one another, and I have listed multiple ways my research participants enjoyed non-bar-centric queer spaces. Queer spaces come in various forms and at various scales, whether physically (i.e. brick-and-mortar venues), mentally (i.e. an emotional connection to neighborhoods or activities that are tied to one's queer identity), or virtually (i.e. internet applications for dating or social media).

The oldest women I interviewed began visiting queer BNCs in the early 1970s. Sadie specifies the language queer women used at the time:

In the 70s there were the 'lesbian bars,' 'women's bars.' My favorite one was A Little More, which I think was in Bernal, or Potrero? [Potrero Avenue and 15th Street] and Amelia's. They were all the classics, I'd say. In those days, we had the sense, pre-AIDS, that gay men didn't want anything to do with us. So, we were quite happy to have our own spaces.

Jane's two favorite lesbian/dyke bars were also Amelia's and A Little More; she said the people at both bars felt like family, a common sentiment among patrons of lesbian bars.

A few lesbian/dyke BNCs seemed to have figured most prominently in my participants' memories of San Francisco. The most popular lesbian/dyke BNC in San Francisco during the 1970s was Maud's Study (previously called The Study), which was open from 1966-1989 and located at 937 Cole Street in the Haight Ashbury District. It was opened by Rikki Streicher who also owned Amelia's (Kempley, 1993). When it opened, California law forbade women from being bartenders in clubs they did not own, so men from nearby gay establishments tended bar.

When it closed in 1989, Maud's was the longest surviving lesbian bar in the country (Lipsky, 2020). Maud's was even visited, along with Scott's and The Stud, by then-Mayor Diane Feinstein. Maud's was an incubator for a shift in lesbian style during the late 60s hippie movement. Butch/femme identities started existing in opposing ways. There were the "classic butch/femmes" who were serial monogamists, presented gender in a McCarthy Era style of heteronormative appearance (crew cuts, suits, paired with dresses and heels), and were used to ghettoization and being closeted; there were also the hippies, who still performed butch/femme but in a less traditional way — butches had long straight hair (because hippie men did too), wore hip-hugger bellbottoms with thick leather belts, and used hallucinogens to enhance their theoretical conversations (Case, 2009). In *Making Butch: An Historical Memoir of the 1970s*, Sue Ellen Case (2009) recounts her experiences at Maud's bar in the 70s.

More than a strict hairy-legged, overall-wearing lesbian feminist was walking through the bar door. Sure, she was around, and she was influential. But the encounter between the classic butch and the hippie butch was perhaps even more prescient in its focus on style, on issues of representing masculinity and sexual desire.

Another popular lesbian/dyke bar was Peg's Place, opened from 1972 to 1988 at 4737 Geary Street, and was famous for a vice squad incident in March 1979 (Lipsky, 2020). A court case that resulted from that raid affected queer bars across San Francisco. Lori recalls,

In the eighties [1979] a bunch of off duty police officers went in [to Peg's] and beat all the women up. And there was a huge court case about it. And it was one of the early gay discrimination cases that was actually won.

According to Sharon, Peg's is a "pot dispensary now" [unable to confirm]. For the Vice article, *The History of Lesbian Bars*, Nicole Pasulka spoke with Jackie Jones, a Peg's regular.

You could wear pants, but not blue jeans. She had a hang-up about that,' 88-year-old Jackie Jones says over the phone. Jones hated being told what to wear. 'I think they wanted you to be — maybe they call it classy. They didn't want to think they catered to bums or truck-driver types.' At Peg's, dancing was restricted to a room with an interior-facing window, so the person playing records 'could watch you and be sure no one was touching anybody — prison style.' If the owners hadn't paid off the cops, they could lose their liquor license, and customers would be dragged to jail for 'no visible means of support.' It was the 1950s, and these women were lesbians. No dance was worth spending the night in jail (Pasulka, 2015).

Other popular bars in the 1970s and 1980s included Scott's Pit, opened from 1970 to 1984 at 10 Sanchez Street by a lesbian named Scotty. It was later sold, and the name changed to Scott's (Marcus, 2008). Jane stated that "the reputation was that [Scott's Pit] was like a rough crowd, but I don't think so, it was just a *dyke* bar." Another popular bar called A Little More was opened in 1982 at 702 15th Street (Kirkeberg, 1982); Jane said, "It [had] an all-women's salsa band called Orquesta Sabrocita, and for at least a year — I left that band in '81, so it must have been like 1980- we played every Thursday night at A Little More."

Among the most famous lesbian bars in San Francisco was Amelia's, open from 1979 to 1991 at 647 Valencia Street and was owned by Rikki Streicher. A dance bar, Between 1989-1991 it was considered the last lesbian bar in the city (Bajko, 2016). "Amelia's was poppin'" recalls Lauren, who said friends used to follow her there on a night out. Jane felt like Amelia's was family and said it closed because the bar somehow lost its appeal:

We all just lived at Amelia's. There was an upstairs and a downstairs — about four years ago someone had some sort of Amelia's reunion — and I went in, and I walked up those steps — the reason it had closed was no one went for a long time, it had probably been about 30 years, I don't remember — I walked up those steps, and it was like this Deja-vu, this visceral feeling of like 'I've walked up these steps *so...many...times.*'

Located at 3464 19th Avenue, The Lexington Club was subsequently considered the last lesbian/dyke bar during its entire operation from 1997 to 2015 (de Jardins & Sher, 2006). Mark

de Jardins and Mike Sher of *The Bay Area Reporter* interviewed owner Lila Thirkield in 2006 and reported that Thirkield said The Lexington was not simply a so-called lesbian bar: “She's always welcomed everyone from the LGBT community.” Being in touch with the community, especially the new generation, she believed, helped The Lexington Club survive; nine years later, it closed. Tamara and Cynthia both mentioned The Lexington Club first when thinking about what had changed during their time in San Francisco. When asked whether queer spaces in San Francisco that are targeted towards women are inclusive to all women, Tamara quickly responded,

The first place that comes to mind is Lexington, which obviously is closed now, but when I first went there it wasn't welcoming. There was this like “in crowd,” dyke vibe, where it's like you're a newbie and an outsider where you walk in and everyone is staring at you, and you're like, ‘uhhhh should I go?’ So, it's interesting, as we're talking about it, the women-dominated places almost seemed unwelcoming. It's funny, I only went to the Lexington twice, and the first time, it was because I was looking for queer community; I was single and there was a meetup group happening there. I was like, ‘great, this is the perfect time to go’ and even then, it was like, I don't know, maybe it was a self-saboteur thing, but the vibe was like, ‘am I in the right place?’ Other than The Lexington, I think any other female-dominated place, even UHAUL ... if I wasn't going with friends, you still get that energy. It doesn't feel like you could just walk in by yourself and talk it up with someone. Everyone is standing in circles, which is so funny.

Jolene's, now sometimes identified as San Francisco's only queer women's bar, has been open since 2018 at 2700 16th street and is owned by Jolene Linsangan; two other previous co-owners are trying to remove their names. Jolene's became the permanent home to Linsangan's popular formerly-roving party for queer women, UHAULSF. The bar is currently undergoing significant litigation for multiple issues, including “nine counts of damages [including] breach of contract, slander and libel, false light, false imprisonment, and both intentional and negligent infliction of emotional distress” (Ferrannini, 2020). Miranda is concerned with the lack of



accountability that Jolene's has shown San Francisco's queer nightlife community and with the fact that they are still operating:

There's a lot of things about [Jolene's] that I think are really problematic. I know they've been called out for these, so like I don't need to do it. But the thing is, I think that they're still open? When we can [go out] again [after COVID-restrictions end], that'll be the place that, then again, that queer folks who are interested in women or other nonbinary folks — they're gonna go there again. There isn't going to be somewhere else; it's going to be there [Jolene's]. And that's disappointing to me because I will *not* make the trip to go there. It just...sucks.

Some brick-and-mortar mixed queer and queer friendly BNCs started as gay or lesbian bars and attracted a more diverse clientele over time. Jane was part of an era of lesbians who did not co-mingle with men in San Francisco's queer spaces, so she could not recall any queer bars, nightclubs, or cafés in the city that were considered “mixed” queer spaces. She shared, “I can't think of any bars [in San Francisco] that were mixed men and women, that doesn't mean there weren't, but I can't remember. The places I went were lesbian bars.”

Sharon believed that The Stud was the most inclusive bar she ever visited, a sentiment multiple other participants shared as well. The Stud is run by a collective of industry veterans and has been open since 1966 but had to close their site at 399 9th street during the recent pandemic due to financial struggles over multiple years (Kane, 2017). Now open only online, the owner's hope to open in a new location. The Stud has been called a drag, a leather, and a punk bar and was frequently referred to by my participants as welcoming to everybody. Jane visited The Stud at its first location on Folsom Street and at its second location on 9th and Harrison.

The Stud used to be on Folsom where that cow bar is, Holy Cow, or something? Then they moved to where it was on 9th and Harrison, and then it closed down [in 2020]. I never was a regular, but I certainly went there. I mean, it was certainly a men's bar, but it

was pretty welcoming there. I think there were women's nights there too. There were certain lesbian DJs they'd have like once a month. I think they had somebody called Junkyard [Junk] or something. By that time, I was kinda old. Mainly [The Stud] was a safe place for women to go. I mean, it wasn't as crucial [for women in the past] in San Francisco as other places, but it was. It was community.

Lauren go-go danced at The Stud one night a week. Tegan remembers enjoying Emily Park doing drag and singing opera on the trapeze at the Stud. Natalie said that the Stud was very welcoming, "straight people went there looking for a threesome. They have that reputation." When asked about The Stud, Elena thought back to her time there in the 70s, "that was a boys bar." The Stud was Miranda's introduction to queer BNCs after her older coworkers at a café downtown took her under their wings.

The first bar that I got snuck into, I was 17, and it was The Stud. And that was really rad. It was very like, 'all right; this is a 'leather daddy' night.' ...I'm wearing this oversized leather vest because I wanted to look really cool." Miranda recalls being so drunk from that night's Bacardi pre-game [drinks before going out] that she was anxious, and the bar was spinning. Someone asked why she was not drinking, so she played it cool. "Then I went into the bathroom and threw up *everywhere*.... But that was my first introduction to kind of like, 'okay, there's gay people!' I walked in, and they were doing arts and crafts night and I was like, 'oh my God!' It was around Thanksgiving time, who cares about that, but it was November. And I thought they said that they were making 'corn purses,' like, you know, how Thanksgiving decor is like dried corn and sometimes multicolored... and I walk over and no, they said 'porn purses'... there's like all these cutouts of porn and people are sewing together these, essentially like wicker paper to make purses. I look, and I just see dicks everywhere. Just *so many* dicks. They're making little purses and accessories out of porn. Little 17-year-old me, I'm like, 'what did I just do, why am I here?' The Stud was kind of the place I always was.

An important mixed queer neighborhood bar that was mentioned by every single participant is El Rio, located at 3158 Mission Street. The SF Eater wrote about the El Rio, "Founded in 1978 as a Brazilian-themed leather bar, El Rio is still a major hub for LGBTQ parties, dancing, and fundraising events." Marlina talks about El Rio as "another place we all felt

comfortable.” Rebecca said, “I went to El Rio. It was me — who is closeted bi — and I went with my cisgender male partner, and just one “out” lesbian, and we still all had a great time.” Pershan (2019) accurately described El Rio’s backyard patio as practically a sanctuary – it hosts a number of queer events including Mango, “a dance party for women.” Lori spoke about how important El Rio is to San Francisco’s queer community – she says the variety of diverse events they host for queer folks has been quite impactful in creating culture.

Wildside West was opened as the Wild Side in Oakland by lesbians Pat Ramseyer and Nancy White before moving to 720 Broadway and finally settling at 424 Courtland Avenue in Bernal Heights in 1976 (wildsidewest.com). While bars like The Stud and El Rio specifically identify as queer spaces, it was debated by my participants and online (Jaffie 2017) whether Wildside West is a lesbian/dyke bar. Although their website includes, “a San Francisco Bay Area local lesbian bar since 1962,” it is most frequently regarded as a neighborhood bar owned by and popular with lesbians. Jane says that “[Wildside West is] more of a neighborhood bar now, I guess it’s still technically considered a lesbian bar.” Nadia’s wife, who identifies as a dyke, is more of a sports person than she is and went to Wildside West but hasn’t been there in a while. Wildside West was too “old school” for Nadia — the regulars there tended to be older and not as welcoming to newcomers. As a Bernal Heights local, however, she does enjoy going to the next-door queer-friendly restaurant Bernal Star; she likes that it has a back patio where they show movies on Saturday Night, and you can take the food from there to Wildside West. Lori has a hard time considering Wildside West a lesbian/dyke bar due to an incident where she says two women were asked not to kiss inside:

...I'm reflecting back on that time in the '90s.... It's always been really hard for me because they never self-identified as a lesbian bar or a queer bar in any way. They did say queer-friendly — or gay-friendly or something, I want to be true to the language at the time. The women who ran it back then, who were very long-time owners of it [Ramseyer and White] .... I think that they were of a very different generation. So how they publicly express themselves as a bar was very different. And it's really hard and complicated because some stuff happened there in the '90s where they didn't allow women to kiss in there. And it was really heavy and intense because a lot of queer women went there and supported them. And there was a sort of generational [gap]...with the patrons themselves and also with the owners...and women got kicked out for kissing and it was a really big deal. And then [in response] there was a whole "Kiss-In" that got organized [where a group of queer people sat in the bar and kissed in protest]; it's very interesting because a lot of people don't know about this....

Lori frequented The Mission District's Red Dora's Bearded Lady Café (commonly referred to as The Bearded Lady) at 485 14<sup>th</sup> Street, a queer café owned by punk musician Harry Dodge that was popular with queer women, until its closure (Warren 2001); Tegan, Lauren, and Pamela each also recalled The Bearded Lady as extremely friendly to queer women.

Several other places were mentioned by participants as their most important queer spaces; they can be found in Appendix B. Gay men's BNCs were also a major topic of discussion with participants, since they were often the only queer BNC options for women, and can be found in Appendix C.

#### **2.4 Other Queer-friendly Neighborhood Bars, Nightclubs, and Cafés**

There are seemingly endless queer-friendly BNCs in San Francisco due to the city's history as a queer-friendly city. Some non-queer-specific BNCs in San Francisco are still quite queer-oriented, some with queer owners and many with queer staff; many places even host queer-targeted events and parties. Many of these places were mentioned by participants or have been patronized by the author.

Straight bars in the Mission District were popular with queer women during the 1990s when The Lexington Club did not exist (1991-1997) and were where those who did not patronize The Lexington Club went. Lori has watched San Francisco's queer community engage with the city's cultural geography in various ways for decades. She sees significance in weekly/monthly/yearly queer parties as a testing ground for culture,

I feel like there was a shift where certain parties and certain things started to be more mixed and that that was happening in like the late...what is that "teens" [2013-2019] maybe where you know where there was that cultural shift that happened where in general where it was sort of like people wouldn't admit to being straight or gay. It just became more fluid, sexuality, and that was more accepted. And I think when that started to happen, like that sexual fluidity....

Lori explains that with weekly/monthly/yearly events, BNCs can have completely different vibes on each night, like heavy metal nights compared to salsa dancing, but it is still the same space:

There is such a significant importance to these weekly and monthly parties .... brick-and-mortar space is really complicated and difficult... [a weekly or monthly party] sometimes goes off once or twice, sometimes they last for years; that's our testing ground for culture, in a way.... hipsters and the queers started to blend together, and then there were gay men going there. But it was different — it wasn't like a Castro Queen; it was like "the hipster gay man." And then all the dykes were going.... It's those [weekly and monthly party] spaces where you really see those shifts in culture.... I really like this idea of this mixing of culture...of not 'queer men here, queer women here, straight people here.' That's the thing about some places like clubs, even El Rio — they have heavy metal nights. In San Francisco, if you're a gay man or a woman and you go in there, no one's going to bat an eye [because you are gay] and it's going to be fine. But does that feel the same as Mango? Fuck no. But it's the same space, you know, so it's hard to talk about space sometimes in the way that you're asking about it. But that really points to something.

So, these straight bars were where everybody was hanging out...there were no queer women hanging out in queer women bars when there were no queer women bars for seven years, eight years. So... was The Castro super friendly back then? I don't know...are they friendlier now? [Probably]. But all the women's nights in the Castro all through the years are fucking Tuesdays; it's like their worst night...they don't get a fucking Friday or Saturday night in The Castro, no.

Several other places mentioned by participants as queer-friendly neighborhood BNCs can be found in Appendix D.

### **2.5 Special Events for Queer Women**

Participants started to notice a shift towards weekly and monthly lesbian/dyke events in the 1980s, and by the 1990s these were the only lesbian/dyke spaces left. Brick-and-mortar BNCs could not financially stay afloat in such a niche market; however, less frequent events could remain successful. Producers only needed to pay for a space one night a week and could charge a cover for their special event. A major factor that draws queer folks in San Francisco into a weekly or monthly event is on-stage entertainment, particularly drag performances (popular in San Francisco since the 1800s.) Weekly and monthly events provide queer women the chance to experience a variety of styles of entertainment and venues with diverse groups of people. These factors proved to be more appealing to some of my participants than brick-and-mortar lesbian/dyke bars of San Francisco's past; others felt their queer social lives were too "calendared" from having to remember which event was happening when and at which BNC.

As of 2015, all of San Francisco's queer parties targeted towards women are hosted weekly, monthly, or yearly (mainly weekly and monthly) in venues that are not considered women's spaces. This was mostly the case during the last three decades (1990-2020), except when The Lexington Club existed. In her 20s in the 1990s, Lori attended numerous weekly and monthly special events. When I asked if any of the queer BNCs she frequented were still open, she replied:

It's interesting how the spaces are identified and what they mean or when you talk about all these clubs and all these different things that were going on in the 90s and the early 2000s, [and you ask] 'do those places still exist?' — those were not brick-and-mortar places. They're places that were...invented in those spaces. Do those clubs still exist? I don't think any of them do. But do clubs still happen and are they really important? Yes.

I feel like all these places were events. The Lexington was the only one that was specifically a queer women's bar, then I'm thinking like Mango [monthly at El Rio] — that's an event, and then Jolene's is the only other one that I can think of that is intended for queer women or non-binary folks.

The most frequently mentioned weekly/monthly event is Mango, a monthly party at El Rio nightclub which has been running since the 1980s and is the longest running “tea dance” [a daytime dance party, also called a “tea party”] in San Francisco and possibly the longest running in the United States. Participants reported that this is an inclusive party for queer people of different races, genders, and sexualities. UHAULSF is a high energy dance party that used to operate at Oasis nightclub and now happens every Friday at Jolene's — Miranda and Rebecca spent time there; Miranda found it cliquey, and Rebecca was ecstatic to finally be surrounded by other queer women at a BNC. The Box and Club Q were roving lesbian dance clubs hosted by pioneering lesbian DJ Page Hodel who played hip-hop as well as disco for lesbians at Club Q (opened in 1987). Hodel often appeared at Club Universe at 177 Townsend Street, and at The Box, a monthly dance at the Kennel Club at 628 Divisadero Street, drawing hundreds of gays and lesbians (Graves & Watson, 2015). Lauren go-go danced for Hodel's various events, particularly Club Q. The Box and Club Q were important for creating multiracial LGBTQ social events in the late 1980s and 1990s (Graves & Watson, 2015).

Lauren mentioned go-go dancing at another roving lesbian dance party called Muff Dive, sometimes held at the Luna Sea Theater, which was popular after the San Francisco Pride Parade. Lauren said that the first time someone gave her LSD was at the after-hours dance club

called Trocadero Transfer which operated in the 1980s at 520 Fourth street. The “Transfer” dance club was founded by Dick Collier and DJ Bobby Vitteriti and was known for staying open until 6 a.m. (Diebold, 1986). Tegan, Lauren, and Lori mentioned going to a recurring queer punk event Junk, first operated at The Stud and later at The Cat Club:

Ushering in the ‘90s with ‘fierce queer fun’ ...playing everything from Dolly Parton to Motorhead. Once, they even had a klezmer music mosh pit! The old venue had a sign on the door proclaiming, ‘All Welcome.’ Junk reaffirmed the tradition of The Stud bar as an inclusive venue. (Freeman, 1994, 2016, 2020).

In Bed with Fairy Butch was the name of a popular event and the host was responsible for 350 nightclubs and sex clubs; he also wrote a sex advice column with the same title. In Bed with Fairy Butch got tagged by the Bay Guardian as “best place to cop a same-sex date,” had a game called the ‘Tingle and Mingle Game,’ had a speed dating game, a full show with audience participation, a ‘Singled Out’ game, and then after the show, a dance party. Audrey Joseph was the host of 177 Townsend, a huge party in a warehouse where Marlena said, “every first Friday and Saturday were women’s nights, and roughly 6-800 women would fill three different dancefloors.” Flyers can be found online for clubs at that site with the following names: Club Townsend, Skirts, Pleasuredome (Walker, 1991-2001), Thunderdome, Universe, 1991, 2000-2002 (Walker, 1990-2001, Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender Historical Society Sites Database). Several other weekly and monthly queer events were mentioned by participants; they can be found in Appendix E.



## 2.6 Other Important Spaces for Queer Women in SF

Participants were asked what queer women do in San Francisco other than go to queer bars, nightclubs, and cafés (BNCs), and they named a plethora of places they felt safe as queer women, including community centers, bookstores, amateur/club sports teams and art events.

Community Centers, such as San Francisco Women’s Center (63 Brady Street) and The Women’s Building (3543 18th Street), were important gathering places for queer women throughout the 1970s-1990s. On Jane’s first day in the Bay Area, she headed straight to San Francisco:

The very first day when I came [to the Bay Area], my friend and I hitchhiked into San Francisco to a dance at the Women’s Skill Center [at 51 Waller Street (GLBT Historical Society)] and this group, The Gente Gspelaires, performed, and then there was a dance. Then there were all these lesbian dances like at the Unitarian Church in Berkeley, at Cedar and Benita. We would just rent it and have dances, and everybody would take their shirts off. I mean, it was like the ‘70s; we were all a bunch of hippies.

Tegan remembers the importance of the sober community and that they held events at the Women’s Center. Tegan spent time with folks from the Good Vibrations warehouse who were part of the “clean and sober” community that went to many queer punk shows, such as Tribe 8, local pioneers of queercore, and 4 Non Blondes. Another participant attends Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) meetings at The Castro Country Club, a current safe place for the queer sober community ([castrocountryclub.org](http://castrocountryclub.org), 2021).

Bookstores, particularly feminist bookstores, were popular with queer women between the 1960s and 1990s. Lauren cited Oakland’s Mama Bears Books [closed in 2003] on Telegraph Avenue as one that she frequented. Performing Arts spaces also provided a safe space to gather and meet other queer folks. The Luna Sea and Theater Rhino theaters were founded and run by

lesbians and appealed to a younger crowd; Luna Sea attracted 80% female audiences (Schiffman, 2001). Molly performed at Luna Sea theater as her persona Queen Esmerelda. Kieran held sex clubs at Luna Sea, “because you can’t have sex in a bar, we’d have sex clubs in another space that wasn’t a bar. Luna Sea was a lesbian/dyke theater space for community events; we’d do sex clubs there.” The Muff Dive party was held at Luna Sea.

Sports clubs were another safe way for queer women to meet outside of a BNC. Jane states that all the bars had softball teams; there was also a team made up of Black and brown women called Gente (“the people”). Rugby was another sport that brought queer women together in a large competitive league. Pamela still stays in touch with her rugby teammates from the 90s and believes that rugby was very inclusive. She became one of the first women referees, which she said was groundbreaking and fun.

Social activist groups and events were also very popular in the queer community. Tegan, Lauren, and Molly all fought with the AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power (ACTUP), a grassroots activist organization working to end AIDS. “We were the cavalry,” said Molly. Marlena is involved with the National Center for Lesbian Rights (NCLR) as well as Parents and Friends of Lesbians And Gays (PFLAG) San Francisco. The yearly Pride parade was frequently mentioned as an event where queer organizations, such as PFLAG, recruit new members. Rebecca has mixed views about the corporatization of San Francisco’s Pride celebration:

Once I actually marched in the [Pride] parade. It’s well known that Pride is so overwhelmingly white, cis, and male. I remember talking to some friends at work, who both are Latina and Latino, and they were like, ‘Pride is white and corporate. So... have fun.’

The arts – fine arts, theater, film, and music – also attract San Francisco’s queer residents. Tatiana reports that The Galleria de la Raza was a safe place to meet, but it is now closed, which was hard for her. The Frameline Film Festival and the Queer Film Festival at Castro Theater were mentioned as safe places for women to gather and meet others. In the music scene, Jane played in multiple bands that performed at queer bars in San Francisco. One of her bands played at A Little More every Thursday night.

Anti-pornography and women’s separatist feminist movements of the 1970s resulted in a countermovement called sex-positive feminism. An active BDSM (bondage and discipline, dominance and submission, sadomasochism and masochism – a style of role-playing that is often sexual) community offered sex classes and sex parties, and by the late 1980s, San Francisco was engulfed in a sexual revolution. Queer sex was celebrated through the popularity of sex toy stores such as Good Vibrations and Mr. S Leather, erotic literature, sex clubs, and erotic dance/drag/burlesque performances. The internet, improved communication, dating apps and social media soon made it easier for folks to meet safely without visiting queer events, bookstores, or BNCs.

### **2.7 Factors Leading to the Decline of Lesbian/Dyke/Women’s BNCs**

For decades, the topic of disappearing BNCs for queer women has been apparent in communities across the United States (Mattison, 2019). It is glaringly obvious, to those who care to look, that brick-and-mortar bars, nightclubs, and cafés (BNCs) catering specifically to queer women are few and far between. The factors leading to their decline are complex.

I asked my interviewees why they thought that brick-and-mortar BNCs for queer women no longer exist in San Francisco. Their answers varied but touched on three common themes:

finances, wider societal acceptance of queerness and transness, and more resources for queer people, particularly on the internet. Many participants felt that they could go practically anywhere in San Francisco and feel safe as a queer person, so they saw less of a need to seek out queer-specific spaces; others said they wanted to spend time with queer folks of all genders. The internet has given queer folks the opportunity to connect with fellow queers anywhere in the world, which participants felt potentially eliminated the need for people to meet others in-person at BNCs.

Tamara brought up a Vice documentary she watched a couple of years ago on the topic of the U.S.'s disappearing lesbian bars —she felt it summarized trends she has noticed regarding contemporary queer women's interest in BNCs. In the 2015 film, *Searching for the Last Lesbian Bars in America*, the host, queer musician JD Samson, seeks to answer, “why are America's lesbian bars shutting down?” Tamara describes the film:

It talks about — geographically — lesbians being pushed out of the city because they don't have the spending power. That's one thing. And lesbians are just generally more homebodies in general. It's a little bit more introverted, I know it's a stereotype, but it's more like “the book club” instead of like the bar. The third thing they talked about is apps. Now that there are apps like ‘Her, [a dating app for meeting lesbian, bisexual, and queer people (weareher.com)]’ you can go and find community online. It's safer [online]; you don't feel like you are putting yourself out there as much as you are in person. And I agree [with the Vice documentary] that those are probably the big contributors to the decline.

Six years after the Vice documentary mentioned by Tamara, factors influencing closures of San Francisco's lesbian/dyke BNCs remain consistent: economics, socialization of women to have children and larger homes – both difficult to afford in San Francisco – and internet dating replacing the need to meet other queer women at BNCs.

Kieran was part of the dyke community for 20 years before he transitioned to affirm his gender as a man. He is an author, scholar, queer anthropologist, entertainer, teacher and parent, and offers additional insight to why San Francisco's lesbian/dyke brick-and-mortar spaces no longer exist: more societal acceptance of queerness led to less need for ghettoization of the gay community; economic impacts of rising rents, a gender pay gap and a lack of funding for queer events; an increasing array of resources where queer folks can find community; and the availability of the internet for socialization.

Money is the most frequently mentioned factor in the discussion regarding the decline in San Francisco's BNCs for queer women. It has been known for decades that there is a gender wage gap in the United States (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2021). With the high cost of housing in San Francisco, single and coupled women cannot financially compete with queer men. It was also reported by my participants that queer women in San Francisco were spending less money than straight women—they assumed this was because women are typically paid less, particularly if they are queer, and therefore two women make significantly less money than two men. Rent prices in San Francisco have even affected the population of gay men in The Castro, although it is not as apparent from the number of brick-and-mortar queer BNCs still there.

Kieran has lived in The Castro since the 90s and has noticed quite a shift:

I would say probably actually significantly more straight folks pass by than gay people anymore. It's quite different. I'm not sayin' there aren't gay people here because there are, but it's not like it used to be. And there are *not* lesbians. They really are not lesbians. Almost everywhere, [by my estimate] 95% percent of the queer people that pass by are men.

A common theme among participants is the significant difference in spending habits between queer men and women in San Francisco and the impact that has on businesses. If

Pamela and Kieran did not have rent-controlled apartments, they each said they would have had to leave their San Francisco neighborhoods (The Richmond District and The Castro, respectively) some time ago. Kieran has lived in The Castro since the 1990s; when asked why he thought his neighborhood still has gay men and businesses catering to them, but queer women do not have a similar neighborhood, he responded, “well, you have the double income, no kids. And you have two male earners; you had two male earners that didn't have kids.” He then referenced the gender wage gap and the effect of doubling two lower wages. “With lesbians, you have two female earners, two females that are not necessarily socialized to earn or to earn very much or to seek out professions where they're more lucrative.” Kieran’s assumptions are supported by M. V. Lee Badgett and Alyssa Schneebaum’s 2015 study, *The Impact of Wage Equality on Sexual Orientation Poverty Gaps*, where the authors state that although lesbians individually tend to make more money than heterosexual women (possibly due to entering male-dominated sectors or not being constrained to gender roles often tied to relationships with men i.e., caring for children), they still make less than queer and straight men. The authors explained,

As a result, a couple made up of two lesbian earners usually has less household income than a heterosexual couple because of the gender wage gap, so lesbian couples and households are more likely to be in poverty than heterosexual married couples.

Kieran’s assumptions are further supported by Lewis’s 2010 study *Modeling Nonprofit Employment: Why Do So Many Lesbians and Gay Men Work for Nonprofit Organizations?*

Lewis suggests that “people with same-sex partners” are more likely than comparable straight couples to work for non-profit organizations because of altruistic motives.

Pamela said she noticed most of her lesbian/dyke friends in the 80s and 90s chose low-paying jobs in industries that help others. She mentioned multiple times that money has been a

big factor in the gay community; she claims queer women were too poor to be here. “I often got stuck paying the bill. I was surrounded by poor lesbians.” Kieran hosted numerous queer events in San Francisco for queer women, non-binary people, and trans people. He said it was challenging for his events entertaining queer women to stay financially afloat:

Men's clubs are a lot more profitable...even if you have the same amount of people at the club because you can charge a lot more for a men's club at the door and you can charge a lot more for drinks, and they're going to drink more, they're going to drink more alcohol, and they're going to drink a higher number of drinks than women. So, it's a lot more economically feasible to throw a men's club than a women's club...you can't charge lesbians what you can charge straight people or gay men. They just won't pay it, and then they'll bitch about it and talk about you in the community for forever and a day because you dared to charge enough to break even. Looking the way I do [trans masculine], it must be a little strange for me to feel entitled to say that. But I was a dyke for 20 years. It was very hard to sustain that for that many years — doing classes for the dyke community, doing shows for the dyke community, and writing for the community.

Other participants also mentioned the frugal spending habits of queer women. Jane lived in San Francisco for 34 years and witnessed numerous changes to the city's queer community. When asked why she thought there were no longer lesbian/dyke bars in San Francisco, she said, “We always said because women stopped drinking and there wasn't as much business, and women probably never drank as much, San Francisco got more expensive.”

Due to exorbitant rent prices in San Francisco, queer women have been living in the city's cheaper neighborhoods and paying less rent than gay men for decades. Graves and Watson (2015) found that larger numbers of queer women began moving to the Mission District in the 1970s because they could not afford to live in the existing gay neighborhoods of the time, The Castro and Polk Gulch. Participants were asked why they thought many queer women moved out of San Francisco, particularly to the East Bay; participants who moved to the East Bay were asked why they left San Francisco. All responses referenced the cost of housing in San Francisco

as a significant factor in their decision. All participants who still lived in SF were asked if they noticed common factors for why many queer women left the city — each of them had answers referencing money.

Marlena, who lived in San Francisco for 20 years from the late 1990s to the recent 2000s, blamed her move to the East Bay on costs of housing in SF, “I rented, which was a mistake — I wished I had bought. I was forced out because of the rents. I now live in [a Bay Area senior living community] and I bought here.” Tegan and Lauren moved out of San Francisco in 2000 to buy a house and start a family in Oakland; Tegan said she could never imagine being a San Francisco homeowner on an educator’s salary because San Francisco is one of the lowest-paying public school districts in the state of California – this observation was somewhat confirmed by Knight and Palomino’s 2016 special report.

Rebecca lived in San Francisco between 2009 and 2016, during a second tech boom that drew tech workers to the city to capitalize on the growing industry of internet technology; the first boom took place around 2000. These tech booms drastically shifted the city’s demographics and overall culture (Opillard, 2015). This influx of tech workers came after years of gentrification in San Francisco’s historically low-income neighborhoods, during which countless low-cost dwellings, particularly Single Room Occupancy units (SROs — affordable long-term hotel rentals of single rooms) were demolished and replaced by luxury condominiums, dramatically increasing rents (Urban Displacement Project, Central City SRO Collaborative, 2021). Marginalized communities, particularly the Black community, were the first to be pushed out of San Francisco (Urban Displacement Project, 2021). Before the second tech boom around 2012, Rebecca tried to rent out a bedroom in her Outer Richmond apartment for \$850 per month,



a price that would be considered a steal in 2021, and had no luck finding an interested renter — people thought it was too far from downtown. (Until the COVID-19 pandemic led thousands to leave their expensive San Francisco rentals, a room for \$850 a month would be considered a great deal, no matter the location.)

The queer community is among the first communities affected by rental market increases, especially queer individuals who are Black, brown, transgender, poor, disabled, or neurodivergent. In addition to high rent prices, it is economically challenging to run a business catering to a minority group, especially when members of the group have begun to leave the city. Tatiana explains that owners of queer bars have had to expand their target clientele:

It's about the exorbitant price of rent. You can't have a financially solvent dyke bar in SF — you can't. Which is partially because so many dykes have moved out because of the price of rent — it is so expensive to pay for the rent for the bar. How do you make more profit? You need to have a wider clientele. Like 'we aren't going to be a dyke bar.' My guess is that going from dyke bar to queer bar is not changing your profit margin. It's not like so many more people are going to come. Virgil's is interesting — this may not be the way management talks about it, but it wasn't a gay bar. It wasn't a queer bar — it was a whatever bar that lots of queer people went to that hired lots of queer employees. It was queer inclusive but not specifically queer. I don't know that is changing how we are queer in an intentional way. It changes how we are queer in the sense that now there are straight people in the queer bar, and I guess that maybe changes things. That's just a financially wise decision.

Lila Thirkield wanted Virgil's to be a neighborhood bar where everyone feels welcome — a strategy that helped the establishment become financially sustainable.

Participants make the argument that the city of Oakland, across San Francisco Bay, became a cheaper alternative for queer women, making its queer community more diverse in gender, race, and socioeconomic status. Queer women who move out of San Francisco frequently end up in Oakland or other parts of the East Bay (Compton & Baumle, 2012).

Numerous participants I spoke with, particularly ones in their 20s-40s, prefer queer spaces where any queer person (regardless of gender, sexuality, race, or income) feels welcome; they felt such places were less common in San Francisco due to high rent prices and gender divisions. Rebecca revealed, “A majority of my friends no longer live in SF. Most of them moved to the East Bay, which also has a very, very vibrant queer scene.” Cynthia says,

Now in my mid 30’s, we are the day party crowd; we definitely are less likely to go to the city — even if it is labeled for us. The times that I have gone to specific parties, it would be because I knew someone organizing it. I feel like it is needed here in the east bay — I like the parties here in Oakland.

Miranda discovered that going out in Oakland involves being surrounded by other queer people without even trying,

What I realized, when I moved to Oakland, I liked that while I was out, I felt that I was around queer people more often than not. You know, so that was like a nice change for me. Like everywhere I went, I could look around and be like, ‘ya’ll are gayyy!’ And I like that a lot. I even feel like a lot of places that I wouldn’t really identify as, ‘okay, that’s a queer space,’ is just automatically already like very queer friendly and welcoming like Rose’s Taproom and Temescal Brewery.

Her description of First Friday at Temescal Brewery is, “gayyy! That’s a cute time for sure.”

During the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, Tamara and her fiancé found a larger apartment in Oakland for the same price they were paying in San Francisco, and it was essential for their shift to working from home.

While the most common assumption regarding San Francisco’s queer demographics involves economics, there are complex factors involved. Participants overwhelmingly felt that with greater societal acceptance of queerness came greater freedom for queer folks to express themselves in a variety of settings. In Dayton, Ohio, where Kieran grew up and came out, “there

weren't even [certain] parts of town where [queer] people gathered because it was so underground that there weren't even 'gay ghettos.' It was a stage beyond that. That there was not even, 'let's keep them in this part of town.' No, it was like 'let's keep them invisible.'" Kieran moved to San Francisco in 1985 at 20. He recalls that at that time, queerness was ghettoized in most of the United States, which meant that queer folks and establishments were marginalized to specific parts of town (Levine, 1979). Kieran says now, however, acceptance of queerness in mainstream media has led to less marginalization of queer communities. He perceives that with more acceptance, queer folks can hang out in a wider range of BNCs instead of just queer ones.

In the 20 interviews for this project, each participant mentioned that as U.S. society has become significantly more queer-friendly, there has been less need for queer-specific spaces. They also shared that with more widespread social acceptance, queer folks can feel more comfortable in a greater number of spaces within the city. The statements provided by interviewees also suggest that as diverse gender expressions are increasingly welcomed within the queer community, people of all expressions can feel comfortable in all queer spaces, making most of San Francisco's queer spaces mixed.

Lauren said that as queer people became more integrated, she liked that. "As an African American, it is nice to free yourself from those bonds." Lauren is content with the decline in lesbian bars and says that it means there is less segregation, a concept she relates to her experience as an African American woman living in the United States. Tatiana is not sure that spaces labeled as "lesbian" or "dyke" are helpful in 2021:

I guess I think there is something useful in SF to be like, 'this is not a gay men's party' — I think that is useful. Beyond that, it's kind of unclear to me because I think the issue with saying 'this is a lesbian/dyke party' — there are lots of people [other than

lesbian/dykes] that are not cis gay men....The question then — is there value in having those exclusionary spaces? — as a cis lesbian, I would maybe say I would like that a little bit, but then my nonbinary friends are going to say that this is not for me or question is it or not? The answer is probably not. Not that they couldn't go, but is that really helpful for our community? I would say no. I definitely think — this is not 'The Castro™.' This is not the clientele this is for. I don't know that that is something for what our community needs.

Ivy has never been to a lesbian/dyke BNC. The last lesbian/dyke BNC in her hometown of San Jose had already closed by the time she was born in the late 1990s and there were none in San Francisco when she moved here in 2016. However, she has little need to go somewhere specific to find fellow queers; since queerness is more commonly accepted within Generation Z, finding queer-specific spaces is not necessary:

A lot of my friends growing up, and now in college, a lot of my friends are queer, so it's less that I go to spaces for community and more [already having it] with people I met in class or in high school and people I have known from my past.

Erin has noticed that young queer folks have more freedom now to express their gender,

I am in a queer yoga group; people seem to have a lot more freedom to express themselves in very different ways. We didn't have a lot of options — we rebelled against the butch/femme thing — it has come back, and a lot of young women take on those roles.

According to Miranda and Kieran, San Francisco's gay men's BNCs have never been as inclusive of different genders as the city's spaces for queer women, leading to lesbian/dyke spaces becoming more mixed while gay men's BNCs typically remain exclusive in terms of gender.

In past decades, queer people often conformed to heteronormative binaries of gender and sexuality in their queer relationships to fit into society; in recent years, changing terms for identity have helped lessen strict binaries. For example, butch/femme relationships are often seen

as reflecting the traditional masculine-feminine binary that many straight couples follow. Now that mainstream society in the United States has learned a bit more about gender and sexual identities and the ever-evolving terms involved, queer folks are able to explore their queerness beyond these binaries. According to my participants, by the early 2000s more members of the lesbian/dyke community of San Francisco began coming out as transgender than ever before. Because they were transitioning from within the lesbian/dyke community, many transgender men had become an inextricable part of San Francisco's lesbian/dyke culture and its BNCs. "I am glad I got to teach at a major University because I learned so much in the 2000s," declares Elena,

A lot of the work I did was in the transgender identity, and then things seemed to get squirrely when the TERF [trans-exclusionary radical feminist (Smythe, 2018)] category came along. I am not going to talk to that debate, but that seems like an extremist overwrought position. In the Bay Area, there are still some lesbians not happy with trans people. I was shocked — are you kidding? People did that to us when we came out as lesbians they were like, 'oh, you're gonna die young, you're gonna have diseases, you are going to be an alcoholic — that's just not a good life — you shouldn't do that.' And now we are turning around telling trans people, 'oh, no, you shouldn't transition' — come on!

San Francisco's lesbian/dyke community was not always welcoming to gender nonbinary and transgender people. Kieran's gender transition in 2000 was not well received by the lesbian/dyke community at the time. Now he says things have changed tremendously and the community has come to accept more trans-inclusion:

That was one thing that I can say — that in my lifetime, things have changed dramatically, it's not subtle. People complain about — and they should, they should continue to complain — about not getting 100% full parity with straight people. But it's so much better than it was. So much better. I have this notion that the more oppressed a minority is, the more they need that separatism. Less oppressed — you find more gay and lesbian people socializing in more mainstream environments.

He later expressed,

I wish I could have experienced being a young person now as a young trans person, because there was no space for that, zero space for being a trans person back in those days even in — just started in the nineties, really. And so I never got to be a young man. That is something I am melancholy about.

Many queer women in 2021 do not identify as lesbians or dykes, and sometimes lesbians and dykes are nonbinary or genderfluid. There are infinite ways to be queer, and these might not fit within the blueprint that older lesbians created for San Francisco's community for queer women. The way Natalie, a lesbian in her 60s, describes it, "Maybe the movement of mixing all LGBTQI and 'don't want to declare' — maybe that has something to do with it." Lori spent every day in a lesbian/dyke bar the 1990s and early 2000s and shared her insight on what factors she believes led to the bar's decline. She also saw other lesbian BNCs closing for the same reasons.

I think the biggest thing is the larger cultural shift — though, I do believe that San Francisco has a big hand in it — of sort of queerness, and I think there is no longer such hard lines. And I think that that's huge. I think that that was carved out here in a lot of ways. I think that through the unacceptance and acceptance of trans culture and the idea that things don't have — they can be more fluid and that if we all like soul music, it can be gay men/queer men, queer women, straight folks, everybody in one room listening or dancing or whatever, you know, that it doesn't have to be...I think creating these cultures has had an effect on even this sort of like stalwart like 'this is a gay men's bar.' I think that that stuff has changed because the culture has shifted, and those things have been carved into it. I think that San Francisco has always been a place where you could feel accepted even, mostly, in a straight space, but I think sometimes there has been division and lines in queer spaces or other spaces. And I think that those have come down a lot. And I think that that's really super cool saying yeah. So I think there has been a lot of change.

Lori also talks about how San Francisco fostered an inclusive environment for her to explore her sexuality,

Even though I sort of found this — is it is sexual preference or a type? I don't know who I would date if I was single. I'm a very big people person. Like, I would go as far as to say maybe I would even date a man if it was the right situation, the right person, because it could be like — I don't feel like I need to have...like in this really weird way I have such a specific thing [type]. But then, in this other way, I feel like I'm actually not at all like that. I feel totally open to anything and that I wouldn't even count out like somebody of any gender at all....And I think that that's an evolution that's happened for me personally, but also I think that's been allowed to happen in the space of San Francisco and here, and it may not exist or be so easy to have anywhere else, because just like you're talking about, it doesn't really matter what you look like but what you see and the spaces that you're in kind of inform also your own identity. And like, I think that's important, too.

Lori goes on to describe changes she has witnessed in inclusiveness of transgender individuals:

I think that things change. There was a time in San Francisco, I mean even in my own community, where it was really a struggle for people to accept people who were transitioning, and it's changed a lot, a lot of that happened, like in those walls at The Lexington Club. People were upset about people transitioning. And it's a very big thing in the history, I think, of our community; but at the same time, there was a lot of, 'you have to do the work, and you have to, you know, you have to show people that this is still our community, and our community is changing, and you have to go through that process of change. I do think that San Francisco has been, in its spaces, like a big breeding ground for a lot of what the larger culture is now starting to see. And the acceptance of trans identity, the acceptance of queerness...I think a lot of that happened in the Bay Area. I really do. I mean, the beginnings of it, the chiseling away [at transphobia]. And I think that that's one of the biggest changes in the spaces here, and that's something to be super proud of. I mean, I really love a lot of the stuff that's happened in this city.

Tamara felt a difference within San Francisco's queer community during the last decade and attributes the difference to a desire for more diversity,

Lexington closed. I felt like there was a thirst for diversity. I felt like this younger crowd, like gen-z queers, were coming in and being diverse and pushing envelopes, and GNC [gender-nonconforming] folks were popping up. And it did feel different. Like they were breaking that normal stereotype of what it meant to be queer. Which was great. I personally loved it. I was also confused, though — because I would go to UHAUL and be like, 'when did I get so old?! Like why is everyone so young? Good for you, though.'

Tatiana is a cisgender lesbian in her 30s, but she is not sure if spaces like The Castro, which mainly caters to affluent cisgender gay men, are useful to the queer community. Miranda agrees

that sometimes specifying who a space is *not* for is important and argues that what also comes with inclusivity is the infiltration of unwanted people. She makes the point that San Francisco's queer spaces for women have always made more of an effort to be accepting of different expressions of gender and sexuality than the city's men's gay BNCs,

What I noticed... you know how Jolene's would be like, 'okay, this is a safe place for queer women...but everyone else too!' — and sometimes the 'everyone else' was like cis men, whether that means that they're queer or straight or whatever the case is — they would still trickle into those spaces... and no one did anything about it. But I've been on the other side of this too, being in male-dominated spaces, let's say those are leather bars — I would go to The Eagle a lot. I had to earn my respect there, essentially. Walking in, I've had the most awful things said to me, done to me, like my drink knocked out of my hand just for being there as a woman... But I feel like women who open these queer spaces and say, 'okay, it's for us, but we're welcoming everybody to it,' [cis men] still take the opportunity, and we don't try to push them out, essentially.

Societal acceptance of queerness has caused a paradox for some in San Francisco's queer community: in a community historically divided by gender and sexual binaries, notoriously more than other major cities according to my participants, where do nonbinary and transgender people feel like they fit? The answer, of course, should be anywhere they find interesting. However, most BNCs in San Francisco neighborhoods that are famously popular with gay men, such as The Castro and SOMA, typically feel less than welcoming to anyone other than cisgender gay men; this left lesbian/dyke spaces as the only queer spaces where non-binary and trans people felt comfortable.

Miranda also talks about toxic behaviors within the lesbian/dyke community that can occur at San Francisco's queer BNCs that push away other lesbian-adjacent queer folks. Stereotypical representations of lesbians are typically masculine-of-center, so when queer women present as feminine, they are often presumed to be straight, even by other queer people;



this affects some queer women's ability to feel welcome in San Francisco's queer BNCs.

Miranda describes her experiences with this phenomenon:

I definitely have been treated really badly going to, let's say, UHAUL or something like that because I'm assumed to be just like a straight girl going with her friend. It makes no sense because there is a whole certain brand of [queer] person who likes really feminine women. And it's kind of like, 'you have that type, but you're assuming that essentially me — who is your type — 'isn't queer' though...but I'm in a queer space.' In my regular life, when we aren't wearing masks and stuff, I am a lipstick bitch; I wear lipstick *all* the time. If I'm going to the grocery store — lipstick is going on. I love wearing dresses. Of course, I'm also a 'sneakers and jeans' type of girl too. I love and honor being as feminine as I am, but I would always be viewed because I'm wearing lipstick and a dress, as just kind of like, 'ew, who is this bitch?' And I'm just like, 'I'm gay as fuck. That's who I am.'

Some of my participants would not go to certain BNCs in San Francisco where problematic behaviors by management, staff or customers go unaddressed by others in the establishment; the most prominent of these behaviors include racism, sexism, and anti-trans bias, which can sometimes result in physical violence. San Francisco's queer women have been protesting for social equity in the city for decades (Graves & Watson, 2016) and have begun calling out local queer BNCs where harmful behaviors have been observed. Cynthia recalls that in 2014, when the Black Lives Matter movement became nationally recognized in the wake of police murders of Michael Brown and Eric Garner, she witnessed a protest in The Castro in response to incidents where BNC and restaurant owners had acted in ways seen as transphobic and racist; the protesters took over and held down the intersection and held a ceremony. On June 6<sup>th</sup>, 2020, following the murders of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Ahmaud Arbery, and Tony McDade, I attended a similar event in The Castro. The rally, named "Ready to Listen," called attention to racial discrimination that Black folks face within the queer community. A march from city hall ended with a rally at Jane Warner Plaza at 17<sup>th</sup> and Castro Streets with

performances and speeches by queer Black creatives, including singers and drag performers. Ferrannini (2020) described the event hosted by drag artist Afrika America. Another drag performer named Sacred gave an impassioned call to fellow queers for solidarity with the Black community at queer establishments in The Castro. Sacred was one of at least two speakers who discussed Castro property owner Les Natali, who owns bars and eateries in the LGBT neighborhood, 'It's ironic we're in the Castro,' Sacred said:

There are many businesses just a block away owned by Les Natali: Badlands, Toad Hall, Hamburger Mary's. Don't give them your money. Shut them down....If you spend your money there, you don't give a fuck about me.

Shortly after the "Ready to Listen" rally, the Bay Area Queer Nightlife Coalition (BAQNC) was formed. The "about" section on the BAQNC Facebook in 2021 page reads, "The Bay Area Queer Nightlife Coalition (BAQNC) is and shall remain an organization of, for, and by the BIPOC Queer Artists, Entertainers, Producers and Employees of the Bay Area's LGBTQIA+ nightlife community." On July 30<sup>th</sup> 2020, the BAQNC held its first Town Hall with a mission to "uphold and follow moral standards of accountability." They invited San Francisco queer BNCs with questionable reputations to hear personal testimonies from community members about their experiences with discrimination in their establishments. Some BNC owners agreed to join: The Stud, The Edge, The Eagle, Badlands, and Toad Hall; others declined the opportunity for public accountability. In a statement released on August 24, 2020, the BAQNC reported that over 900 people attended the Town Hall and that while they saw some representatives rise to the challenge of the call to change, not all BNC representatives, in attendance or absent, were able to commit to taking the first step towards restorative justice, accountability. BAQNC implored the queer community to "support establishments in accordance with their showing" and that it was "up to

us to show these establishments that we will not be complacent with racism, misogyny, ableism, or discrimination of any kind.” It encouraged folks to leave reviews, contact owners or management, request actionable steps, post to social media, tag the businesses in question, post on their Facebook walls, and show support for the marginalized within the queer community by demanding equitable treatment of their neighbors.

This was not the first time Badlands was called to account for its reputation for racial discrimination; the bar announced its closure via social media on the same day it was to join the BAQNC’s Town Hall. Jay Barmann of SFist reported,

Badlands, along with Toad Hall across the street and Hamburger Mary's around the corner, was owned for many years by neighborhood businessman Les Natali, and Natali has not offered any comment on the closure. Natali has been dogged by accusations of racism that go back to 2004 when he owned the bar Pendulum that was in the Toad Hall space, which catered to Black gay men. Badlands became the center of protests when patrons of color claimed that they were turned away by bouncers and told to go to Pendulum across the street. As the Bay Area Reporter recalls, Badlands was then the subject of a Human Rights Commission report in 2005, though the report was never made official because the commission's director at the time never signed off on it.

The 10-month Human Rights Commission report on Badlands concluded that Badlands “required multiple forms of identification from some Black customers, used discriminatory hiring practices, applied a dress code only to Black patrons, and denied entry using other policies rarely applied to whites.” Although Badlands is closed, Les Natali still owns the building and liquor license.

In response to BAQNC’s allegations of abuse and racism, Jolene’s shared a statement on Instagram. According to Ferrannini (2020), thirteen defendants associated with Jolene’s are (at the time of writing this) facing a lawsuit from one former owner and anonymous allegations of employee mistreatment, manipulation, racism, and cover-ups of alleged sexual assaults. Rebecca

was disappointed that Jolene's ended up being a place where many queer folks felt unsafe or unwelcome at work and at events,

It's so frustrating because they even have that whole sign on the door that says, 'you belong here, no transphobia allowed, no racism allowed...' and then their practices are completely opposite. I remember taking pictures of that sign, and the 'you belong here' sign and the 'drink your gay ass water' sign and sending it to my friends, and then in retrospect — that was all just a show. It was all a lie. I took a friend who was transitioning to female, and I thought it would be so fun, but now it's like 'nope.'

Rebecca thinks it is vital that San Francisco's queer community be more inclusive of the varying ways that queerness presents itself.

This goes for the entire LGBT community, in all aspects — welcoming trans folks, welcoming bi folks, and not just being the whole "cis, single-orientation" thing, and I think that's international, that just the community just needs to come together in general.

Rebecca pointed out that even within the queer community, people can force binaries and heteronormativity and that needs to change. Miranda says that while Jolene's claims to be inclusive to queer women, nonbinary people, and trans people of all races, she thinks the reality is that it is more of an afterthought:

Like at first, they were like, 'this is a space for gay women. This is a lesbian space, period.' And then after, someone probably was like, 'that's really problematic because that's just making it seem like you can only be a cis woman and gay and only date other cis women, you know, that's fucked up.' And so, because they're like, 'oh, well, I don't want to come off TERFy [trans exclusionary radical feminist] or not accepting of nonbinary folks.' And so, they're just like, 'lesbian party! but for everyone.'

When asked about whether events and places for queer women are welcoming to *all* queer women, Natalie recalled a very white environment in San Francisco's queer BNCs of the 80s and 90s, "this was a white oriented culture, no black women, a few Latinos." Miranda, who is in her 20s and still frequents queer weekly and monthly events, was asked whether SF's queer women's BNCs are welcoming to *all* women; she said she still sees mostly white people at them.

I can definitely say I see a separation — like I could straight up say right now that I know for a fact that when I would go to these parties, very rarely would I see Black people. I don't even wanna say like “Black women” because I don't know how anybody identifies. But I very rarely would see brown skin of any kind, really—just a lot of white folks. I can definitely say that. And then when I came to Oakland and started to go to more queer parties and whatnot, I saw definitely a bigger diversity. You know, like it wasn't even a thought, but I just noticed, like — I notice when I'm in a really white space, that's what I notice. But when I'm just kinda like groovin', and I'm feeling good in a space, it's usually super fucking diverse. And I like that. That doesn't feel like a move, you know what I mean? It's just like it's natural.

Many younger queer folks want to socialize in diverse spaces. However, Miranda feels that there is still ambivalence within the queer community regarding gender inclusion.

I still hear certain queer folks, [some] who are younger, too, that are just kind of like, ‘I don't know...I don't understand the ‘they/them.’ And I'm just like, ‘okay...you need to do better. You need to unlearn that and get out of your fucking own ass; it's not about you.’ Saying that to say like...the job could be done better.

Queer nightlife can constitute a variety of different atmospheres, with some folks embracing its dynamics and others detesting them. Rebecca describes her ability to enjoy contrasting queer environments,

As much as I appreciated being able to go to dance bars and get trashed and dance in sweaty mosh-pits, sometimes I just want to have a margarita and chit chat with people and check out people. So, there's the “let's chat” and more casual vibe that I get with El Rio and that I got with Jolene's versus the sweaty mass of bodies that I got from places like Badlands.

Multiple interviewees described wanting a mellower place to hang out with daytime hours and more to do than just drinking. Cynthia says there should be an emphasis on dancing, photo booths, and patios; there should be a place to communicate instead of just spaces for drinking. Queer bars, nightclubs, and cafes have been a very small part of Cynthia's life; she was able to find community through things like potlucks, cooking, hiking, art, and activism — a queer artist herself, she describes the importance of the art world to the queer community, “queer art events

matter, film festivals, museums, activism.” Tatiana would also prefer queer spaces to become less bar-centric and hopes that other options become available.

I don’t mean to be like ‘we don’t need them anymore,’ but because of my narrow, slowed down life, I would love different kinds of spaces. I would love galleries and movie theaters and bookstores and cafés. It is exclusionary to people that don’t want or cannot be in places where people are consuming large amounts of alcohol.

Molly, a university professor, posed the question, “Where is that space today? My college students have it — with the queer center, the women’s center — you might have it in an HR department in a queer-friendly company.

It is imperative to consider the impact of the internet and access to online events on the queer community, according to Molly. She emphasizes the internet’s influence on the disappearance of queer BNCs,

I think hanging over the entire umbrella of the closure of the physical space — it’s impossible to talk geography about the closure of brick-and-mortar without discussing the fact of the internet. Anything else in connection is minor compared to the impact of the internet. There used to be 300+ feminist bookstores in the US. Where are they? There isn’t a way to discuss these subcategories of what happened to the physical spaces of gay bars without talking about the impact that gathering on the internet and purchasing on the internet has had.”

Molly elaborates that the internet has provided ease, anonymity, and a certain level of safety for queer people. “You can go to an online gay event and scout around to see if you like it. Prior to the internet, you had to go into that physical space and that was a rite of passage.” Several other participants agreed that the internet has drastically expanded folks’ ability to connect with others in the queer community. Tamara mentioned the popularity of dating apps for queer people, specifically referencing “Her,” an app for queer women. “You can go and find community online. It’s safer; you don’t feel like you are putting yourself out there as much as you are in-

person.” Kieran has 3,200 people in his Facebook group, “that’s my current major means of expression.” The presence of the internet is a significant factor in the decline in lesbian/dyke and other queer BNCs, but it can also be a good alternative to alcohol-centered spaces, adds Nadia. It allows queer individuals to find others who share their specific issues interests and orientations in a space that is not alcohol-focused:

What I’m looking for now—I need to meet new people in my social circle with women that maybe have raised kids. I am now on Meet Up and found ‘dykes with dogs’ and “queer women watching movies,’ and I can find interesting people that way. That is a good way to meet people without alcohol.

### **2.8 Hopes for SF’s Queer BNCs for Women in the Future**

Participants were asked about their hopes for the future of San Francisco’s queer BNCs for women. Most stated that they believe that queer folks still need queer spaces to safely gather and meet other queer folks; some said that did not need to be in a BNC setting while others emphasized the importance of such settings. Other participants found no need for BNCs targeted towards queer women in San Francisco since they saw the entire city as welcoming to all queer folks. Miranda hopes that after the COVID-19 Pandemic, San Francisco will see new queer BNCs created as “techies” leave the city,

I just really hope it’s [queer BNCs] prioritized with all the places that are shutting down, unfortunately, because of COVID at this point in time; and I think that — [which] to me is kind of awesome — tech companies are leavin’. I just really appreciate that now I know so many people that are in our age group, in the queer community or not, they’re moving to places that we could never afford, you know what I mean? Like fucking North Beach or The Marina. [I’m] not putting my wallet in someone else’s pocket, but most of us can’t afford \$5000 a month; that’s kind of just the standard. That’s crazy. But now that these places are at market rate and people *can* afford to be there and it’s younger folks and queer folks and brown folks, and they’re moving these spaces that are notoriously rich, notoriously white. I think that that’s incredible. And I really hope to see that spread

in terms of what's going to be opening, the spaces that are going to be created. I hope that maybe the stupid little bars in The Marina could — maybe somewhere queer will open there. Doubt it. In a million years. But we could cross our fingers and hope that what San Francisco should and used to be could start spreading into the spaces that have been claimed.

Elena is pessimistic that San Francisco's future includes lesbian/dyke BNCs.

I am pessimistic about it. I don't think it'll come again. It could come again — it happened in the 70s to have lesbian-only bars, that was new for San Francisco. If the guys' bars hold out — then someone with a lot of money could open a queer women's bar — or just a 'queer people' bar...I'm not sure it's gonna happen again.

Lauren agrees that “traditional dyke only spaces” will not return, “instead, I think the trend will continue for spaces to be inclusive of the spectrum of queerness in public and leave specialty groups to connect online.” It has shown profitable for queer businesses to be exclusive, according to Tatiana.

Thinking about the importance of queer spaces that are not businesses and what you said about Badlands and Jolene's last summer, it clicked for me—barring tremendous political pressure, it can be and has been profitable for queer businesses to exclude trans people and marginalize queer people of color. I've seen both happen to friends and strangers. I don't think the market can be relied upon to make a space more inclusive of economically disadvantaged groups, hence my belief in the importance of and desire for queer-inclusive community centers, parks, libraries, and other cost-free public spaces.

Tatiana shared that now that she is in her 30s and gets hung-over easily, she would be excited about finding non-bar queer spaces in places like art galleries:

I am thinking about events like Galería de la Raza and what it means for that space to close — that hurt [when their brick-and-mortar gallery closed]. I would love to see [more of that]. And I understand why clubs/parties/bars have been and continue to be the main fixture of queer life/community. It is exclusionary to people who don't want or cannot be in places where people consume large amounts of alcohol.

Tatiana hopes that queer spaces in San Francisco can remain accessible. She says we need more free queer spaces, such as Dolores Park:



Thinking about spaces more generally — what other spaces have been important. Dolores Park — that can also not be the best space for everyone. That is where dyke march is — that has been an important place for queer women. La Taqueria is not a queer space, but La Taqueria is functionally the same as Virgil's. A place for sustenance that is very near a queer party. [Also] Mission Pies [2901 Mission St.] — I think it's closed now. I would love there to be queer spaces that were not businesses. The park is important because it is a public space. Even if the rents go sky high — it is free to go to the park. We need public spaces as queer women to be in community, not to be tied to market fluctuations — the sky-high rent.

Sadie hopes that the recent COVID quarantine results in San Francisco becoming more affordable and therefore more racially and economically diverse, and that working remotely becomes more of the norm. This would result in the BNCs being more inclusive and vibrant. Molly believes that the COVID-19 quarantine allowed the queer community to identify how endangered BNCs are and how vital they are to the community. Most participants felt that BNCs targeted towards queer women are important in 2021 and beyond — Rebecca and Miranda would love to see queer spaces celebrating femininity. Some participants mentioned wanting San Francisco's queer spaces to continue expanding from a white cisgender focus to more racially, sexually, and gender-inclusive spaces — Cynthia particularly thinks a space is needed for queer trans folks of color. A number of participants want to see dance parties and non-alcoholic activities grow and most agreed that Pride events are important to bind the community together.

### Chapter 3: Summary and Conclusions

San Francisco's queer community has a rich history of popular queer bars, nightclubs, and cafés (BNCs). Until the recent rise of societal queer-friendliness, queer BNCs were often the only place queer people could safely find queer friends and partners. Since the early 2000s, the number of queer women living in San Francisco has significantly decreased, and based on the limited literature on the topic, there are a few common assumptions as to why. The most common assumption is that queer women do not make as much money as queer men and therefore could not hold physical space through San Francisco's ever-increasing rental market rates; conversely, affluent gay men could thrive in gentrified neighborhoods like The Castro. The second most common observation is that queer women "like to settle down and have kids," and San Francisco's tiny and expensive housing options make that difficult, which led many queer women to buy houses in Sonoma County, Santa Cruz, and, in recent decades, Oakland and the East Bay.

Queer women certainly still socialize in San Francisco, but it is no longer in lesbian/dyke bars, nightclubs, and cafés (BNCs). After interviewing 20 queer people who lived in San Francisco at some point, I found a range of explanations for the decline in lesbian/dyke BNCs. While money was mentioned by every participant, another leading explanation was that increasing societal acceptance of queers has reduced the need for segregated queer spaces. It was also frequently mentioned that the queer community itself is more accepting now of transgender (including non-binary and genderqueer) folks and that binaries put forth by traditional gay BNCs were and still are being challenged.

San Francisco's lesbian/dyke community was not always open to socializing with transgender folks due to a belief that transfeminine folks were not really women and that transmasculine folks were traitors for "participating in patriarchy." Unlearning false binaries of gender and sexuality can be a daunting task, but there is a difference between not knowing something yet and actively choosing to ignore someone else's lived experiences, and that difference appears as transphobia and anti-trans bias.

Many of my participants who lived in San Francisco between the 1970s and 1990s noticed that within San Francisco's lesbian/dyke BNCs, the butch/femme dichotomy goes through phases. When I compare my participants' stories of butch/femme to the earlier historical trends of butch/femme in San Francisco, it is clear that transgender individuals were part of the lesbian/dyke community for decades. However, when transmasculine folks began to affirm their gender within the lesbian/dyke community, they were often booted out of those social circles. Today, the stance on what defines a dyke has evolved, which is an excellent example of greater local acceptance of transgender individuals.

Many of my participants also cited the internet, mainly dating apps, as a reason they think BNCs for queer women are not as popular as they once were. I can see this as a logical reason, but the popularity of the internet, particularly the gay men's hookup app Grindr, does not seem to have affected gay men's ability to patronize queer BNCs. The idea that the internet could have influenced queer women's establishments and social lives in different ways than queer men's deserves further study.

Although there are no longer BNCs with a target audience of queer women, queer women are still in San Francisco. There may not be lesbian/dyke enclaves such as the Valencia Corridor

in The Mission District, but mixed queer spaces still exist and often celebrate gender diversity that includes women.

Before I began this project, I held the common assumptions that San Francisco no longer had lesbian/dyke BNCs because queer folks who are not cisgender men cannot afford to live here, especially if they want space to raise children. Doing this research, I wanted to see what factors intersect to shape the queer human geography of San Francisco other than gender, sexuality, and finances. While my respondents often validated my assumptions, they also offered new insights. One of the most noteworthy was that the more society accepts queerness, the less need there is for ghettoization of queer spaces. Society, and the queer community itself, got more comfortable with specific aspects of queerness, such as transgender, nonbinary, genderqueer and agender+ folks; this in turn blurred the gender binaries that existed in queer BNCs, particularly in lesbian/dyke ones. It seems that my interviewees based a significant amount of their comfort level in San Francisco's BNCs on gender inclusivity, whether that meant wanting it or not. Some interviewees preferred to be at BNCs with only queer women, some preferred to be in queer BNCs with all genders, and others typically preferred not to seek queer-specific BNCs.

Interviewees who spent time in San Francisco's brick-and-mortar lesbian/dyke establishments in the 1970s certainly held stauncher views on necessity of BNCs for queer women in creating community; some were not sure where else young queer women could meet each other. Younger participants said they want their trans/nonbinary/genderqueer friends to feel welcome in the BNCs they visit and if that means it is not a queer business then so be it. Several women said that Mango at El Rio was the most inclusive queer party they had been to in San Francisco. Mango has been a successful party since the 1980s and was referenced by women, so

it must follow a good formula. Another frequently mentioned BNC for its inclusivity was The Stud — almost every participant had a positive experience there.

Some participants felt that the lesbian/dyke identity is disappearing. Is it the erasure of lesbian/dyke identity, or is it the expansion of lesbian/dyke identity? There used to only be a couple of queer options — being a lesbian/dyke or being a gay man, a product of heteronormative societal expectations. People are now exploring their queerness in ways with which colonized societies are unfamiliar. This exploration came with new terms and identities. However, even participants who advocated for gender-inclusive queer BNCs still see the necessity of queer-oriented spaces.

This study included participants of various ages, genders, sexualities, races, abilities, and socioeconomic statuses. However, despite my efforts to cast a wide net, outreach for this study did not result in many Black respondents, and no self-identified trans women respondents. In future studies, key factors to consider other than gender, sexuality, and geography (in this case queer women in San Francisco's queer BNCs) would be race, income, and the place of diverse and evolving gender identities within the landscape of San Francisco's queer geography. Transgender, nonbinary, genderqueer and agender+ folks are integral to San Francisco's queer community and their lived experiences are crucial in understanding the role of queer BNCs in the city; I touched on the topic a bit in this project but only from an observational standpoint. A question I have for the future is, what factors about San Francisco foster such an inclusive space for masculine bodies, both straight and queer? It would be interesting to look at whether other U.S. cities are as centered around masculine queer identities as San Francisco or if we truly lead the way in that regard.

## References

- Badgett, M. V., & Schneebaum, A. (2015). The impact of wage equality on sexual orientation poverty gaps.
- Bajko, M. (2016). For many, shuttered Lesbian Bar Maud's was Home. *Bay Area Reporter*. [www.ebar.com/news//246406](http://www.ebar.com/news//246406).
- Barmann, J. (2020). *Storied Castro Nightclub Badlands Closes After 45 Years*. SFist. [sfist.com/2020/07/30/storied-castro-nightclub-badlands-closes-permanently-after/](http://sfist.com/2020/07/30/storied-castro-nightclub-badlands-closes-permanently-after/)
- Barmann, J. (2017). *The Best Gay and Lesbian Clubs and Parties in SF*. SFist. [sfist.com/2017/06/21/best\\_lgbt\\_parties\\_clubs\\_sf/](http://sfist.com/2017/06/21/best_lgbt_parties_clubs_sf/)
- Bay Area Queer Nightlife Coalition (BAQNC) Facebook. Retrieved March 15, 2021. [www.facebook.com/baqncoalition/](http://www.facebook.com/baqncoalition/)
- Bell, D., & Valentine, G. (1994). *Mapping desire: Geographies of sexualities*. London; New York: Routledge.
- Binnie, J., & Valentine, G. (1999). Geographies of sexuality-a review of progress. *Progress in human geography*, 23(2), 175-187.
- Bitker, J. (2020). 45-Year-old Castro Gay Bar Badlands Permanently closes. *San Francisco Chronicle* [www.sfchronicle.com/food/article/45-year-old-Castro-gay-bar-Badlands-permanently-15447683.php](http://www.sfchronicle.com/food/article/45-year-old-Castro-gay-bar-Badlands-permanently-15447683.php)
- Boyd, D. (2010). Before the Castro: North Beach, a Gay Mecca. *The Semaphore Winter 2010*. [archive.org/details/theseaphore2010winter189/page/n15/mode/2up](http://archive.org/details/theseaphore2010winter189/page/n15/mode/2up)
- Boyd, N. A. (2003). *Wide-open town: A history of queer San Francisco to 1965*. University of California Press.
- Case, S.-E. (2009). *Making Butch: a Historical Memoir of the 1970s*. Feminist and Queer Performance, 17–30. [doi.org/10.1007/978-1-137-04560-7\\_2](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-137-04560-7_2)
- Castells, M. (1983). *The city and the grassroots: A cross-cultural theory of urban social movements* (No. 7). Univ of California Press.
- Castro Country Club website, <https://www.castrocountryclub.org/programs/> accessed 28 April 2021.
- Central City SRO Collaborative. [www.ccsroc.net/s-r-o-hotels-in-san-francisco/](http://www.ccsroc.net/s-r-o-hotels-in-san-francisco/)

- Cockrell, C. (1987), Baybrick Era Ends, *SF Sentinel*.  
[digitalassets.lib.berkeley.edu/sfbagals/Sentinal/1987\\_SFS\\_\\_Vol15\\_No40\\_Oct\\_02.pdf](https://digitalassets.lib.berkeley.edu/sfbagals/Sentinal/1987_SFS__Vol15_No40_Oct_02.pdf)
- Compton, D. L. R., & Baumle, A. K. (2012). Beyond the Castro: the role of demographics in the selection of gay and lesbian enclaves. *Journal of homosexuality*, 59(10), 1327-1355.
- des Jardins, M., and Sher, M. (2006), Lexington Club is for the Ladies, *Bay Area Reporter*.  
[www.ebar.com/arts\\_&\\_culture///223994](http://www.ebar.com/arts_&_culture///223994)
- Diebold, David (1986) *Tribal Rites: San Francisco's Dance Music Phenomenon* Northridge, California:1986; Time Warp Publishing; "Trocadero Transfer" Pages 128-143.
- Dothebay.com. Hunnies & Hot Sauce Lunar New Queer flyer.  
[dothebay.com/events/2019/2/2/hunnies-hot-sauce-lunar-new-queer](http://dothebay.com/events/2019/2/2/hunnies-hot-sauce-lunar-new-queer)
- Duggan, L., & Hunter, N. D. (2006). *Sex wars: Sexual dissent and political culture*. Taylor & Francis.
- Ferrannini, J. (2020). Castro protest expresses solidarity with Black Lives Matter. *Bay Area Reporter*.
- Ferrannini, J. (2020). Future of SF Eagle in Question. *Bay Area Reporter*.  
[www.ebar.com/news/latest\\_news//298236](http://www.ebar.com/news/latest_news//298236)
- Ferrannini, J. (2020), *SF queer-owned bar Jolene's faces lawsuit, demands for change*, Bay Area Reporter. [www.ebar.com/news/news//294946](http://www.ebar.com/news/news//294946)
- Flanagan, M. (2018) *Best Nightlife Events: Your favorite comedy, drag, women's and leather events*, Bay Area Reporter.  
[www.ebar.com/index.php?ch=search&q=ships%20in%20the%20night](http://www.ebar.com/index.php?ch=search&q=ships%20in%20the%20night)
- Flanagan, M. (2018). *café Back In The Day*. Bay Area Reporter.  
[www.ebar.com/bartab/barchive/257221](http://www.ebar.com/bartab/barchive/257221)
- Freeman, Mark. (1994, updated in 2016 & 2020). The Stud Decade by Decade. *First published in the Bay Area Reporter in 1994*. [markhfreeman.wordpress.com/the-stud-decade-by-decade](http://markhfreeman.wordpress.com/the-stud-decade-by-decade)
- Ghaziani, A. (2015). Lesbian geographies. *Contexts*, 14(1), 62-64.
- Giesecking, J. J. Brown, G., & Browne, K. (2016). Dyked New York: The space between geographical imagination and materialization of lesbian–queer bars and neighbourhoods.

*The Routledge research companion to geographies of sex and sexualities* (pp. 53-60).  
Routledge.

Graves, D. J., & Watson, S. E. (2016). *Citywide Historic Context Statement for LGBTQ History in San Francisco*. San Francisco Planning Department.

History of AIDS at UCSF, UCSF.edu: [ari.ucsf.edu/about-us/history-aids-ucsf](http://ari.ucsf.edu/about-us/history-aids-ucsf)

Irwin, Veronica (2021). SF Eagle Nears Historic Landmark Status. *SF Weekly*.

Jaffie, K. (2017). The History and the Mystery of San Francisco's Wild Side West. *San Francisco Bay Times*. [sfbaytimes.com/history-mystery-san-franciscos-wild-side-west/](http://sfbaytimes.com/history-mystery-san-franciscos-wild-side-west/)

Kane, P-A. (2017). How the Stud Was Saved. *SF Weekly*. [www.sfweekly.com/culture/feature-culture/how-the-stud-was-saved/](http://www.sfweekly.com/culture/feature-culture/how-the-stud-was-saved/)

Kempley, R. (1993). Last Call at Maud's. *Washington Post*.  
[www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/style/longterm/movies/videos/lastcallatmaudsnrkempley\\_a0a3c4.htm](http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/style/longterm/movies/videos/lastcallatmaudsnrkempley_a0a3c4.htm)

Kirkeberg, M. (1982). *A Little More, a Lesbian Bar*. Max Kirkeberg Collection. Diva at San Francisco State University. [diva.sfsu.edu/collections/kirkeberg/bundles/236408](http://diva.sfsu.edu/collections/kirkeberg/bundles/236408)

Knight, H., & Palomino, J. (2016). Teachers priced out: SF educators struggle to stay amid costly housing, stagnant salaries. *San Francisco Chronicle*.  
<https://projects.sfchronicle.com/2016/teacher-pay/>

Kost, Ryan. (2015). Last call for the city's last lesbian bar. SF Gate.  
[www.sfgate.com/education/article/Last-call-for-city-s-last-lesbian-bar-6209121.ph](http://www.sfgate.com/education/article/Last-call-for-city-s-last-lesbian-bar-6209121.ph)

Lewis, G. B. (2010). Modeling nonprofit employment: Why do so many lesbians and gay men work for nonprofit organizations?. *Administration & Society*, 42(6), 720-748.

Levine M. P. (1979). Gay ghetto. *Journal of homosexuality*, 4(4), 363-377.  
[https://doi.org/10.1300/J082v04n04\\_04](https://doi.org/10.1300/J082v04n04_04)

Lipsky, B. (2020). *Rikki Streicher — Champion of Individual Freedoms and LGBT Rights*, San Francisco Bay Times. [sfbaytimes.com/rikki-streicher-champion-individual-freedoms-lgbt-rights/](http://sfbaytimes.com/rikki-streicher-champion-individual-freedoms-lgbt-rights/)

Marcus, M. (2008), *Here We Go Again*. Bay Area Reporter.  
[www.ebar.com/arts\\_&\\_culture//225243](http://www.ebar.com/arts_&_culture//225243)



Merriam-Webster. Definition of brick-and-mortar. <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/brick-and-mortar>

Midnight Sun website. [Midnightsunssf.com](http://Midnightsunssf.com).

Opillard, F. (2015). Resisting the politics of displacement in the San Francisco bay area: Anti-gentrification activism in the tech boom 2.0. *European journal of American studies*, 10(10-3).

Pasulka, N. (2015). *The History of Lesbian Bars*. Vice. [www.vice.com/en/article/8x443v/the-history-of-lesbian-bars](http://www.vice.com/en/article/8x443v/the-history-of-lesbian-bars)

Pershan, C. (2019). *City Rescues Beloved LGBTQ Bar El Rio*. Eater San Francisco.

Podmore, J. A. (2006). Gone ‘underground’? Lesbian visibility and the consolidation of queer space in Montréal. *Social & Cultural Geography*, 7(4), 595-625.

Ray, B. (2016). Les Natali Surrenders Patio café Liquor License As Hamburger Mary’s Plan Drags On. *Hoodline*. [hoodline.com/2016/04/les-natali-surrenders-patio-café-liquor-license-as-hamburger-mary-s-plan-drags-on/](http://hoodline.com/2016/04/les-natali-surrenders-patio-café-liquor-license-as-hamburger-mary-s-plan-drags-on/)

Ruskin, Z. (2020). SF drag legend Heklina bids adieu to the ‘Mother’ of all shows. San Francisco Chronicle. [datebook.sfchronicle.com/theater/sf-drag-legend-heklina-bids-adieu-to-the-mother-of-all-shows](http://datebook.sfchronicle.com/theater/sf-drag-legend-heklina-bids-adieu-to-the-mother-of-all-shows).

Salamon, G. (2015). Last Look at the Lex. *Studies in Gender and Sexuality*, 16(2), 147-148.

Schiffman, J. (2001). *When Coming Out Comes of Age — Gay theatre in the Bay Area is historical at this point, but there are certain groups (lesbian playwrights, for example) who, are only now finding their audience*. Last updated: November 4, 2019. [www.backstage.com/magazine/article/coming-comes-age-gay-theatre-bay-area-historical-point-certain-29347/](http://www.backstage.com/magazine/article/coming-comes-age-gay-theatre-bay-area-historical-point-certain-29347/)

Beaux. *SF Gay History*. Retrieved March 20, 2021. [www.sfgayhistory.com/neighborhoods/castro/castro-gay-bars/84-2/](http://www.sfgayhistory.com/neighborhoods/castro/castro-gay-bars/84-2/)

“San Francisco Survival Manual” c. 1975, Gay Health Project Papers, Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender Historical Society

Smythe, V. (2018) I’m credited with having coined the word 'Terf'. Here's how it happened. *The Guardian*. [www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2018/nov/29/im-credited-with-having-coined-the-acronym-terf-heres-how-it-happened](http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2018/nov/29/im-credited-with-having-coined-the-acronym-terf-heres-how-it-happened)

- Stein, A. (1997). *Sex and sensibility: Stories of a lesbian generation*. Univ of California Press.
- Swan, R. (2014). Pride of Place: As the Nation's Gay Districts Grow More Affluent, Lesbians Are Migrating to the 'Burbs. *SF Weekly*. [www.sfweekly.com/news/pride-of-place-as-the-nations-gay-districts-grow-more-affluent-lesbians-are-migrating-to-the-burbs/](http://www.sfweekly.com/news/pride-of-place-as-the-nations-gay-districts-grow-more-affluent-lesbians-are-migrating-to-the-burbs/)
- Swagger Like Us. Facebook.com. [www.facebook.com/swaggerlikeussf](http://www.facebook.com/swaggerlikeussf).
- Taylor, Y. (2008). 'That's Not Really My Scene': Working-Class Lesbians In (and Out of) Place. *Sexualities*, 11(5), 523-546.
- Theophano, T. (2004). Butch-femme. *Summers, CJ (red.). glbtq: An Encyclopedia of Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer Culture*.
- Urban Displacement Project. [www.urbandisplacement.org/redlining](http://www.urbandisplacement.org/redlining).
- US Bureau of Labor Statistics: <https://www.bls.gov/cps/earnings.htm>
- Warren, N. (2000). *Let's just say So Long, Coco Club*. SF Gate. [www.sfgate.com/entertainment/article/Let-s-Just-Say-So-Long-Coco-Club-3237848.php](http://www.sfgate.com/entertainment/article/Let-s-Just-Say-So-Long-Coco-Club-3237848.php)
- Warren, N. (2001) Tea Time At Red Dora's. *San Francisco Chronicle*. [www.sfgate.com/news/article/Tea-Time-At-Red-Dora-s-café-3267522.php](http://www.sfgate.com/news/article/Tea-Time-At-Red-Dora-s-café-3267522.php)
- Western Roundup Living Sober webpage. <http://www.livingsober.org/archives.html> accessed 15 January 2015. Bay Area Career Women Newsletter April May 1988, 6.
- Zeitchik, S. (2015). A transgender director on 'Transparent' is making history of his own. *Los Angeles Times*. [www.latimes.com/entertainment/tv/la-ca-st-trans-director-transparent-silas-howard-tambor-20151214-story.html](http://www.latimes.com/entertainment/tv/la-ca-st-trans-director-transparent-silas-howard-tambor-20151214-story.html)

## Appendices

### Appendix A: Further Participant Information

Pseudonym	Further Participant Information
<b>Cynthia</b>	As a young person, Cynthia dreamt of living in a big city and would take the train to the Haight. She moved to SF and lived in Bernal Heights for several years, frequenting Wild Side West and El Rio and attending parties such as Mango, Hard French, and Swagger Like Us. She recently moved to The East Bay with her partner because of increasing rents. She likes the day parties in Oakland because they are inclusive, and states that “queer art events matter; film festivals, museums, and activism.” She believes a BNC is welcoming when it has gender-neutral bathrooms and when management makes it clear that “no homophobia” is allowed.
<b>Elena</b>	Elena moved to SF in the 1970s from the east and left the area due to economics. She socialized in the Mission and Valencia neighborhoods and felt the lesbian BNCs were very welcoming to women. She went to Peg’s and Maud’s and liked to dance on Saturdays at Amelia’s. She states that lesbians moved from San Francisco likely due to finances and that the dot com boom [the period around 1997-2001 when people flocked to SF to start internet companies, with a second boom occurring around 2012] caused everything in the city to become too expensive to live in. She now lives in a senior community in the East Bay where she participates in an active LGBT community.
<b>Erin</b>	As a young woman, Erin felt that lesbianism was an extension of feminism and “lived in a communal lesbian house in Noe Valley; it was amazing; we were all political, we worked at the food co-op.” She went to different bars on different nights of the week and participated in a lot of musical events. She saw bars slowly go out of business but is heartened to see that “people seem to have a lot more freedom to express themselves in (very) different ways [today]. We didn’t have a lot of options – we rebelled against the butch/femme thing – it has come back, and a lot of young women take on those roles.”
<b>Ivy</b>	Socializes in the Richmond and Tenderloin. Believes being in San Francisco helped her figure out her queerness. She believes it is important to have queer labeled spaces, “Thinking about that space as a queer space. I do think it’s still necessary, just because it is always safe to have that label.”
<b>Jane</b>	“We all just like lived at Amelia’s” and went to Wild Side West and A Little More. Felt men’s bars were not welcoming and that lesbian/dyke and gay men’s bars were not mixed. “Women needed three pieces of ID to go into the men’s bars. Like they wanted it really separate.” Jane refers to the prejudices against women with children, “there was a thing called the ‘Lesbian Mother’s Union’ because back then there was a lot of prejudice against lesbians with kids [because they had procreated with a man], especially male children.”

<b>Kieran</b>	Kieran was part of the dyke community for 20 years before he transitioned to affirm his gender as a man. He is an author, scholar, queer anthropologist, entertainer, teacher, parent and therefore has profound insight into why San Francisco’s lesbian brick-and-mortar spaces no longer exist. He has thrown parties, written books, and taught classes for queer women/trans folks/nonbinary folks/genderqueer folks+.
<b>Lauren</b>	Visited queer BNCs in Valencia, SOMA, Haight, and the Castro neighborhoods. Moved to Oakland — didn’t want to live in the city environment anymore and didn’t want her life “based around the queer scene.” Frequented Amelia’s, Club Q, and Mango at El Rio and felt that bars such as the End Up, The Stud, and The Bearded Lady were welcoming to queer women. By the 90s, it was all “one-off night lesbian events” such as Bondage-a-go-go and the Tracadero Transfer. Believes there is no longer a need for lesbian/dyke bars because “society is more inclusive now; there isn’t a need for segregation.”
<b>Lori</b>	Lori was widely exposed to gay culture when young, so she felt moving to San Francisco was not as big a deal as her Midwestern college friends. She admired the Bearded Lady, “it was a big queer epicenter, especially for queer women and kind of punk rock. .... there’s a lot of ...queer writers that hung out there.” Feels that San Francisco allows queer women to explore masculinity like no other city and gives examples of her own experiences exploring gender in San Francisco’s leather bars.
<b>Marlena</b>	Marlena came out in her 30s and, by 40 had moved to San Francisco because she found it “unique.” She visited Wild Side West and danced at the 777 Townsend dance party. She volunteered at the NCLR but felt that she “missed out” on some of the lesbian-only bars. The high cost of rent forced her out of the city, and she now lives in an East Bay retirement community with an active LGBT community.
<b>Miranda</b>	As a teenager, she was able to navigate her way independently around the city and was snuck into The Stud at age 17. She frequented The Stud, The Eagle, and weekly/monthly parties such as UHAUL SF. Moved to Oakland because there was a larger queer community of women and for cheaper rent. “What I realized, when I moved to Oakland, I liked that while I was out [like at Ships in The Night] I felt that I was around queer people more often than not. You know, so that was like a nice change for me. Like everywhere I went, I could look around and be like, ‘ya’ll are gayyy!’ And I like that a lot.” Began performing in drag shows at the age of 17. Grew tired of seeing the same queer women at the same weekly and monthly parties. She loves the diversity of Oakland.
<b>Molly</b>	Performed at the Luna Sea Theater in the 1990s and has done research on San Francisco’s queer women community.

<b>Nadia</b>	Once married to a cis man, she came out after they moved to San Francisco — “[coming out] might not have happened if I had not come to SF. A lot of women my age [suppressed coming out].” Prefers a more “open” bar environment as opposed to darker bars. “The environment needs to include more than just beer — it has to include wine and food. It has to include spaces that are not hard masculine — it has to have a somewhat softer environment. Maybe we can bring our kids. We have to stop separating it.” Though she went to El Rio and Virgil’s, now she states that an “online presence is very important.” “What I am looking for now — I need to meet new people in my social circle with women that maybe have raised kids. I am now on Meet Up and found Dykes with dogs and Queer Women watching movies and I can find interesting people that way. That is a good way to meet people without the alcohol.”
<b>Natalie</b>	Lived in the Castro and ran a pet care business. Socialized in the Mission and Valencia neighborhoods and felt the lesbian bars were very welcoming to women. Went to Peg’s and Maud’s and liked to dance on Saturdays at Amelia’s. States that lesbians moved from San Francisco likely due to finances and that the dot com boom caused everything in the city to become too expensive to live in. Now lives in a senior community in the East Bay where she participates in an active LGBT community.
<b>Pamela</b>	Pamela visited cafes and sporting events (as a player and a referee). Pamela’s visits to lesbian/dyke BNCs were usually after rugby games with her team; she recalls that she always got stuck paying the bill. Felt that queer women could not afford to live in San Francisco because they often chose low-paying humanitarian-type jobs: “it’s the money. It was disconcerting to hear women talk about their need to do something for women and not make any money, and they were destined to be poor – I said, ‘are you freaking crazy? You get a job – something that pays – you don’t have to give that up just because you want to be gay. I thought that was ridiculous. Women seem to continue to scrape the bottom.”
<b>Rebecca</b>	“I was not really out when I was living in SF- and everyone’s coming out story is different- I’m bisexual, and I was very much raised with the ‘you can be gay, you can be straight, but you can’t have both’ [she says with a laugh].” Even after leaving the city, she still went to Jolene’s and El Rio. Most of her friends have left the city to be with partners and to live in a less costly city. Believes that lesbian bars are still important, “El Rio...felt much more inclusive, it felt...that every possible flavor of woman is there.”
<b>Sadie</b>	Socialized in the Mission and Bernal Heights and left SF because of the high cost of living. Frequented women-only bars and says, “Nowadays, queer people can come out and don’t have to choose — don’t have to identify and can be fluid or exploring or queer questioning or any of those things. If you are in that category and you are young, why would you want to go to a women’s only bar?” “I think I sometimes feel, and my cohort of friends sometimes feel that...lesbians are disappearing a little bit. Or this kind of idea that lesbian identity is disappearing a little bit.” Her wish for the future is that SF could be more diverse and more affordable and that may hasten the return of lesbian bars.

<b>Sharon</b>	Sharon visited Peg's, Amelia's, A little More, and Clementina's (which was her favorite because it was the nicest bar.) As a teacher, she believes San Francisco's cost of living made living in the city untenable, so she moved before 1990. Believes the bars closed because of economics, but feels they are still important and hopes they survive. Believes that the East Bay now has a thriving lesbian community and notes that it is easier nowadays to find like-minded communities on the internet.
<b>Tamara</b>	Tamara moved to Oakland for a lower cost of living and to get a dog. Tamara socialized in the Castro and Mission neighborhoods and felt like queer BNCs in SF was heavily dominated by cis white men. Her friends are predominantly gay Asian men. Tamara frequented Jolene's, U-Haul when it was at Oasis, Mango at El Rio, and The Cafe because it was "more open."
<b>Tatiana</b>	Socialized in the Mission and Potrero Hill and often went to Virgil's and Mango at El Rio. Feels that the changes in SF are due to finances and feels comfortable in bars when she sees other queer folks. Likes to frequent bars that welcome a diverse crowd. Wants to see more non-bar queer spaces that don't focus as much on alcohol. Has seen exclusion happen to friends and strangers at queer bars. Does not think the market can be relied upon to make a space more inclusive of economically disadvantaged groups, hence her belief in the importance of and desire for queer-inclusive community centers, parks, libraries, and other cost-free public spaces.
<b>Tegan</b>	Socialized in Mission, SOMA, and the Castro. Frequented Mango at El Rio, the Bearded Lady, and the Lexington. Tegan danced in local performances about feminist revolution and participated in San Francisco's clean and sober and Pagan community activities. As a teacher living in the city, the cost of rent was too high, so she left to be able to buy a house.

## Appendix B: Other Lesbian/Dyke Brick and Mortar BNCs Mentioned By Participants

<b>Other Lesbian/Dyke Brick and Mortar BNCs</b>			
<b>BNC Name</b>	<b>Location</b>	<b>Years Open</b>	<b>Background</b>
<b>Olive Oil's</b>	Pier 50	1982-?	Same owner as Maud's and Amelia's – Rikki Streicher. Natalie had a big birthday party there.
<b>Bay Brick Inn/Baybrick Inn/Clementina's Baybrick Inn/Clementina's</b>	1190 Folsom Street	1982-1987	Ran by Lauren Hewitt. Sharon said it was "so nice"; she went there a lot.
<b>Red Dora's The Bearded Lady</b>	485 14th St.	1985-?	Co-founded by Harry Dodge (founding member of San Francisco queer punk band Tribe-8) and Silas Howard, who later directed the TV show Transparent (Zeitchik, 2015). 'Marlena Tea's Wicked Awesome' was an event held there, "Tea, a co-founder of the legendary all-girl, all-queer spoken word group Sister Spit....'With these shows ["Wicked Awesome"] I bring in anybody whose writing I like -- straight boys, gay boys, straight girls, queer girls, tranny girls,' Tea said. 'It's all mixed up.'" (Warren 2001)
<b>Coco Club</b>	139 8th St.	1995-2000	Lauren frequently go-go danced there. In Bed With Fairy Butch was initially hosted there. (Warren 2000)

## Appendix C: Other Mixed Queer BNCs Mentioned by Participants

<b>Other Mixed Queer BNCs Mentioned by Participants</b>			
<b>BNC Name</b>	<b>Location</b>	<b>Years Open</b>	<b>Background</b>
<b>The Patio Cafe</b>	531 Castro St.	1960s to 1980s	Lauren recalls that The Patio Cafe was “a staple of The Castro. The roof opened,” referring to the back Patio’s retractable roof. The building is now home to Hamburger Mary’s San Francisco iteration (Ray, 2016).
<b>The End Up</b>	401 6th St.	1973 to present	Lauren go-go danced here in the late 80s and referenced it as one of her top women-friendly bars in San Francisco. Natalie remembers it as, “good for men and women, just a dance
<b>Oasis</b>	298 11th St.	2015 to present	Oasis was a drag event that turned into a brick-and-mortar space. It was named after an 80s/90s queer nightclub The Oasis which was famous for its plexiglass-covered swimming pool under the dance floor. Oasis is known for its drag performances, such as Mother (2015-2020), hosted by former co-owner Heklina.
<b>Valencia Rose Cafe</b>	766 Valencia St.	1983 to unknown – closed	Now home to a cutlery shop. Jane remembers seeing, now celebrity dyke, Lea DeLaria “...got her start” at Valencia Rose.
<b>Hamburger Mary’s</b>	531 Castro St #336	1970s to 2001, 2018 to present	Original location at 1582 Folsom Street was a major meet up for queer folks. Returned to SF in 2018 in the long-vacant former location of The Patio Cafe in The Castro.
<b>Cafe San Marcos (currently The Cafe)</b>	2367-2369 Market St.	1993 to present	The annual drag party sponsored by the Muscle System Gym event became so popular, it moved to Eureka Valley Rec Center in its later years (Flanagan, 2018). Marlina remembers that The Café was known for women getting drugged with the “date rape drug.” Went through phases of being mixed, lesbian (late 80s-early 90s), then gay.



## Appendix D: Other San Francisco Gay Men’s BNCs Mentioned by Participants

<b>Other SF Gay BNCs Mentioned</b>			
<b>BNC Name</b>	<b>Location</b>	<b>Years Open</b>	<b>Background</b>
<b>Badlands (bar/nightclub)</b>	4121 18th St.	1975 to 2020	Permanently closed in 2020, this bar was subject to significant boycotts and protests for accusations of racism and sexism in hiring practices (Bitker, 2020)
<b>Midnight Sun (bar/nightclub)</b>	4967 18th St.	1971 to present	"The nation's premier LGBTQIA+ video bar" (midnightsunsf.com). Lauren referenced Midnight sun as a place unwelcoming to women in the 80s — women would be elbowed there.
<b>AsiaSF (nightclub)</b>	201 9th St.	1998 to present	Referenced by multiple participants as a popular place to go out since the 1990s.
<b>The SF Eagle (bar)</b>	398 12th St.	1981 to present, closed between 2011 and 2013, 2013 to present	Well-known SOMA bar popular with fans of leather and hyper-masculinity. Formerly called The Eagle Tavern, it is currently on track to achieve landmark status in San Francisco (Irwin, 2021). Lori spent a lot of time at SF Eagle, “there was a big scene at The Eagle... — what do you call the late very early 2000s? — but right around then a lot of queer women hung out at the Eagle. There was a while where it was sort of a Friday night thing that was unofficial...people's birthdays there and stuff.” Miranda also spent a significant amount of time there but says she had to earn respect there as a cis woman; at first, men would knock her drink out of her hand and call her names.
<b>Toad Hall (bar)</b>	4146 18th St.	2009 to present	
<b>Q Bar</b>	456 Castro St.	2009 to present	
<b>Hamburger Mary’s</b>	531 Castro Street	2018- Present	“There were some restaurants that had the “gay men vibe” that women were welcome to, like Hamburger Mary’s.”

<b>Café Flore (cafe)</b>	2298 Market St	1973 to present	Now called Flore.
<b>Elephant Walk/Harvey Milk Café (cafe)</b>	500 Castro St.	1973 to present	
<b>The Lookout (bar)</b>	3600 16th St.	2007 to present	Ivy had a bad experience at The Lookout, “I was groped by a guy on my 21st birthday....it was a mess.... At that time, there were a lot of men around, and there weren't a lot of women around, and it definitely influenced what happened that day. The bouncers were big men — what was I going to do? I didn't feel like they would get it.”
<b>Twin Peaks (bar)</b>	401 Castro St.	1973 to present	Natalie felt that Twin Peaks “was not as welcoming to women. It was more of a guy's place.”
<b>Beaux (nightclub)</b>	44 Market St	2013 to present	Has had many iterations since opening in 1963, where its first name was Missouri Mule — The Castro's first gay bar (SF Gay History).
<b>Hole In the Wall (bar)</b>	1369 Folsom St	1994-present	Lori went there and other SOMA leather bars. Miranda references “the bar with all the chains hanging out front,” presumably Hole in the Wall's sign.
<b>The RoundUp (bar)</b>	298 6th St.	1970s	Country western bar. Natalie said it was fun to dance here after Pride
<b>Dreamland (nightclub)</b>	715 Harrison St.	1980	Disco extremely popular in the 70s and 80s. Natalie said it was fun to dance here after Pride.

## Appendix E: Other Queer-Friendly Neighborhood Bars, Nightclubs, and Cafes

<b>Other Queer-friendly Neighborhood Bars, Nightclubs, and Cafes</b>			
<b>BNC Name</b>	<b>Location</b>	<b>Years Open</b>	<b>Background</b>
<b>Virgil's Sea Room</b>	3152 Mission St.	2013 to 2021	Owner Lila Thirkield (a queer person) opened Virgil's with the dream that people from all walks of life could share space and enjoy a cocktail.
<b>Precita Café Group - Precita Park café, DeBoce Park café, Delores Park café</b>	500 Precita Ave 501 Dolores St 2 Sanchez St Oakland location	1997 to present	Run by queer spouses Rachel Herbert and Dana Oppenheim
<b>DNA Lounge</b>	375 11th St.	1985 to present	
<b>Phonebooth</b>	1398 S Van Ness Ave	1974 to present	
<b>Martuni's</b>	4 Valencia St.		
<b>The Uptown</b>	200 Capp St.	1984 to present	
<b>Blondie's</b>	540 Valencia St.	1991 to present	
<b>Casanova</b>	527 Valencia St.	1970s to present	
<b>Zuni Cafe</b>	1658 Market St.		Erin and Lauren referenced it as a fun place to go in groups.
<b>The Knockout</b>	3223 Mission		
<b>Cat Club</b>	1190 Folsom St.		Formerly Baybrick Inn/Clementina's. Has hosted many queer events and was home to Bondage-a-go-go at one point

## Appendix F: Other Weekly/Monthly/Yearly Events Mentioned by Participants

<b>Other Weekly/Monthly/Yearly Events Mentioned by Participants</b>		
<b>BNC Name</b>	<b>Location</b>	<b>Background</b>
<b>550 Barneveld</b>	550 Barneveld	Was home to an array of queer nightclubs: Bounce, Robot, Evolution, Le Freak, De Luxe, Players Club, New Wave City, Space 550, Backstreet, Le Thump, Cake, Club Papi (Walker, 2000-2003). Currently home to Sundance Saloon, LGBTQ+ country-western club open two days a week], and other events.
<b>Hard French</b>	Roving	Referenced as runner up for the “Best Women’s event” in Bay Area Reporter (Flanagan 2018)
<b>Ships In the Night</b>	Roving; now in Oakland	
<b>Swagger Like Us</b>	Roving	Hip/Hop party at Jolene’s and El Rio, formerly alternated between El Rio, Oasis, and F8 (ebar.com, sfist.com, Swagger Like Us on Facebook)
<b>Hunnies &amp; Hot Sauce</b>	Roving	Moving party in San Francisco and East Bay, "an intentional space for our community of queer, trans, genderqueer, nonbinary, folks on, out of, and beyond the spectrum, femme, masc, Hunnies of Color to exist and not have to worry about being ‘too spicy.’ (Hunnies & Hotsauce Facebook, 2021).”
<b>Club Cherry</b>	Roving	A weekly club at the EndUp. Lauren go-go danced there around 1987.
<b>Pier 50- Old Spaghetti Factory/Jelly’s/Olive Oil’s</b>	Pier 50	Jelly’s held salsa nights popular with queer women, according to Jane, who enjoyed dancing there. Lauren recalls it being "a scene."
<b>Trannyshack</b>	Mostly @ The Stud; 399 9th St.	A weekly party at The Stud was hosted by local drag star Heklina, who later co-owned Oasis nightclub from 2015-2020 and began hosting a similar event called Mother (Ruskin, 2020). Miranda’s first experience performing on stage at 19 was as a stage prop at a Trannyshack event
<b>Hyatt Regency</b>	5 Embarcadero Center	Natalie remembers going to queer dances at the Hyatt Regency, “they used to have a big dance at the Hyatt Regency [5 Embarcadero Center], a woman named Nicole Shapiro started that.”