LABOR OF LOVE: A MULTIMEDIA ETHNOGRAPHY OF LESBIAN COMMUNITY SPACE IN THE WASHINGTON, D.C. METROPOLITAN AREA

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By

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to explore through their own experiences how lesbian leaders create and sustain lesbian cultural organizations in the Washington, D.C. metropolitan area. The thirty-one lesbian leaders who participated in this study each had a hand in creating a community space for lesbians in the Washington, D.C. metropolitan area between 1980 and 2013. This multimedia ethnographic investigation reveals the tools and emotions lesbian leaders use to build community spaces in the Washington, D.C. metropolitan area. Two research questions guide this study: (i) how satisfied are lesbians with the current community spaces available to them in the Washington, D.C. metropolitan area? and (ii) how can a multimedia ethnography assess and improve civic engagement practices amongst lesbians in the Washington, D.C. metropolitan area?

A multimedia ethnography research design was used in this qualitative study to focus on a group of lesbian leaders who share the culture and desire to improve the quality and quantity of lesbian community spaces. While filming interviews with lesbian leaders, I identified two important themes that my informants repeatedly referenced throughout each interview: (i) the safety of the community space, and (ii) the integration of lesbian culture within broader society. While the community’s perception of the overall safety of the community space impacts the preservation and longevity of the lesbian community space, the integration of lesbian culture with broader society has lessened the need to engage in sexuality-specific community events.
The iterative process of this study hopes to educate current lesbian leaders in the Washington, D.C. metropolitan area about the needs of the lesbian community in order to assist them in establishing a new inclusive community space. The lesbian stories recorded by video are made public via the documentary-video portion of the project, entitled Labor of Love, which was screened to members of the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Questioning (LGBTQ) community during two offline events. Through these screenings I came to understand the contested views of what lesbian community space means and whether or not the Washington, D.C. metropolitan area is in actual need of a new space to support women of the LGBTQ community. Finally, this multimedia ethnography demonstrates that the potential use of a new community space for lesbians will change depending on the needs of each lesbian, which are rooted in their ethnic background, social class, and friendship networks.
The research and writing of this thesis is dedicated to the women of Washington, D.C.’s LGBTQ community. Without them, I would not have the courage, nor story, to tell.

Many thanks,
Kelsey Megan Brannan
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Special Addenda (3)
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  December 13th Screening Recap DVD (3 Min) Digital: https://vimeo.com/55997268
INTRODUCTION

Fascinated by the popular perception of the Washington, D.C. metropolitan area as a place that epitomized a progressive, liberal, and Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Questioning (LGBTQ) friendly city, I set out in 2011 to explore the truth of this rhetoric and what it offered to the local communities inhabiting the area. As a recent transplant to the Washington, D.C. metropolitan area and a lesbian, I was looking for a place in the city to find new friends and build new relationships with other lesbians in the community. In search of a lesbian community space, I was surprised to find that the weekly spaces and events that catered to lesbians were primarily limited to the club space. I also found that the LGBTQ community spaces that did exist, such as the The D.C. Center, D.C.’s LGBTQ resource center, did not offer a consistent set of events that catered to the diverse array of interests within the lesbian community. Questions surfaced: Why is it that the nation’s capital, Washington, D.C., lacks community infrastructure for lesbian women? Is it because lesbian women do not feel a need or was I not looking in the right places?

I approached this project much like all my other research endeavors with a keen awareness of inner social dynamics, an interest in stories to be told, and a fascination in understanding the way community impacts the work people do. During the course this study, I came to understand the intellectual evolution of my undergraduate thesis to my master’s thesis as a change in my perspective and approach. In the past, while I focused on community injustices, my approach was rather top-down and relied on discourse analysis. This project, however, stemming from the doctrine of grounded theory, seeks to understand how members of the community formulate their own community identity around particular community spaces. In
addition to video interviewing lesbian leaders of the Washington, D.C. metropolitan area about their experience building and participating in lesbian-oriented community space, I held public screenings of my video material, which included video interviews, B-roll, and historical documents from past and present lesbian community spaces, to start a conversation about what lesbians want and need. Thus, my research process in and analysis of the lesbian community in the Washington, D.C. metropolitan area, coalesces here into what I call multimedia ethnography.

While exploring the present-day landscape of lesbian space in D.C., which included locally created lesbian online social media sites (SMS) such as, Lezgettogether.com, WhereTheGirls.com, PhatGirlChic.com and lesbian clubs such as, Phase 1, Phase 1 at Dupont, Lace Lounge, and a monthly lesbians event called Bare at Cobalt (a gay-male bar), my subjects repeatedly mentioned to me they felt as if the lesbian community in the Washington, D.C. metropolitan area was fragmented, segregated, and sometimes inciting competition between different lesbians promoting groups. I began to wonder if lesbian space in the D.C. area always had this splintering effect or if it this was only a phenomenon specific to today’s lesbian community.

In May 2012, a few months after my research began, I discovered the Rainbow History Project, an online history project (www.rainbowhistory.org) dedicated to “collecting, preserving, and promoting an active knowledge of the history, arts, culture relevant to sexually diverse communities” in the Washington, D.C. metropolitan area. While the website held useful resources, such as a complete list of clubs, bars, community centers, etc. of Washington, D.C’s LGBQ Community, it did not include any digitized materials of lesbian spaces it featured (Rainbow History Project, 2005). There was, however, a special collection located at The Historical Society of Washington, D.C. entitled, “The Rainbow History Project Archives, 1960s-
1990s.” This collection included a plethora of correspondences, newspaper clippings, magazines, pamphlets, articles, case briefings, committee reports, ephemera relating to LGBT National politics, and most importantly, a special series entitled “GAY WOMEN’S ALTERNATIVE (GWA), 1981-1992” (“Special Collections Findings Aid,” 2010). The GWA, formed by two lesbian leaders, Ina Alterman and Leigh Geiger, was a local D.C. social and cultural lesbian organization that operated with the intention of offering gay\(^1\) women of the Washington, D.C. area with an alternative to the bar and an alternative to the closet. Geiger, co-founder, notes:

This all began in 1975, that is ancient history now I know, but back then it was very hard to meet other women and I was just coming out and I wanted to meet women and the only place we had to go were the bars. They were dirty and smelly, smoky, and scary and not in very good neighborhoods...so I decided to throw my own open house for women at the Unitarian Church in Arlington, but it became a lot of work for one woman...” (L. Geiger, video interview, September 19, 2013).

I met Geiger by calling a list of old landline telephone numbers located on the meeting minutes from the GWA collection at the Washington Historical Society. Surprisingly, one of the old phone numbers went though -- it belonged a former board member, Jeanette Paroly, who still lived in the area. Through Paroly, I learned that not much has changed within the D.C. lesbian community. For example, she noted that it has not only been financially difficult to sustain lesbian space in the D.C. area over the past three decades, but the transient nature of the city often causes leaders, and spaces, to come and go. Paroly explains:

It was the only place [The GWA, which met at The Washington Ethical Society], at that time, where you could go, listen to something that either fun or intelligent, something of interest and then just hang out and socialize. It started at 7:30pm and by 10:00pm-ish we were cleaning up, and I think it was necessary cause there was no middle ground. It involved older and younger. If there was a place like that now, for me, that would be

\(^1\) In the early 1980s, women who partnered with other women were not as “out” in public and preferred to use “gay” as not to exclude women and make it more welcoming and safe for women. Geiger, the co-founder of GWA, notes that the term “lesbian” was a political term at the time and since the GWA was a socio-cultural organization, the term “gay” was chosen in order to dissociate the organization from the politics of gay and lesbian rights.
great! But there isn’t any place like that right now, it’s sort of like, more and more lesbians are moving further and further out into the suburbs...and so what happened over time, is that people on the board [of the GWA] didn’t have the social connections they once had, so it was hard to get people [to speak at the events] on the calendar that we were able to get(J. Paroly, audio interview, August 15, 2013).

In addition to the fact that lesbian women coupled-off and moved out into the suburbs, Paroly notes that the reason there is a lack of a space like the GWA today is because of two phenomena: (i) the integration of gay and lesbian culture within the broader heteronormative community and (ii) the evolution of social media communication technologies.

After my conversation with Paroly and my continued contact with the Rainbow History Project archives located at the Historical Society of Washington, D.C., I somehow became nostalgic for lesbian spaces like the GWA. While holding the GWA meeting minutes in my hand, it became apparent to me that the cultural ideas which fueled the beginning of the GWA and, ultimately, the foundation of lesbian existence today, was quickly fading from lesbian cultural memory. It occurred to me that I should record, archive, and document the stories of lesbian women who were involved in these past lesbians organizations in order to pass on their institutional knowledge and educate today’s lesbian leaders.

As I began interviewing lesbian leaders from the past it occurred to me that the D.C. lesbian community is in still need of a space to call its own, a space that is not a bar, but a safe place to support community projects. This ‘spatial alignment’ I felt with my informants, became an opportunity for myself, a researcher and documentarian, and my informants to use my project as a form of assessment for the lesbian community at large.

The reorientation of my goals as a researcher also took a significant turn when I met one of my key informants Denise Bump, former owner of a lesbian bookstore, Lammas, and current
founder the D.C. Women’s Initiative (DCWI). She told me she formed the DC Women’s Initiative in March 2012 to begin the process of building a new space for Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender, and Questioning (LBTQ) women in the Washington, D.C. metropolitan area.

Bump’s goal is to launch a new space for LBTQ women within the first half of 2014, but public awareness, funding, and divides within the community (e.g. black vs. white and gay vs. lesbians) remain her current barriers for success. Bump explains:

I get irritated about a few things: one is that we have to create the space and it doesn’t already exist here and we’ve had space, and so, why it doesn’t exist, that’s infuriating. It’s sort of like, ‘Why are we recreating this now?’ This many years after, and then trying to work with other organizations that are just trying to survive. So I feel like through this economic downturn especially, everybody just kind of buckles down and only wants to make sure that they’re doing okay. (D. Bump, Video Interview, October 17, 2012).

Bump saw my project and the filmic portion as an opportunity to amplify the voice of her Initiative and to get more women involved.

Thus, what started as an ethnography that would explore one past lesbian space in D.C., the Gay Women’s Alternative (GWA), evolved into an ongoing archive project that not only explores the relationship of lesbian community space to cultural memory in documentary form, but serves as a site for assessment of current lesbian spaces. The project’s website (www.laboroflovefilm.org) is where the public can access mini-stories about the history of lesbian space in the D.C. area. Part of the goal of placing stories online in one virtual space, is to urge women to then meet offline to then bring their spatial and communal desired into action.

While website and associated video archive and interweave stories from lesbian women of the past with the story of the D.C. Women’s Initiative, the function of the public documentary screenings will be to create conversations about what lesbian women want and need from a new community space.
I held two public screenings that featured two different cuts of the film. The first screening was on December 13, 2012 at The Washington Blade offices, D.C.’s LGBT Newspaper (See Special Addenda). This cut was only 13-minutes long and primarily focused on the experiences of lesbian women that led now defunct organizations. The goal of the cut was to show the generational divides that exist between lesbians from the past and the present and the need to bridge the gap between the two.

The second screening was on March 14, 2013 at Busboys & Poets (5th & K ST NW, Washington DC). This cut included interviews and scenes from present-day lesbian spaces, including the most popular bars, such as Phase 1 and the women’s monthly event at Cobalt, Bare. The goal of this film was to show what current spaces are available to lesbians and to start a conversation about what can be improved to create more civic engagement amongst lesbians of all ages in the Washington, D.C. lesbian community. Both screenings had three goals: (i) to educate members of the LGBTQ community unaware of the challenge, passion, and effort put forth by lesbian leaders, (ii) get more lesbians involved and aware about community space, and (iii) discover potential use for a new space designed for LBTQ identified women in the Washington, D.C. metropolitan area.

In Chapter one, “Methodology,” I explicate my methodology, multimedia ethnography, for the project. It details the history of ethnography and multimedia ethnography in general, as well as the implications the ethnographic filmmaking process in the field of anthropology. In addition to this background, this chapter includes how I collected my data through video interview, participant observation, and surveys, and then how I interpreted my data and constructed the documentary-video portion of the project, Labor of Love (See Special Addenda).
In Chapter Two, “Setting The Stage,” I setup the analysis of the fading nature of lesbian space in the Washington, D.C. metropolitan area. The goal of this chapter is understand the difficulty D.C. lesbians leaders face as they attempt to produce and sustain long-term lesbian community spaces in the D.C. area (Ribes & Finholt, 2009). I focus on how my informants, all of whom were at one time a leader of a lesbian organization, articulate the way they achieve a safe and diverse space for lesbian women, which is based on the organization’s “Circle of Influence.” An organization’s circle of influence consists of three factors: visibility, capital, and space. Within this discussion I will also include how the larger transmigratory processes of the Washington D.C. metropolitan area and the prevalence of national LGBT organizations, such as the Human Rights Campaign, impact the diversity and success of locally-based lesbian community organizations. Lastly, this chapter introduces a new local D.C. based lesbian organization, the D.C. Women’s Initiative, whose goal is to build a new long-term community center to connect the LGBTQ identified women.

In Chapter three, “Assessing Lesbian Community Space,” I explicate the valued aspects of lesbian community space, as well as the spatial needs I found noteworthy from my fieldwork and video interviews with lesbian leaders. By providing excerpts from my interviews this chapter discusses possible answers to the study’s two research questions: (i) how satisfied are lesbian identified women with the current landscape of Washington D.C.’s LGBTQ community spaces? (ii) how can an ethnography help the community understand the landscape and perhaps improve civic engagement? The following two themes surfaced from my participant as common attributes associated with lesbian community space: (i) the safety of the community space, (ii) the integration of lesbian culture with broader society. Combined with my informants opinions, notes from participant observation, and results from the DC Women’s Initiative Survey
(Appendix B), this chapter explicates the variable needs of the lesbian community and multiple meanings of community space for lesbian women in the Washington, D.C. metropolitan area.

Chapter four, “Reflections on the Ethnographic Journey,” examines the process of producing, editing, and publicizing the video-portion of the research project, including the way in which my research questions were guided by my current knowledge of ethnography and my multiple subject-positions as both a member of the community and an ethnographer. With this in mind, this chapter explores for in whose interest the project was made. Was the project solely conducted for my own interest in obtaining material for my master’s thesis or was it to benefit the community at large? To address these questions, I propose the critical need for both fieldwork and a post-field reflexivity, a type of reflection that causes ethnographers to constantly reconsider the meaning of what they are doing, how it impacts their subjects, the goals of the project, and the relationship of the academy and public intellectuals.

**CHAPTER ONE: METHODOLOGY**

This chapter addresses the central methodological and theoretical implications entailed in this multimediated ethnographic study of lesbian spaces in the Washington, D.C. metropolitan area. As Glaser & Strauss (1976) note, ethnography, from a grounded theory perspective, is a form of generative theory, which refutes the doctrinaire and positivist views of verification theory and endorses the systematic discovery and emergence of theory through the data collection process. The methodology of this particular ethnography study mixes and integrates participant observation with both video interview and observational videography to obtain data and theorize from the ground up. The critical point of any methodology should be “how particular methods help to answer specific questions of the research project” (Stokes, 2003). In
In this case, the main research question is highly reflexive and methodological: how can a scholar use a research methodology to fix a community problem?

Throughout this chapter, I summarize the history of ethnography and development of multimedia ethnography. I then discuss the benefits of using this methodology in the context of an anthropological study about lesbian spaces in the Washington, D.C. metropolitan area. I show how the use of multimedia ethnography, particularly the methods of videography, by the ethnographer can help the community that she researches to become more aware and conscious of a particular problem. Finally, I elucidate the particular methods I used for this multimedia ethnography, the problems and challenges I faced during the fieldwork, the importance of reflexivity during the production of the study, especially in terms of my role as a member of the LGBTQ community and as a filmmaker, and the process of analysis, interpretation and articulation of the data in the final manuscript of this thesis.

Ethnography and multimedia ethnography

The methodology of ethnography developed within the field of anthropology and sociology. Clifford (1988) notes that ethnography has been thought of as a style of collecting culture that considers and sometimes foregrounds “the ways that diverse experiences and facts are selected, gathered, detached from original temporal occasions, and given enduring value in a new arrangement” (p. 231). In other words, ethnography itself is a highly subjective and selective process of collecting or in this study’s case filming the accounts, and interpreting the lived values

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2 In this case, the problem is the lack of community space available for lesbian women in the Washington, D.C. metropolitan area.
and lived experiences of the research subjects (Clifford & Marcus, 1986; Morley & Silverstone, 1991; Gray 2003).

One of the key goals of any ethnographic researcher is to immerse oneself within the world and everyday experiences of your group of research while also remaining “in significant ways an outsider to the worlds of those studied” (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995, p. 35). The researcher’s approach is complicated when the ethnographer is not entirely “outside” the research community, but a member of the research community, such as in this study where I share the same regional location and sexual-identity as my research subjects the Washington, D.C. Metropolitan area (Murphy & Kraidy, 2002). Thus, it is important to account for the way in which the researcher’s “subjects-positions(s) and voices(s)” not only impact the subjects, but the entire research process (LaCapra, 1997, p. 65). Reflexivity (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995) is a crucial and sensitive component of this research because my personal characteristics and biography may “affect the interaction and production of knowledge during the research project” (Heyl, 2001, p. 377-378). I will expand one the notion of reflexivity in the self-reflexivity and circumstantial activism section of this chapter on page 15.

Hints of feminist ethnographic goals have also been incorporated into this multimedia ethnography. Feminist ethnographers are known for challenging the relationship of the informant and ethnographer and the production of knowledge (Mankekar, 1999). Feminist scholars also suggest that feminist research has a “political” agenda that questions the causes of women’s oppression. Thus, Mankekar notes, “the fundamental question that constantly informs feminist research is always ‘in whose interests?’” (p.437). This research is directly related to the interest of my subjects, lesbian leaders. By investigating lesbian space in the Washington, D.C.
metropolitan area, this study reveals unintended power relationships and conflicts that exist within the LGBTQ community alone.

The multiple locations in which this multimedia ethnography takes places are also a notable aspect of multimedia ethnography. The fact that this study explores ‘fragmented’ sites of inquiry: the home, workplace, bar, restaurants, and organizations of lesbian leaders, requires the ability to map out the relationship of various spaces to an informant’s “world perspective.” (Marcus 1995). Marcus notes, “single-sited research can no longer be easily located in a word system perspective” (p.98). Lesbians, and people in general, experience community in multiple spaces, thus multimedia ethnography often means treating and documenting the field as variable, fluid, and sometimes-transparent fluid. Moreover, multi-sited ethnographers must understand how the space or place of the community is situated in particular histories and power relations amongst the community itself. While Lesbian spaces in the D.C. community began in basements, bars, and home, they have since become integrated within the web, though dating sites (e.g. Okcupid.com), and social media sites, (e.g., Meetup.com, Facebook.com), and other larger national LGBTQ spaces, such as The Human Rights Campaign (HRC) and the Victory Fund Campaign.

Thus, as Gillespie (1995) suggests multimedia and multisited ethnography practices “can deliver empirically grounded knowledge of [people] in a way that other, less socially encompassing methods cannot” (p. 54). Similarly, Bird (2003) argues that “only ethnography can begin to answer questions about what people really do... rather than what we imagine they might do, or what close readings of texts assume they might do” (p. 191). Using film and other forms of multimedia for ethnography thus constitutes a critical methodology for understanding how a multimedia production about a particular group, produced by the ethnographer, can intermingle
and impact the everyday lives of a particular community (Machin, 2002; Bird, 2003). In other words, how can the mediation of an ethnographic study change people’s perceptions on a community concern; a concern about the lack of lesbian community spaces in the Washington, D.C. metropolitan area.

In summary, multimedia ethnography can be defined as a mixed methods research process, in which the ethnographer collects data, with the understanding that it will be perceived, interpreted, and, possibly, manipulated by others. Multimedia ethnography is utilized to not only collect basic data about a community, but to also understand how the mediation of research can impact the lived experiences and community activities amongst a particular group situated in a specific time and space. In this case, this multimedia ethnographic project is designed to investigate how lesbians respond to the mediated voices of their friends and community members via the cinematic apparatus.

**Intersections of cinema and ethnography**

In the 1970s, ethnographers began to work with the moving image and video to study their communities and information systems. By using a visual medium, they transformed their methodology into what is, today, called ethnographic filmmaking (Ruby 1977; MacDougall, 2001). One of the goals of ethnographic filmmaking is to make the process of revisiting the material easier and to give researchers the ability to build stories around studies conducted in remote spaces (James, 2003; Morris, 2011). The latter was particularly useful and important for filmmakers invested in social justice issues (Gregory, 2005). It gave them ability to make the research more impactful and worthy of worldwide press. However, the questions of the ‘visibility’ have always posed ethical and methodological problems in the anthropological world.
MacDougall notes, “[films] appeared to show everything, and yet, like the physical body, remained annoyingly mute” (p. 277). It became important for the anthropologist or the ethnographic filmmaker to be conscious of how the camera and the filmmaker change the “scene” or actions put forth by the community. For whom is the film made for? And relating back to feminist ethnography, in whose interests is the film made?

In terms of this project, I chose the filmic medium not for observational reflection purposes, but in order to craft a documentary story about lesbian spaces to share with the community. The story was not certain at the beginning of the project, which is true for any documentary. But in the initial treatment stages, the documentary was conceived in order to show present day audiences how vibrant and thriving lesbian spaces were in the late 70s and 80s in D.C. As I interviewed and met new members of the lesbian community I discovered that there was a group of LBTQ women in the D.C. area called the D.C. Women’s Initiative. The group, headed by lesbian leaders that were nostalgic for the communal spaces that existed in the past, was looking to create a new safe and welcoming space for women of D.C.’s LGBTQ community. Thus, what started as a research project that explored the history of past lesbian spaces, such as the Gay Women’s Alternative (GWA) 1980 – 1993, evolved into a film that explores the present-day lesbian women’s scene and the future of the D.C. Women’s Initiative.

The evolution began when I sent my project to Denise Bump, the co-founder of the DC Women’s Initiative, in October 2012. Denise Bump was also a former owner of Lammas Bookstore (1978-2000), a lesbian bookstore in the D.C. area, and an active participant in the Lesbian Services Program (1995-2005). These two venues, Bump notes, were lesbian community spaces. While reminiscing about Lammas Bookstore, she explains, “It was a place where women could come and they would find their way in a community, that, really, it was
safe. They weren’t coming to drink...they could come by themselves...and we don’t have it anymore” (Video Interview, October 17, 2013).

After these spaces closed, Bump informed me that she felt as though there was a lack of cohesion between lesbian women in the Washington, D.C. area. It is for this reason that she and other women decided to form the D.C. Women’s Initiative. The goal of the group, initially, was to launch a new space in June 2013, but it was too short of time. Thus, to gain funding the DC Women’s Initiative decided that performing a regional survey would be the most important step to understand the spatial needs of the community. Throughout this process of documenting and filming their meetings I decided to step in as a lesbian leader myself and help them craft their survey. The rapport I developed with Bump, my key informant, became a perfect opportunity to align my ethnographic research project with the D.C. Women’s Initiative assessment project. Bump, and the other members of the D.C. Women’s Initiative saw my project as a perfect opportunity to amplify their voice and interview women about what they would want from a new space. Thus, the function of my research and film became primarily concerned with bringing lesbian leaders together to discuss the issue at hand: how to create a new community space for the lesbian women of the Washington, D.C. area.

The first screening of the interviews and footage I collected was on December 13, 2012 at The Washington Blade Offices. This thirteen minute cut of the film included the voices of my informants, both young and old, and was edited together to show the community what is at stake: the ever fading nature of physical lesbian women-oriented spaces in the DC area. Following the screening, there was a Q&A with myself, Denise Bump, Bonnie Morris, a Professor of Women and Gender studies at Georgetown, and June Crenshaw, a co-founder of the D.C. Women’s Initiative. The Q&A was a way to not only discuss the film, but also discuss what women would
want from a new community space. Thus, the most important aspects of this entire *filmic* process, from the filming to the screening, are the conversations and activism that arose from the mediation of the film itself.

This approach to ethnographic research is fairly standard. Typically, when an ethnographer uses film, the film is produced and distributed to the community for feedback. Similarly, *Labor of Love* produced two different screenings; each cut incorporated suggestions from my informants and was designed to prompt discussion about lesbian community space. In terms of style, the film relied heavily on interviews and less on participant observation. One reason for this is because there is not a lot of lesbian space action to follow in the film. Most of the communication between lesbian women occurs online. Also, many of the lesbians organizations referred to in the film are now defunct and the documentation from that period includes few to little motion picture or photographic material. As a result, my visualization of past spaces, such as *Lammas, The Gay Women's Alternative, and Lesbian Services Program* (See Appendix A) relied on the memories of the women who once inhabited them.

After each screening I held a Q&A panel with lesbian leaders from the community. My goal was to activate a reflexive response about the process of my film. I wanted the members of the community to draw their own conclusions and interpretations from the film. Furthermore, I wanted to speak about my own goal in producing the film as an advocacy film for the D.C. Women’s Initiative and its goal to build a new space for women of the LGBTQ community.

It is this very suggestive and interpretative nature of the filmic medium that hits the heart of the filmmaker-anthropologist dilemma (Barbash & Taylor 1997). While the anthropologist is more concerned about making the subject matter more explicit (which there is always the demand for further contextualization (e.g. narration)) and possibly objective, the filmmaker is
more concerned with making images that complicate reality and produce new ideas in the minds of the audiences.

MacDougall (1993) notes, “It is often difficult for people who express themselves through words [e.g. word-oriented anthropologists] to accept a form of communication that works so much through suggestion, implication, reference, ambiguity, and comparison without conclusion” (Barbash & Taylor, 1997, p.75). I mediated this methodological dilemma through the explication of my relationship to my methods, or what Jay Ruby called, reflexivity.

**Self-reflexivity and circumstantial activism.**

Scholars and researchers within the field of anthropology, predominately those associated with what is now called the *Writing Culture* Movement, were highly concerned with reflexivity or how the researcher or filmmaker’s subjectivity and social capital influenced the process of gathering data in the field (Ruby, 1982; Clifford & Marcus, 1986). Jay Ruby (1977) notes that it is crucial to make explicit the producer, process, and product (Fabian, 1971) of filmmaking. He notes, however, that revealing the producer throughout the film can be thought to be “narcissistic, and over personal and subjective. The revelation of process is deemed to be untidy, ugly and confusing” and often takes away from the research objective itself (Ruby, 1977 p. 3). By exposing one’s scientific process or methods (e.g. participant observation) anthropologists also risk compromising the scientific “legitimacy” of their research. This is the paradox of anthropology’s continual battle against positivism (Ruby 1982, p. 122) Ironically, as anthropologists become more scientific by revealing their methods, they become less scientific because their methods are highly subjective and *selective*. Thus, rather than solely articulating
the producer’s role throughout the entire ethnography, Ruby suggests that it is more important to show how the methodological process informs the end product.

Thus, in the context of multimedia ethnography, a form of ethnography that is explicitly public, it requires the consideration of the following: the reflexivity of the filmmaker and the validity and representativeness of the informants/community. Reflexivity is not only a widely discussed topic amongst the world’s leading anthropologists, but also by multimedia ethnographers (Geertz, 1973; Clifford and Marcus, 1986; Gillespie, 1995; Bird, 2003). Self-reflexivity is when the ethnographer becomes conscious or aware of the way her or his personal experiences, social capital and personal/professional roles and beliefs come into play in the process of producing a multimedia ethnography (Press, 1996; Machin, 2002; Gray 2003).

Validity refers to the question of how “appropriate” is the data to represent the reality of the group studied. To validate research, the ethnographer must use a strategy called “triangulation,” which entails collecting multiple points of views from different sources and people, at different stages of the research (Morley & Silverstone, 1991; Stokes, 2003). This is also known as “saturating” one’s findings through constant comparative analysis (Glaser & Strauss 1967). Representativeness, on the other hand, means measuring the diversity of the people represented in a research project. It is important that the sample of informants, or those taking on the research include a variety of people (varying by gender, social class, religious affiliations, etc) from that particular group in order to avoid making broad generalizations or universal claims.

Before I go into the validity of my informants, it is important that I make explicit some of the most important elements of my fieldwork process and personal identity that might have
particularly influenced the validity and representativeness of informants in my film, as well as the theoretical and methodological applications of this multimedia ethnography.

The discussion of self-reflexivity in this multimedia ethnography is a sensitive topic because I am analyzing the way sexual identity informs community spaces among the lesbians in Washington, D.C.’s community. In this context I am not an outsider, but instead, I bring an insider’s perspective that informs the overall interpretation of the multimedia ethnography project. It became necessary for me to not only be conscious of the way my methods, videography, participant observation, and surveys, changed my subjects, but also about how my shifting positions and roles in the community affected the final form of the ethnography and the process of collecting data from my multiple sites of study.

Throughout the research process I had to juggle three performance roles: (i) a member of the lesbian community, (ii) a researcher conducting ethnographic fieldwork, and (iii) a filmmaker, exhibiting her work to the larger film community. All three of these roles greatly influences how the project shifted from just a written ethnography to a public and multimediated performance of lesbian community space. Marcus (2008) refers the person who takes on multiple roles during research as a circumstantial activist. He notes that the activist role is not related to the traditional type of activism often “claimed by the left-liberal scholar for his or her work [but] rather, activism quite specific and circumstantial to the conditions of doing multisided research itself” (Marcus, 2009, p. 13). Due to my multiple roles and involvement in the community, I was no longer just an observer of lesbian communities -- I became an activist.

In this respect, I discuss here some biographical characteristics that might be important for evaluating the ways in which my background influenced my interactions with lesbian women in the Washington D.C. metropolitan area, as well the process of producing the video portion of
this multimedia ethnography. Following the completion of my Bachelor of Arts in Film and Media studies from University of California, Santa Barbara, I moved to Washington D.C. in the summer of 2011 to begin my Master of Arts in Communication, Culture, and Technology at Georgetown University. My identity as a Washington D.C. transplant at the start of this research project became an important influence on the project. After moving I learned from the local community, D.C.’s transmigratory culture often makes it difficult, especially for minority populations like the lesbian women’s community, to sustain community spaces over time. And, ultimately, as people come and go from the city, the spaces that they were apart of go away as well. Upon arriving in Washington, one of my subjects noted the difficulty in finding community, she notes, “I had no idea where to meet other lesbians when I got to DC, so I actually went to a Meetup.com thing and the room was full of thirty or forty much older lesbians who were kind of actively attempting to find a domestic relationship rather than attempting to make friends...” (Rockhill, video interview, August 26, 2012)

Second, my role as a member of the lesbian women’s community, or an “indigenous ethnographer” (Clifford & Marcus, 1986), represented me to the lesbian women’s community as a compatriot, which gave me privileged access to lesbian women’s spaces and trust amongst the community. However, even though some of my informants became my friends and fellow LGBTQ companions, I was still subject to crossing boundaries of age, class, sex, education and gender. In a way, my ethnographic interactions with my informants highlight my particular social capital as white graduate student in the field of Communication, Culture, & Technology. The evolving relationship between ethnographer and informants began to inform the culture and impact of my project (Murphy & Kraidy, 2003). When I told my informants I was an MA student at Georgetown University, it not only gave me validity, but the informants usually
congratulated me not only on my enrollment at Georgetown, but for finding a meaningful project geared towards community development. This is worth noting, since higher educational programs in the D.C. area are geared more towards policy and law programs that utilize and perpetuate top-down policy approaches to LGBTQ issues and community development. For example, while the reauthorization of the Violence Against Women Act in March 2013 included additions to empower Native American tribal authorities to prosecute non-Native American for abuse, and gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender survivors of domestic abuse and sexual violence, it does not mean that it will stop violence from occurring. There is a discrepancy between the privileged people who write the law and the people whom the law affects. In other words, if the communities affected are not actively involved in the design of a bill, there is a lack of agency and awareness.

Furthermore, I also must mention that I have a critical perspective of the place of national LGBT organizations in the D.C. area. On one hand, national LGBT organizations, such as the Human Rights Campaign (HRC), perform phenomenal lobbying action for LGBT rights on a national level, but on the other hand, organizations like the HRC tend to take away space from local lesbian community projects and privilege members of the community with expendable capital. National LGBT organizations provide tax benefit for those with more expendable capital, which tends to be gay men in the community, not lesbian women. Going into the project and after speaking with my informants, I developed the perspective that the national organizations provided an illusion of community, masking the reality of space for women, or the lack thereof. While this study’s focus remains on the spatial needs of D.C.’s local lesbian women's community, it also will reveal the larger unresolved divides related to the national characteristics of D.C. as a city. Thus, one of the major contributions of this thesis is that it
shows that working with a community from the group up will help them effectively build and create a community space they desire.

My informants, many of whom were currently running or a part of a lesbian women’s group, saw my project as an opportunity to grow their group and possibly use my project as a public relations device. For example, for both screenings I had community sponsors and beneficiaries. The Washington Blade, D.C.’s LGBT newspaper, sponsored the first screening and *The Mautner Project* (National Lesbian Health Organization) and *Tagg Magazine* (D.C.’s Lesbian magazine) sponsored the second longer 25-minute screening at Busboys and Poets, with all the proceeds going to the benefit of the D.C. Women’s Initiative. As I involved more sponsors, the project’s audience grew, resulting in more impact. In a sense, the project itself began to evolve into a solution; a way to bring lesbian women together to discuss ways of improving civic engagement within the community.

Third, as a filmmaker, I felt obligated to make the issues of sustaining female space public and visible to the community at large. I wanted the film portion of my interviews to make an impact on the community. I decided to not only take a portion of my video interviews and put them online on the *Labor of Love* website, but also to hold screenings in various LGBT friendly spaces in the DC Area, e.g. The Washington Blade Offices (D.C.’s Gay and Lesbian Newspaper) and Busboys & Poets (a local progressive cafe and bar). By screening the footage online and in these spaces, I wanted to give the community time to reflect upon the history of lesbian women’s spaces (See Dec. 13th Recap Video, SPECIAL ADDENDA). In a sense, publicly displaying my research was like holding up a mirror to my informants, all of whom I invited to my events. It is important to note that this mirror, however, is not an exact reflection, but one that reflects my own direction as a filmmaker and my editorial/aesthetic choices. I had to select which clips and
videos I would include online to share with the community and which portions of the interview would make it into the media ethnography based on my own ethnographic interest (Pink, 2011). While interviewing my informants and learning about their desires and needs for a new community space, I saw this as an opportunity to voice the needs of my community in order to foster a solution. Thus, I envisioned the film portion of my research to be a new facet from which they, the lesbian women’s community, could see an issue at hand and perhaps foster reflection, discussion, and possibly new solutions.

Fourth, in January 2013, after my project successfully completed a fundraising campaign, my project began to gain press from the community. One of my key informants, Denise Bump, the founder of the D.C. Women’s Initiative, which is a 10-month old group seeking to improve community spaces for lesbian women in the D.C. area, area asked me to help her lead the D.C. Women’s Initiative. She saw the film as an amplification of the Initiative's voice and as an opportunity to take the mission and make it a reality. Thus, I was no longer just a member of the lesbian women’s community, graduate student, and filmmaker, but also a leader. The combination of these four roles: a D.C. transplant, an “indigenous ethnographer,” filmmaker, and lesbian leader is what transformed me from being just a sole ethnographer, but into what Marcus calls, a circumstantial activist. I was able to move from just performing participant observation and investigating a problem, to becoming apart of the solution.

**My process of fieldwork**

I conducted the media ethnography fieldwork during thirteen months between February 2012 and March 2013 in the Washington, D.C. metropolitan area. The study focuses on lesbian leaders in the Washington, D.C. area. The multimedia ethnography fieldwork included 31
interviews, 23 of them video-based and 8 audio interviews, with lesbian identified women residing in the Washington, D.C. metropolitan area, or women that had resided in the D.C. area at one time (See APPENDIX A). Each woman interviewed was at one time a leader. In the context of this study, a leader means that the woman either ran or helped lead a lesbian women focused space/organization at one time in the Washington, D.C. metropolitan area. On average the interviews lasted between 30-50 minutes.

Living in the D.C. area made it particularly easy for me access my respondents and schedule visits to various lesbian women’s spaces. There was a range of locations where the interviews took place that included the informant’s houses, offices spaces, coffee shops, production studios, and bars. My strategy to find my informants started with people in my social network and expanded outward. Once I met one lesbian leader, they then introduced me others I should speak to, expanding my informant base. I first selected women whom I had been told by community members would have a plethora of knowledge about the history of lesbian women’s space in DC, I then approached each following interview with a perspective of the community given to me from the previous interview.

Of the 31 respondents, 28 of them identified as lesbian (women who partner with women, 2 as bisexual (women who partner with men and women), and the remaining 2 referred to their sexuality as queer. Queer, according to the respondents that identified as queer, noted that they use the term because it breaks down the ability to label and categorize lifestyles that enable oppression. With that said, it should also be noted that 90% of my respondents did not like “labeling” their sexual identity at all because they did not like being put in a labeled “box.” One of my respondents noted: “I feel like I have no problem using lesbian, because I feel like that is what I am...I use queer, but I don’t think I fully identify...folks don’t like to be put in a box, you
know, and I think the word queer kind of opens it up to anybody” (Michelle Ross, audio interview, April 21, 2012). Thus, when referring to my sample of informants throughout this paper, I will use the term “lesbian women.” I acknowledge that by using this term, however, I am reducing the complexity and diversity of the community at large, as not all homosexual and bisexual women identify as lesbian or associate within the LGBTQ paradigm.

This multimedia ethnography incorporated media, oral histories, and flyers, from the local Rainbow History Project archives held at the Kiplinger Library within the Washington Historic Society. At the Library, I found the archives of The Gay Women’s Alternative (1980-1993). While taking photographs of old flyers and meeting minutes, I was also able to obtain the names and numbers of lesbian leaders from the Gay Women’s Alternative, which is how I gained access to lesbian leaders between the ages of 50-70.

In addition to the archival material, I also interviewed lesbian leader from present-day lesbian organizations, such as Phase 1, Where The Girls Go, and The Ladies of Lesbian Underground Railroad Entertainment (LURE) (See APPENDIX A). Part of this also included gaining access to film various lesbian events in order to include action and community shots in the video portion of the project.

In order to validate the needs of the lesbian women’s community, I needed to diversify my sample, particularly in terms of ethnicity and age. However, due to time and access only five of my informants were African American and only one was Latin American, the other twenty-five came come Caucasian decent. Despite the lack of ethnic diversity, I was, however, able to successfully equalize the diversity by age: 13% between 25-29, 16% between 30-40, 15% between 40-50, 13% between 50-60, and 36% between 50-70. Twenty-three of the interviews
were recorded by a Canon DLSR 7D camera, the other eight were tape recorded due to the request by the informant. All interviews were then transcribed verbatim.

The multimedia ethnography fieldwork also involved the process of taking field notes from my participant observation in different sociocultural activities of the lesbian women’s community, as well as informal conversations I had with people or what I heard in the streets, at a bar, or at a social networking events. Clifford (1988) emphasizes that participant observation is a “paradoxical, misleading formula, but it may be taken seriously if reformulated in hermeneutic terms as a dialectic of experience and interpretation” (p. 34). The process of taking notes became my own selective process that privileged certain aspects of the lesbian women’s community, and of course left our others (Emerson, Fretz, Shaw, 2011). Equally, the process of writing this ethnography, as well as editing the video portion was, as Gray (2003) insists, “just as selective and constructive as every other part of the process” (p. 172).

The events I chose to attend and the filmed interviews I put online are also selections I made. Although these are selections, some members of the community may mistake them to be representative of the whole culture of lesbian space in the Washington, D.C. metropolitan area.

Pink notes:

...Attempts to represent physical environments, objects, events or performances form part of a reflexive ethnography. However, such photographs should be treated as representations of aspects of culture; not recordings of whole culture or of symbols that will have completed or fixed meanings (p. 58).

The point of this statement is that with every single form of media lies an unremovable perceptual filter. Rather than stating that my film is a “mirror,” to the community, I state here that it is only one reflection that shows my own hermeneutic interpretation of the D.C. lesbian
community. In *Labor of Love’s* case, I chose to film events and interview lesbian leaders that would emphasize my particular point of view; a view that emphasized a current need for new community spaces for lesbian women in the D.C. area -- a need that otherwise would have gone unspoken.

As with any research project, the researcher must be able to identify and defend the need for a method of choice. Visual methods are no exception; ethnography with use of visual tools must be thoroughly investigated prior to embarking on a project. The importance of this step is critical to the setting and to the safety of the participants who will participate. In this project, visual methods were chosen to not only capture emotion, but to also share this emotion with the Washington, D.C. community at large. Pink (2001) notes that the context is the most determining factor about whether visual methods are ethical. In this context, visual methods were not questionable, as all of my informants were comfortable with the publicness of their lesbian sexuality. One leader noted, “How could I lead if I was not comfortable with my sexuality?” (Eva Freund, Video Interview, December 12, 2013). Thus, filming my informants, did not put them at a disadvantage, but instead, gave them agency. By recording their stories, I was making their stories visible and relevant to D.C.’s LGBTQ community at large.

The only potential risk to using visual material, such as video, during research, is that the researcher has less control over how the meanings of the visual product will be interpreted. Below Pink notes how one image can have multiple meanings, the same can be applied to the videos of women that I posted on the project’s website (www.laboroflovedc.org). Pink notes:

> The meanings of photographs are arbitrary and subjective; they depend on who is looking. The same photographic image may have a variety of (perhaps conflicting) meanings invested in it at different stage of ethnographic research and representation,
as it is viewed by different eyes and audiences in diverse temporal, historical, spatial, and cultural contexts (Pink, 2001, p. 51).

The purpose of Pink’s remarks is to encourage researchers who use visual methods to be prepared to deal with the multiple interpretations, and possible conflict that may arise while using it for their qualitative research.

**Data interpretation and media production**

My media ethnography fieldwork, was three-fold: (i) logging/capturing footage, (ii) transcribing and coding my interviews, (iii) editing different versions of the documentary and uploading clips to the *Labor of Love* website. The latter production process is connected to the former written process, as the video is the public and active portion of the written research. I will first describe the process of transcribing and coding the data and then describe the video editing process.

Throughout my media ethnography fieldwork, I logged and imported my video interviews via Final Cut Pro 7 media software. From there I exported each video interview’s audio for transcription. I was able to complete all 31 of these transcriptions with the assistance of a research intern. While reviewing the transcriptions completed by my intern, I highlighted codes/themes or sentences I found would be worthy of further analysis. Ruddock (2001) notes that, while interviews produce “thousands of pages of information that does not speak for itself; it is the researcher’s task to interpret the meaning of this data, and present their most salient features in a coherent form” (p.139).

There were many codes that emerged from the interviews, the two most common themes surrounding the success and failure of lesbian women’s spaces: (i) the safety of the space, and
(ii) the integration of lesbian culture with broader society. From these themes, I selected quotes that highlight the themes and included the diversity of my informants. This is part of the “triangulation” and constant comparative aspect of the analysis, one that verifies the validity of the informants and ethnographer positions. Gillespie (1995) states, “the criteria for selecting informant’s quotes and extracts are their typicality, clarity, relevance, and veracity in the eyes of other informants” (p. 74). These themes are fleshed out in Chapter Three: “Assessing Lesbian Space.”

In terms of the preparation for the screenings of the film segments, before the Dec. 13th screening event at the Washington Blade I prepared and exported several clips from my interviews in order to engage the community. The women I highlighted were a diverse range of lesbian women leaders in the community, including (in alphabetical order): Elizabeth Birch, former president of the Human Rights Campaign (HRC), Ebone Bell, managing editor of Tagg Magazine, Denise Bump, former owner of DC based lesbian bookstore (Lammas), Jackie Gilbert, former member of the DC Chapter of NOW (National Organization of Women), Susan Hester, founder of the Mautner Project (The National Lesbian Health Organization), Isabella Firth, co-founder of Bon-Vivant (lesbian social group of the 90s), and Papaya Mann, former president of Sapphire Sapphos (Black Lesbian Group). The goal of each clip was twofold: (i) to educate women about past and present-day lesbian spaces, and (ii) allow women to reflect the values and behaviors of the lesbian leaders that run them. For instance, the title of my first clip with Christina Catuerucci (Writer for Where The Girls Go) is called “Christina Catuerucci on Queer Blogging.” Within the video post on the website, I include a biography of the woman and their involvement with the community.
The 13-minute trailer I screened at the Washington Blade Offices on Dec 13th was a large success (See SPECIAL ADDENDA). Over 100 lesbian women from the community came to the event -- lesbian women and leaders that I as a researcher, had not yet met. The screening featured the lesbian women I mentioned above on the website who had run a lesbian community space. Each lesbian spoke about how important it was for women “to gather in large” groups and raised the question: where have these spaces gone? The diversity of women on the screen, as well as the diversity in the room, produced feelings of nostalgia amongst the community, while also pointing towards the need of a future space with the introduction of the D.C. Women’s Initiative in the film. The screening became an incredible site of study itself; as space where, I, as a filmmaker, member, and leader was able to evaluate the needs of the community at the event. In other words, the screening space became a community space where lesbians from all different backgrounds, ethnicities, and ages came together to discuss their needs.

**Conclusion**

Depending on the culture of the participants study, the innovative use of film and other forms of media, e.g. the Internet, can help the ethnographer engage her audience. Also, using film can be a way to involve lesbian leaders from both the past and present in the Washington, D.C. area. It is not the same challenge to conduct a traditional survey-based ethnographic study in a territory, than to turn the research project into a form of ethnographic action or circumstantial activism.

I have also made my own self-reflexivity an important part of this project in order to show that every element of producing and writing this multi-media ethnography is intertwined with my subject positions as a researcher, filmmaker, and lesbian leader of the community. I
became aware of my personal assumptions and internalized collective values (e.g. a need for new space) might interfere with the interpretation of my informant’s believes and their communal practices in everyday life. Thus, the methodological rigorousness of this multimedia ethnography is based on a bottom-up approach to community development, transparency of my research methods, and my role as a circumstantial activist. In the following chapter, I discuss the way in which the Washington, D.C. metropolitan area, as an urban, political, and transient space, affects the way in which lesbian leaders build their communities.

**CHAPTER TWO: SETTING THE STAGE**

This chapter sets up the analysis of the fading nature of lesbian space in the Washington, D.C metropolitan area. The goal of this chapter is study is to understand the difficultly lesbian leaders face as they attempt to produce and sustain long-term lesbian community spaces in the D.C. area. In order to understand this problem, one needs to examine how lesbian organizations develop and who develops them. The identification of the problems that prevent lesbian institutions from being “long-term” is not to be seen as my own, but as the reality of my informants lives (Ribes & Finholt, 2009, p.380). According to my informants, the organizations that are the most successful are the ones that are “inclusive” and “diverse.” (Bell, 2012; Bump, 2012; Carpenter, 2012; Mann, 2012; and Marloff, 2012). Throughout this chapter, then, I focus on how my informants, all of whom were at one time a leaders of a lesbian organization, articulate the way they achieve a safe and diverse space for lesbian women, which is based on the leader’s “Circle of Influence” (Ribes & Finholt, 2009). An organization’s circle of influence consists of three factors: visibility, capital, and space. Furthermore, within this discussion I will also include how the larger transmigratory processes of the Washington D.C. metropolitan area
and the prevalence of national LGBT organizations, such as the Human Rights Campaign, impact local lesbian space. Lastly, this chapter introduces a new local D.C. based lesbian organization, D.C. Women’s Initiative, whose goal is to build a new long-term community center to connect the women of Washington, D.C.’s LGBTQ community.

**Lesbian space at stake**

This study’s focus on the life of lesbian women’s space grew out of the discovery of what the Washington City Paper referred to as the “fading nature” of lesbian and queer women’s spaces (Hoover, 2000). While reflecting on the closing of *Lamma’s Bookstore*, a D.C. based lesbian owned bookstore, in 2000, Cheryl Spector, a local D.C. lesbian activist, said, “It was a wonderful feeling walking in here, knowing you had a safe space...This is a devastating loss for the lesbian community. All of our spaces are closing. Where are we going to go now?” (Hoover, 2000). Rather than being shut down because the bookstore was “gay,” it was shut down because of two reasons: (i) books selling is no longer a sustainable business model, and (ii) because of the effects of social desegregation on the lesbian community. Social desegregation is a process by which sexual minorities become more accepted by society at large. In other words, as the LGBTQ community becomes more widely accepted by the public, there is less urgency by LGBTQ people to create separate spaces for themselves (Hoover, 2000). Sylvia Colon, the last and final owner of *Lammas Bookstore*, explains, “Now, the environment is so much more accepting, so many more women are out. But there’s less of sense of community among lesbians, and many women no longer feel a need to support their bookstore” (Hoover, 2000). Since the close of *Lammas Bookstore*, the Washington, D.C. metropolitan area has not regained a new physical community space for women of the LGBTQ community. There are bars and several
one-off events, but not a space that replicates the sense of “community” women felt being in the Lammas Bookstore.

Denise Bump, a former owner of Lammas Bookstore, notes that Lammas was more than a bookstore, but a women’s movement. She said:

I ran Lammas for a couple years, those years were amazing because, um, Mother Tongue, sprung out of there. The very first, like women’s poetry slam, was up on the roof of Lammas. So they came and they were like, “Do you have some space? We just want to get this out there. We just want to start something. And that’s a movement. That’s a place where people gather and their ideas can be shared and it really sprouts into something because it’s a safe place to bring your ideas” (D. Bump, video interview, Oct. 17, 2012).

The “movement” Bump describes is a term to describe a space that does not just provide a space for women to gather, but a space that inspires civic engagement, consciousness raising, and relationships amongst women in the LGBTQ community, whether it be a poetry slam, the formation of a musical band, or support group.

When interviewing 31 lesbian leaders in the Washington, D.C. metropolitan area, my informants repeatedly mentioned that the integration of lesbians with larger society in the D.C. area made it less of an impetus to gather in one space. While integration, on one hand, means LGBTQ individuals are gaining more rights in the broader community, it also results in less civic engagement amongst the community members. Many of my informants also agreed that integration is more prominent in D.C., as opposed to other cities, because of the high effects of gentrification and transmigratory movement present within the Washington D.C. metropolitan area.

Ebone Bell, Managing editor of Tagg Magazine (D.C.’s Lesbian Magazine, See APPENDIX A), notes, “DC tends to be a transient state, you know, where you don’t get a lot of people staying here for very long. There’s a lot of people who come from all over and they
maybe live here for a few years or people who have lived here like a really long time, they move off” (E. Bell, video Interview, Sept. 11, 2013). These transmigratory processes are not unique to the D.C. lesbian community, but it effects the entire D.C. population. The difference, however, is that members of the lesbian community, are not only a sexual minority, but also suffer the economic disadvantages of being a woman. Not all women can afford to live in the Washington, D.C. area, thus the effects of gentrification and transmigration tend to push women out into the Virginia and Maryland suburbs.

According to “The DC Neighborhoods Profile,” issued by the Washington, D.C. Economic Partnership in February 2013, D.C.’s population has grown at a faster rate “than any other U.S. state and over the past four years D.C.’s residential base has increased by more than 43, 590 people. Fueling this population growth has been young professionals who are attracted to DC’s revitalized neighborhoods” (Fluker, 2012). The Washington D.C. metropolitan area is divided into four quadrants: northwest (NW), northeast (NE), southwest (SW), southeast (SE) Northwest is the located north of the National Mall and west of North Capital Street. It is the largest of all four quadrants and the neighborhood that has undergone the most redevelopment over the past ten years. Today, it has the highest market value and lowest rate of crimes compared to the other three quadrants. A D.C. resident notes, “Indeed, I see people moving in my neighborhood into homes and apartments that the previous occupants had to leave because they simply weren’t able to afford the higher rent, property taxes, and cost of living. Will they, like many of the indigenous people and cultures of the Americas, be wiped clean of our cultural memory the District and other cities experiences a renaissance” (Fluker, 2012). Historically, lesbian women have been economically disadvantaged and have been unable to sustain “safe” space in Northwest due the high market value. Also, as Northwest continues to grow, people of
color and the African American communities continue to be pushed out farther east, segregating the community.

It was the very recognition of these adverse effects on the community that prompted Denise Bump and others to form the D.C. Women’s Initiative. Bump notes:

The [DC] Women’s Initiative is a tiny little thought in a group of peoples’ minds when we sat down and we started talking and we were like, “Wouldn’t it be great to have something where women could gather? Like we used to have, and then there was the reminiscing...” Oh remember Lammas, when we had a bookstore and everybody would come and we would do drum circles on the roof?” And the reminiscing brings these big smiles and, like, this feeling of community...And it began to bubble a little bit and I realized, like, “Where do we go now?” And none of us could really come up with anything that was similar to those experiences we had.” (D. Bump, video interview, October 17, 2013).

The D.C. Women’s Initiative formed to overturn the transmigratory nature of lesbian space and to launch a new safe and welcoming physical space for the women of D.C.’s LGBTQ community. One might ask, then, what about the role of the D.C. Center? The D.C. Center, Washington’s LGBTQ resource center, began in 1995 and has since been relocated ten times. The D.C. Center has struggled to find a large space in the community to support the larger community. Today, it sits in a storefront located in NW, in Mid-City, near the corner of 14th Street and U Street. The space, however, can only hold a maximum of 100 people, restricting large events from taking place within the center. In addition, many women of the LGBTQ community note that they feel unwelcome and uncomfortable within the space. One informant notes, “it is not the type of place I would want to hang out in” (Anonymous, personal communication, February 10, 2013).

The co-founder of the D.C. Women’s Initiative, Denise Bump, is also on the board of the The D.C. Center. She originally joined The D.C. Center board to improve woman’s
programming in the area, however, she found that most of the energy was being spent trying to revamp the D.C. Center’s budget and not on the quality of the programming (Bump, D.C. Women’s Initiative Meeting, January 9, 2013). She also found it difficult work with the current male director, whom did not align with her goals to understand the needs and wants of women in the LGBTQ community. Realizing the bureaucratic constrictions of the D.C. Center, Bump found it necessary to work separately. Bump, thus, soft-launched he D.C. Women’s Initiative 2013, in order to increase visibility and establish their mission: to create a safe space for women of D.C.’s LGBTQ community.

The D.C. Women’s Initiative is one example of the many lesbian-oriented organizations that emerge to combat the adverse effects of gentrification and transmigratory movement on the DC lesbian community. While I will revisit the D.C. Women’s Initiative in Chapter three, the following section, details the three factors that influence the success and diversity lesbian spaces in the Washington D.C. metropolitan area in general, as noted by my informants: visibility, capital, and space.

Circles of Influence: Visibility, capital and space of lesbian communities

“It’s all about your circle of influence…It’s who you hang around…it’s who you choose to see…”(M. Ross, audio interview, April 21, 2012).

Many lesbian women in the D.C. area have created a variety of online and offline lesbian spaces in D.C., ranging from queer blogs to monthly dance parties over the past decade in order to make it easier for lesbian women to connect. To them these spaces serve as gateways and resources for women to meet other like-minded lesbian women in D.C. area. Despite their efforts to make these spaces diverse and inclusionary, however, the events still manage to attract
specific lesbian demographics and exclude others. Why is it that the Washington D.C. metropolitan lesbian community continues to remain segregated? This is not just due to the effects of gentrification and transmigratory processes as mentioned before, but also due to the exclusivity or inclusivity of lesbian space, which depends on the lesbian leader’s social network.

A leader’s circle of influence consists of three overlapping components: (i) visibility, how do promoters advertise or represent themselves? (ii) capital, what resources do they have? (iii) and space, where do they host events?

In an ideal world, an inclusive lesbian space will remain gender neutral and work with a diverse variety of people, and the space would be geographically be equally convenient for people living within all of D.C.’s four quadrants (NW, NE, SW, SE) of the city. In reality, however, not all lesbian organizations have the social and monetary resources to create this type of ideal diverse space. In the following section, I discuss each component of the circle of influence and how lesbian women go about negotiating the visibility, capital, and space of their community organizations, and how then these factors determine whether a leader’s circle of influence is inclusionary and/or exclusionary.

**Visibility.** One of the most important factors that influence the diversity of a community is visibility.Visibility, as measured by the D.C. lesbian community, is dependent on three variables: style/class, the naming of organizations, and the perceptual filter of the leader. In the following paragraphs, I describe each variable as it pertains to the Washington D.C. metropolitan area based on the information provided by my informants.

**Style and fashion.** A promoter’s circle of influence is primarily dependent on the way they advertise the “style” and “look” of their community. Megan McKellar, a steering committee
leader for the Her HRC event in DC, notes, “9 times out of 10...its goes on how you present
yourself” (M. McKeller, audio interview, March 17, 2012). Moreover, women are more likely to
go to events where they are going to find a partner or love interest that is their ideal type. For
example, a black lesbian that is interested in a white woman will not go to an all “black” event
(N. Carpenter, audio communication, April 21, 2012). Sarah Marloff, editor and chief of Where
The Girls Go (D.C’s Queer Women Blog) notes, “I mean if you put me next to a white
Georgetown kid and a black hipster, I’m going for the black hipster, cause it has nothing to do
with your skin color, it has to do with how you dress...”(S. Marloff, WTGG, audio interview,
March 16, 2012). It is thus rather natural for lesbian women, just like all people, to hang out with
members of their community that exhibit a similar sense of style to their own.

Naming. Another aspect of visibility that influences the inclusivity of an organization’s
circle of influence the title of the organization and the acronym (LGBT or LGBTQ, or terms,
lesbian, gay or queer) they associate with it. For instance, the creator of a social network for
lesbians in the DMV (D.C., Maryland, and Virginia area), called Lezgettogether.com, changed
the subtitle of social network to be more inclusive in order to attract more LGBTQ members to
her site. At first the site was given the subtitle, “a social network for lesbians.” After initial
feedback about the title’s exclusion of transgendered women, she changed the title to read,
“LezGetTogether: a social network for lesbians & queer-identified lovers of women” in order to
be more inclusive of woman that did not identify as lesbian.

This “naming” issue is not just an issue particular to the Lesbian community, but the
LGBTQ community at large. Sarah Marloff, Editor and Chief of WTGG, notes that the “T”
(Trans) and the “Q,” which sometimes stands for queer within the LGBTQ acronym, are rarely
used by organizations. She notes that while most organizations include the letter “T,” she also
feels as if the “T” is not “welcome anywhere” (Marloff, audio interview, March 16, 2012). Thus, merely including all the letters is not going to include everyone, it is about who is leading the organization and if they invite members of the “T” and the “Q” to their events.

**Perceptual filter.** A lesbian leader’s perceptual filter is dependent on her social-network, her class, and socio-economic background. When determining the diversity of a leader’s organization the following questions must be asked: How long has a lesbian lived in D.C.? Where are they from? What is their racial background? What social class are they in? All impact the form and influence of the leader’s organization and the spaces they inhabit. According to my informants, leader’s that are “transplants” to the D.C. area have an entirely different viewpoint lesbian culture, than local leaders. A transplant leader is a lesbian woman who moves to D.C. as an adult and to lacks the local cultural knowledge about the history of lesbian space in the D.C. area. Nikisha Carpenter, the leader of a monthly Wednesday lesbian event in the Washington, D.C. metropolitan area, *Women of Mova*, notes:

> They [transplant leaders] are only here for a short period of time, and they don't really know people, they don't know the community, they might go online, go to a couple of events, read the MW, and who do they see there? The resources are in certain niches of people that can advertise [e.g. The Washington Blade and Metro Weekly]. Or they think it is worth advertising to those publications, so those other people are just missed (N. Carpenter, audio interview, April 24, 2012).

In addition, Sarah Marloff, the editor-in-chief of D.C.’s premiere women’s queer blog, WhereThegGirlsGo.Com, notes that many publications in D.C. also reflect a “transplant” bias.

> I wish that certain publications, like the big ones in D.C., would look outside their realm of, like, Cobalt and Town and Nellie’s [three well-known gay-male bars in the D.C. area]. Oh, and then there’s Phase 1 [a lesbian bar], right? We’ll just throw them in. And it’s like there’s a lot more than that, and, like, maybe the average person won’t be able to get it, but, like, you’re a reporter, do your job. I can find out about multiple things going on in the city to write about...” (S. Marloff, video interview, August, 26, 2012).
According to Marloff, many transplant leaders only reach out to publications and organizations that are most visible in the city, and, the ones that are the most visible are the ones with the most money and social capital, but often lack social diversity. Thus, without intention, many LGBTQ non-profits in D.C., whom employ and/or recruit D.C. transplants as volunteers, often perpetuate the erasure of local LGBT history and the segregation that so often divides the lesbian community in the Washington D.C. metropolitan area.

**Capital**

“So it’s network and money! It really is, because the community will change, change every 3-5 years, people will move out to Virginia, Maryland or move on somewhere else” (N. Carpenter, personal communication, April 24, 2012).

In terms of capital, local lesbian leaders often have to choose to work with or against existing powerful LGBTQ organizations (e.g. Human Rights Campaign, a national lobbying group fighting for marriage equality) in D.C. to gain a voice and a space for their local organization. Twenty-seven out of my thirty-one respondents run their community sites as side jobs, with only three, having turned it into her own successful business focusing on LGBTQ needs. In order to be successful, women must network regularly to gain trust from existing LGBTQ organizations. Ebone Bell, Managing Editor of Tagg-Magazine, D.C.’s premiere lesbian magazine, notes: “I think it’s a D.C. mentality to do that with trust...Nobody helped me [to develop] women’s proms [capital queer prom], because I didn’t have anything to show, I didn’t have a previous event...that is how trust is built. It is through your resume and through your reputation” (Bell, audio interview, March 1, 2012). Bell outlines three components lesbian leaders must take to create a notable and trustworthy circle of influence in the D.C. community: (i) legwork, (ii) networking, and (iii) advertising.
Networking. To build up one’s circle of influence lesbian leaders need to perform consistent legwork, such as one to one meetings, networking (both online and offline), and advertising. This process, however, is exhaustive and challenging. Bell’s colleague, Kim Rosenberg and founder of Mixology, an offline LGBT dating service in the D.C. area, notes:

I was literally out 4-6 days of the week, always out showing my face, always introducing myself to people…it felt like establishing those relationships with people that are very well connected in the community” (K. Rosenberg, video interview, April 6, 2012)

Lesbian leaders who seek to develop a community space, however, are often turned down not just because they do not have a resume or the social resources to prove they can be successful. Thus, more often than not, competition between lesbian leaders becomes more apparent. Jacyn, designer of Prihm, a queer social network, explains a particular moment where she felt rejected by other lesbian leaders she felt were her sisters. She said, “I feel like women that try, get shot down, so many times, I mean if [we] are going to get shot down, and we already have been, by a woman of all people [ironically]” (E. Jacyn, audio interview, April 6, 2012). Thus, women who do not have the time or prefer not to network are going to be unable to gain the social resources to create a circle of influence that is ethnically and socially diverse.

Monetary capital. The expanse of lesbian leaders’ circle of influence is also largely dependent on how much monetary capital the leader is connected to. One of the reasons the Human Rights Campaign (HRC) is so visible in D.C. is because they have produced a culture of giving which has enabled them to bring out celebrities and important representatives of the marriage equality campaign. Related to the concept of visibility, the culture of giving became successful through the marketing of their logo, the blue square with a yellow equal sign. The creator of LezGetTogether.com, a lesbian social network specific to the Washington, D.C. metropolitan area, notes that wealthy national LGBTQ institutions often have the potential to
“create attitudes of what they call “gay elites” (Anonymous, audio interview, January 23, 2012). However, she notes that money is the only way in which organizations can become successful. She said, “that’s how you get in charge and advance your tasks” (Anonymous, audio interview, January 23, 2012). Thus, lesbian organizations, that choose not to be political and counter the D.C. networking mentality, will never be able to make as much impact as the organizations involved in the politics of networking and money. Bats, a writer for Where The Girls Go (a local queer blog) notes:

“I mean the most political thing that we do is that we actively throw parties that support trans communities. But that’s not really political, it’s just who we are as people...It’s such a political town, I think people just get tired of it. They need a break” (Bats, audio communication, January 21, 2012).

Space

“A lot of folks here are transplants, so they don’t feel attached to this neighborhood…I don’t feel upset about gentrification because I wasn’t born here...And I think that’s why we don’t have a big home for us [lesbians] that really 100% ours” (M. Ross, audio interview, April 21, 2012).

The breadth of an organization’s circle of influence is also dependent on how well leaders are able to create spaces that are easily accessible to lesbian women that live in the city. However, the largest spatial barrier is the “lack of gay spaces that have been historically open to females” (C. Catarucci, audio interview, January 21, 2012). Instead of working with or within gay male spaces, several female promoters said they would never want to host an event at Town or Nellies, gay male club spaces, because they associate the space as “gay” and “uncomfortable” (C. Cauterucci, audio communication, January 21, 2012; Anonymous, January 23, 2012).
In addition to the lack of lesbian owned space, lesbian leaders are also limited to the resident’s perception of mobility within the Washington, D.C. area. D.C. is only ten miles wide, but the design of the city makes it often difficult to navigate a short distance of two miles. Christina Cauterucci, writer for Where The Girls Go, notes, “No one [in D.C.] wants to go more than two neighborhoods away. We are throwing and co-hosting this big Friday event on H street next month [located in Northeast (NE) D.C.]...We are trying to reach out, but we are worried that H street is too far.” (C. Cauterucci, audio interview, January 21, 2012). Part of the reason in which Where The Girls Go decided to throw an event in the H street region is because most of the central clubs located in Northwest D.C. are gay-male owned. Thus, local lesbian leaders must experiment with locations that are less central because they are cheaper venues.

Conclusion

Since the early 2000s present-day lesbian leaders in the Washington D.C. metropolitan area have created more local online and offline spaces in D.C., such as PhatGirlChic.com, WhereTheGirlsGo.com, and Lezgettogether.com, which embody values such as diversity and inclusivity. The organization’s visibility, the leader’s access to capital (both social and monetary), and their spatial choices all determine how inclusive or exclusive an organization's circle of influence will be. Lesbian leaders must be constantly aware of the way in which their visible, capital, and spatial choices change over time, as it will change the way members of the community perceive the leader’s circle of influence. As people move in and out of the city, however, the lesbian community in D.C. still remains in ceaseless flux causing lesbian women to constantly renegotiate the visibility, capital, and space of their community’s circles of influence. While this chapter outlined the way in which lesbian leaders build diverse circles of influence,
the following chapter delves deeper into my informants interviews to discuss two important themes that effect local lesbian community space: (i) safety, and (ii) integration.

**CHAPTER THREE: ASSESSING COMMUNITY SPACE**

In this chapter I explicate the different meanings of lesbian community space, as well as the spatial needs I found noteworthy from my fieldwork and video interviews with lesbian leaders in the Washington D.C. metropolitan area. This chapter presents the findings as an ethnographical accounting of the study’s two research questions: (i) how satisfied are lesbian identified women with the current landscape of Washington D.C.’s LGBTQ community spaces? (ii) How can an ethnographic study help the community understand the landscape and perhaps improve civic engagement? These questions were designed to guide the analysis while the emerging themes show similarities amongst each participant’s cultural application of the themes while building lesbian community spaces in the Washington D.C. metropolitan area.

In the first part of this chapter I describe my informant's glossary of working definitions of spaces, concepts, and identity to inform the reader of necessary context of the term’s usage prior to delving into the analysis of their feedback. Then, in the second part of the chapter, I examine the valued themes associated with lesbian space in the Washington, D.C. metropolitan area. The content of this section is a result of a rigorous process to reduce the themes from my participant interviews. The following two themes emerged from my participants as common attributes that effect lesbian community spaces in the Washington, D.C. metropolitan region: (i) safety and (ii) integration. In addition to revealing thematic commonalities amongst the participants, this chapter reveals of multiple meanings of lesbian-oriented community space based on age, race, and class. Throughout this discussion I combine some of my informants
opinions, notes from my participant ethnographic observation among the lesbian community in the Washington, D.C. metropolitan area, and results from the D.C. Women’s Initiative spatial survey (See APPENDIX B). This critical point of this analysis is to explicate the variable needs of the lesbian community and multiple meanings of community space for lesbian women in the Washington, D.C. metropolitan area.

The lesbian leader participants

Thirty-one lesbian leaders participated in this study. All but four publicly identified as lesbians (as opposed to bisexual, transgendered, or questioning), two publicly identified as queer, and two identified as bisexual. All the participants had at one time remained a leader of a local lesbian socio-cultural organization for more than two years. This chapter presents the voices and themes from the interviews with thirty-one lesbian interviews, as well as anonymous comments from the 250 surveys collected by the D.C. Women’s Initiative between January and March 2013. Before I present the findings, however, it is important that I explicate working terms and organizations that the leaders used in order to bring clarity to their stories, visions, and communal needs.

Terms: Identity and organizational definitions

Identity

Coming-Out. Coming out refers to a lesbian leader participant making known for the first time to one or more person’s in her workplace or personal circles that she is a lesbian. Coming out is not a singular event, but a life-long process that a lesbian experiences as more and more people enter her professional and personal life circles.
Gay. Gay in reference to this study is a male-gender born man who partners and are sexually attracted to other men. The participants in the study acknowledge that the Washington, D.C. metropolitan area’s LGBT community is predominately gay.

Lesbian. Lesbian in reference specific to this study is a female-gender-born woman who partners with other women. The participants in this study believe that being lesbian is not a preference or lifestyle. Each participant in the study noted that lesbians might seek, maintain, and thrive to be in long-term and committed relationships.

Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Questioning (LGBTQ) LGBTQ is an acronym that refers to Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Questioning community members. Unlike LBTQ, this acronym is sometimes just used as LGBT, without the Q, but it is entirely dependent on the leadership of the organization.

LBTQ. LBTQ is an acronym that collectively, in this study, refers to Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender, and Questioning women of the LGBTQ (see definition below) community. This acronym dropped the “G” from LGBTQ while the DC Women’s Initiative formulated their new mission to create a new community space for women of D.C.’s LGBTQ community. Their mission reads as follows: “To create a safe and welcoming space for the diverse women of the LBTQ community and their allies in the D.C. area” (D.C. Women’s Initiative).
Organizations

*Bon Vivant.* A lesbian social group found in 1989 that threw events and social gatherings for lesbian women in “safe” spaces. The name literally translates into meaning “good liver.” To the co-founders of this organization, this translation means that their goal is to provide the lesbian community with a space to live well and be safe. In 1995, *Bon Vivant* came under new leadership and transformed into a non-profit that convened once a month in Northern Virginia for dining and dancing. It is noted by the president of the last board, Celeste Beaupre, that it “thrives because many women in their 30s and older have grown tired of the bar scene.” *Bon Vivant* ran out of funds and eventually closed in 2009 (Hoover, 2000).

*The D.C. Center.* Founded in December 2002, The D.C. Center was the newest incarnation of the LGBTQ community center in the Washington D.C. area. Before it emerged, the *Gay Community Center* existed periodically between 1972-1973 and then from 1979 - 1990. The *Gay Community Center* primarily offered AIDS support to groups in the late 1980s and ran into several financial difficulties and was forced to close in 1990. Similarly to the *Gay Community Center,* The D.C. Center has also struggled to keep a consistent space. It has moved three times and is currently located at a storefront at 1318 U St. NW, Washington, D.C. A board of directors and an executive director, David Mariner, runs The D.C. Center. While it houses many programs, such as Center Aging, Center Women, Center Cisexual, and more, the physical space of the center is small, with a maximum capacity of 100 people. It is also often regarded as “uninviting,” “small,” and “disorganized,” by several of my informants.

*Lammas.* Located at 321 7th SE, Washington, D.C., Lammas was founded as an arts & craft store by Judy Winsett and Leslie Reeves, and later owned by Mary farmer, Lammas became a
bookstore, community center for lesbians, and a performance space. It was an important space that encouraged women’s arts, activities, and events, such as poetry slams and feature artists. Mary Farmer sold Lammas to Jane Troxell, Rosa Fennel, Marge Darling & Susan Fletcher in March 1993, and it moved from the SE location to 1426 21st St NW. In 2000, the store moved again to 1533 17th St. NW, and a year later it closed in 2001. To many of my respondents, Lammas was more than just a bookstore, “it was a movement,” that encouraged art, poetry, and spirituality amongst the lesbians in the Washington, D.C. metropolitan area.

*Lesbian Services Program (LSP).* Lesbian Services Program is a community support program that met inside of the Whitman-Walker Health clinic from 1995 - 2009. While some of the programs focused on health-specific issues, such as depression and alcoholism, the most popular programs addressed social issues, such as a “Coming Out After Marriage” support group and a “Maybe-Baby” program for lesbian couples interested in adopting or having a child together. Between 1995 and 2009, LSP had its own space inside Whitman-Walker, however, in 2009, due to budget cuts, Whitman-Walker had to consolidate all of its services (HIV+ services, Coming Out Groups, and other health services) into one building called the Elizabeth Taylor Medical Center, located at 1701 14th St. NW, one block from the original building. My participants whom were apart of LSP describe this transition as a major loss to the lesbian community.

*Phase One.* Also, referred to as “The Phase,” is Washington D.C.’s oldest continuously open lesbian bar in the city located at 525 8th St. SE, Washington DC. It opened in 1970 and continues to be one of the principal women’s only (lesbian/bisexual/transgender) bars in D.C. The bar was opened by Allen Carol, whom continues to hold ownership to this day at the age of
Presently, The Phase’s manager is Angela Lombardi (35). Under her management, The Phase continues to evolve by throwing new themed parties to attract a variety of women, including local fundraisers, themed nights, such as Flannel Fridays, Topless Saturdays, and will occasionally host D.C. Drag King shows.

In the following analysis, I describe two important themes that influence the creation local lesbian community spaces in the Washington, D.C. metropolitan area: (i) safety and (ii) integration.

**Community safety**

“Safe, non-boozy, social space would be great.”

(Anonymous, comment, DC Women’s Initiative Survey)

Safety was a tangible and important theme that permeated the fundamental core of each lesbian leader’s life, work, and community. Safety was spoken about multiple times by every leader on virtually every level from personal safety to community safety. The first form of safety is tied to a general emotion and feeling of “comfort” a lesbian woman feels when surrounded by other lesbian women. The second form of safety is related to the condition of being protected from danger, risk, or injury. While the two forms of safety are interconnected, lesbian leaders often feel they have to overcome the latter to achieve the former.

**Safety for comfort.** Ellen Kahn, Director of LGBT families at the Human Rights Campaign (HRC) and former director of Lesbian Services Program (LSP), notes that the “safety” of lesbian space is dependent on whether or not the physical space reflects lesbian culture and history. When asked to describe the space of Lesbian Service Program (LSP), she highlighted
attributes of the physical space, such as the photography on the wall, which gave lesbian members a sense of safety and comfort. She notes:

There would be a door that people could walk through and really feel like they’re walking into their own space and everything was very intentional about that. You know, we had the Lesbian Lending Library, which was one of our signature things, the photos [of women] we had in the lobby, everything was very much, like, “This is your space.” (E. Kahn, video interview, February 2, 2013).

Kahn notes that *LSP* intentionally made lesbian identity visible on the walls of the space, evoking a sense of “safety” and comfort. Kahn also explained that gay men were welcome in the *LSP* space, but only lesbian-women were allowed to participate in the programs held within the space. Denise Bump, former owner of Lammas Bookstore and former member of *LSP*, notes that the difference between a space that is set-up for women and a space that is set up for men, is that lesbian space embraces feminine spirituality and “sacredness.” She notes:

There is just a very different need of what a space is to women as what it is to men...I can’t speak for all the lesbians out there, but just from my experience with Lammas and the Lesbian Services Program of Whitman Walker, what I think was really important to them was that when they walked in there were pictures of women and there were spaces that were exclusive to just women. Like, men didn’t come there and it was a sacred way to be...It’s not that we want men to stay out of it. Men could come into the Lamma’s bookstore, but the difference is, it’s set-up for women. That’s the difference.” (Bump, personal interview, October 17, 2012).

According the dictionary definition of “sacred,” when something is sacred it is regarded with great respect and reverence by a particular religion, group, or individual. In this case, the *LSP* space was not sacred in the religious sense, but sacred by the way in which it remained lesbian only. The space became a place where lesbians could connect with other women with similar life-experiences of “coming-out.”
Another reason why LSP was considered a sacred space is because it took years of community leg-work to build. Ellen Kahn notes that Whitman-Walker did not always have a space dedicated to lesbian women of DC’s LGBTQ community. Kahn explains:

> When Whitman-Walker was forced to respond to HIV/AIDS [beginning of 1980s] and essentially started becoming the premier HIV/AIDS service organization...many lesbians were involved. They were on staff, they were volunteers, they were visiting people at home, helping them out, being, just very engaged and supporting gay men who were affected by HIV/AIDS...And then Emily Zern (first director of LSP in 1990) and other women who’d been doing a lot of HIV/AIDS works went to the leadership of Whitman-Walker Clinic and said, “We have give a lot to the gay men’s health issues. We have stood with you on the front lines. We’ve raised money and we need more. We feel that Whitman Walker clinic needs to, sort of, own its mission as the lesbian and gay health center. (E. Kahn, video interview, February 11, 2013).

Kahn, as well as other lesbian Whitman-Walker volunteers, believed that lesbian women in the community deserved their own health-care and community infrastructure, which addressed the health concerns specific to lesbian-identified women, such as alcoholism, breast-cancer, depression, and smoking.

In response to Emily Zern’s request, Whitman-Walker Clinic happily granted the lesbian community their own, Lesbian Services Program, which facilitated the creation of discussion groups, such as, “Coming Out of Marriage.” Kahn explains the growth of the program:

> So LSP started to grow and, um, they started doing more health promotion and health awareness in the women’s community. We were able to start going to primary GYN screenings at Whitman-Walker...Barb Lewis, who still works at Whitman-Walker clinic as a provider, was one of the first providers and she’s a physician's assistant. So that’s really the advocacy of women who’d been involved helping Whitman Walker clinic kind of grow into addressing HIV/AIDS and being more of a health and wellness resource for the community, saying “We need our own space.” In the LSP space they had a group called “Starting Over,” for women who had ended a long-term relationship...We’d meet once a week for eight weeks or so, and you’d maybe make a couple of close friends in that group, so that’s a nice way to sort of expand your network” (E. Kahn, personal interview, February 12, 2013).
Before the introduction of LSP at Whitman-Walker, the medical services offered were primarily geared towards gay men (primarily related to AIDS/HIV). After the introduction of LSP, however, Whitman-Walker grew into more of a health, wellness, and community space for women to meet other women and expand their social network.

Similarly to LSP, The Mautner Project (1990 - Present), the national lesbian organization specializing in offering community support for lesbian women suffering from cancer, began out of a desire to offer lesbian-women the same health support gay men were receiving for HIV/AIDS related trauma. Susan Hester, the founder of The Mautner Project, notes that she created The Mautner Project to make lesbians recognize the fact that they also needed a space to care of themselves:

You know I think that lesbians were so glad to work on an issue that was relevant to them. Because we had spent a lot of time working in the AIDS movement, you know, cheerfully. People wanted to be involved with the AIDS movement. But women had given so much time to a movement, which at that time, was primarily focused on men...So I think what happened with The Mautner Project was that it was a great confluence of circumstances, in terms of the time and the experience, and that lesbians really came enforced into the project. One because it was a place to be in the community and it focused on an issue that was really about us. And I think women, in general, have a very hard time, taking care of themselves. You know, our culture, is to take care of everyone around us...and we have a hard time saying, you know, it can be about us. So the project came to be a place where people could be activists, and to also be social and to be connected with other lesbians....” (S. Hester, video interview, November 20, 2013).

While The Mautner Project still exists and holds an annual Gala Dinner and Fundraiser, which allows them to continue their work as a lesbian oriented health-care infrastructure, it no longer holds the original social space that allowed for other women to feel “safe” and “to be connected with women” (Hester, video interview, November 20, 2013). Similarly, in 2005, Whitman-Walker decided to condense all the programs into one building on 14th and R street, The Elizabeth Taylor Medical building. Due to budget cuts, Whitman-Walker had to transform itself
into a medical model so they could survive financially and bill their services through insurance. As a result, Whitman-walker could only focus on LGBTQ issues that could be made billable, which was limited to medical expenses, forcing the social programs and services to be dropped. For example, Whitman-Walker could not make the LSP’s “Starting Over” program, a social program designed to help women overcome a breakup, billable -- it was not classifiable as a medical necessity.

In reaction to the Whitman-Walker consolidation, Kahn and other lesbian women felt that the space no longer evoked the safety and sacredness it once had. While reminiscing about her latest medical check-up at Whitman-Walker, she notes, “And it really is a different experience. You know, I went into the waiting area and, say 70% Of the folks are men and very diverse group of men...There were women with children I could pick out, but it was not, you know, my space...” (E. Kahn, video interview, February 11, 2013).

Lesbian Services Program was a safe community space where lesbian-women, of all ages and backgrounds, could find a source of wellness and comfort in the community, outside of the few club and bar spaces that existed for lesbian-women, such as the Hung Jury (1819 H St NW), 1984-2002, The Other Side (1345 Half St SE) 1978-1988, and The Phase One (525 8th St. SE) 1970 – Present. Today, however, Whitman-Walker only holds one support group for lesbian woman called, “Coming Out - Women,” a 10-week confidential discussion group for women exploring their interest in women, it is offered 2-3 times a year.

In the following section, I will describe the reasons why lesbian leaders saw the bar and club space as in opposition to “safe” spaces, such as the Lesbian Services Program at Whitman Walker Clinic.
Lesbian women are often “turned off” by bars due to the fact they have been historically dangerous spaces for lesbians. The creators of Bon Vivant (1989-2004), a now defunct lesbian social group, decided they needed a “safe” space due to a particularly dangerous and life-threatening incident that occurred outside a lesbian bar. Michaela McNichol, co-founder of Bon-Vivant, notes:

There was a shooting incident [in 1988] that made this need come to the forefront for me. Margo Fitzpatrick [co-founder of Bon Vivant] and I were with three friends and we were coming out of a women’s bar and restaurant [Mitchell’s] and the bars and places we could meet at in the 80s were not in the best parts of town..and we when were coming out of the restaurants with our friends and a group of young men came running at us with guns and they were shouting “Dyke! Get em!” and they were laughing, mocking us, and laughing and shooting. So we got out of there pretty quickly. And a couple of blocks later we were shot at. The glass window of the car was shot in and we got a few blocks away and we found a police officer. And we went to him and thought he will help us cause there were people shooting as us. He will write a report, he will help us. And he completely disregarded our need for help and he actually questioned us and turned it into a flirtatious event and said, “What are good women like you coming out of a bar like that?” And that was unbelievable to me. So when Margo approached me with the idea of Bon Vivant. I immediately, thought, safe, we could make a safe place for women...” (McNichol & Fitzpatrick, video interview, Dec 1, 2012).

Thus it was the unsafe locations of lesbian bars that prompted the creation of Bon Vivant. In the 1970s and 1980s, the location of Phase 1, a lesbian bar located in the South East quadrant of Washington, D.C, posed similar threats to lesbian attendees. Jean Homza, a long-term patron of the Phase 1 and current bar manager of the 9:30 club describes Phase 1’s transformation:

This [area], South East, didn’t turn around until maybe 2002. All of a sudden this became the next place on Capitol Hill that was a commercial zone and you could open up nice restaurants and, you know, DC’s been owning that for the last 15 years and really been
pushing, and that’s good, and that’s what turned this neighborhood around. Because it was not safe and that’s why we have that partition [She points to the front door of the Phase] there because people would thrown the door open and throw shit in. Milkshakes. They’ve had gunfire but not in my time and, um, you know, just a lot of bad things would happen at that door. So that’s why that partitions there, literally. So people can’t just come and gawk, you know, because that was a huge part of it. And even now you don’t want it. You can’t discriminate so you can’t turn straight people away or you have to be awfully damn creative and not break the law (J. Homza, video interview, February 7, 2013).

While the area in which *The Phase* is located has improved, the audiences of women that attend the events are generally women between the ages of 21-35. Lesbian women 35+ do not feel comfortable in the space, as they have “out-grown” the bar (Alterman, 2013; Brown, 2013; Bump; 2013; Crenshaw, 2013; Firth, 2013; Kahn, 2013; McNichol, 2013). Or, they feel as if it is no longer a space, where they successfully find a partner.

Age is a huge factor that determines the how lesbians feel about the overall safety of a community space. Isabella Firth (50), another co-founder of *Bon Vivant*, notes that she could benefit from a new community space in the city even though she has since married and moved outside of the city.

I do think there is a need for an organization, a place, a destination for women, especially a place for women that are interested in being around other women. And I do think it would be nice if it wasn’t in a bar, that is dark, and loud, and smoke, well not smoky anymore, but it used to be smoke filled. I think that for me, I think I would go to a place, if there was a compelling, provocative reason to go, you know, a speaker a topic, talking about something that is interesting to me...and I think doing something that is connected to a cause is a good way to bring people together. Women are naturally drawn to causes... (I. Firth, video interview, Nov. 11, 2012)

Firth also mentioned that a space centered around a cause, could also bring lesbian women from different generations together, to bridge the gap between the young and the old.

According to Ellen Kahn, lesbian couples who have kids, no longer have the same social needs as a young (21-30) single lesbian women looking to meet people in the city. Kahn notes that after she was married and had kids, her social network drastically shifted. She said that it is
not that she no longer felt “the need to feel safe and part of a community...it’s just different...it’s just what you need is different what you might have needed as a single person or as, a younger person.” (E. Kahn, video interview, February 11, 2013). In other words, lesbians who are married and 40+ will not utilize a community as much as the lesbians between the ages of 21-35, as their goals are now focused on family building. Kahn notes. “So this demographic of women that are married and have kids and also women that are not married and do not have kids, are looking for a similar space to LSP to engage with people in daylight. But it seems like a lot of the culture, of LGBT culture now, is centered around, um, national agendas, which is not a bad thing, it’s just very unique to D.C. I think and so the local sort of becomes neglected and so the only other spaces are, like, The Phase...” (Kahn, video interview, February 11, 2013).

The question is, where do lesbian-women, who do not enjoy atmosphere and culture of lesbian bars go? Are there spaces? If there are not, what spaces would they would want and need? These questions lead us to a description of a process of what my participants refer to as the integration of or broader acceptance of lesbian culture into the larger heteronormative world.

**Community integration**

Part of the loss of the Lesbian Services Program space and other similar types of non-bar spaces for lesbian women, such as Lammas bookstore, can be linked to what my participants call “integration” or social desegregation. Social desegregation is the process by which members of the LGBT community gradually become integrated with the broader heteronormative world. Angela Lombardi, General Manager of Phase 1, notes, “I can go anywhere, I can go to Bennigan’s (grill and tavern restaurant) with my girlfriend and make out with her and the chances of something horrific happening to me are slim to none, except for maybe food
poisoning. We have the ability to go anywhere. We’re not just competing with gay bars anywhere either, you know...It’s like lesbians can go anywhere” (A. Lombardi, video interview, January 17, 2013).

**Integration & technology.** In addition to the changes in the overall political acceptance of LGBT people at a macro-level, the advent of social media on the Internet has also contributed to social desegregation. Lesbians in the Washington, D.C. metropolitan area no longer need to leave the house to meet other women, but can log online to various social networks, Facebook, and online dating sites, such as OkCupid to connect with other lesbian women. Kahn notes, “I do think there’s kind of an evolution of [space]...because people can connect by logging onto their computer and that a lot of folks are...a lot of spaces feel welcoming and safe, even though they’re not queer-specific. Like, you know, it’s not unusual to go into restaurants and bars and see same-sex couple hanging...” (E. Kahn, video interview, February 11, 2013).

Today, community spaces have evolved to also include virtual spaces of connection. For example, in recent years, local lesbian leaders also created local social networks online to connect lesbian women such as, LezGetTogether.com and lesbian and queer friendly blogs, such as WhereTheGirlsGo.com.

The Web and recently other more mobile forms of social media technologies have been popularly conceptualized as liberational and emancipatory tools and spaces for lesbians and queer populations (Munt et al, 2002; Wasserlein & Sween, 2005; Alexander, 2002). Online space relieve lesbians and other minority populations from having to endure the harassment often provided by the “heterosexual street,” as well as being confined the “margins of the “ghetto” and the back street bar and preferably, the closeted or private space of the home (Valentine, 1996, p. 145). Online spaces, particularly social media sites, have been highly effective in
bringing like-minded lesbians in remote areas together (Wasserlein & Sween, 2005). Lesquire’s pub, an online social gathering of lesbians created in 2002, did just this. The creator of Lesquire had a dream to create a sustainable community form which she could share her personal lesbian experience and read others. Lesquire is an example of the way in which lesbians use the internet to foster a safe, separate, and alternative space to the “heterosexual street,” “back street bar,” and the closet (Wasserlein & Sween, 2005).

In addition, lesbian-oriented social media sites, such as Gaygirls.com in the UK, (Munt, Bassett, & O’Riordan, 2002), operate as a “forum for the transfer of (sub)cultural capital” (p.130). These online spaces for lesbian women function as sites of knowledge production and growth, where lesbians can go to evolve and learn about the “aspirational ideal(s) of lesbian” sexuality (Munt, et al, 2002, p. 130). According to a study conducted in 1996, however, scholars found that women “had to negotiate the sometimes difficult terrain of electronic co-existence with a diverse group of lesbians and/or bisexuals” (Wincapaw, 2000, p.45). While all the women share one thing in common, their sexuality, online, there are also several other factors of diversity that inhibit community formation, such as class, race, gender-expression, and more. Not everyone has access to online space, nor the skills to use it. Thus, the same forms of racism and segregation that occur in the broader world occur in online lesbian spaces as well. One respondent from Wincapaw’s study notes, “What I’ve experienced is a discounting of black womyn’s experience within the community of womyn-loving womyn-both on-line and in the hardworld” (Wincapaw, 2000, p. 55).

Furthermore, the web is often seen as way of expanding identity and encouraging new forms of sexual exploration (Szulc & Dhoest, 2012). Yet, despite it’s “flexible” interface, the Web replicates, if not, carries over the same forms of exclusion and heterosexism that originated
offline. For example, Alexander (2002) notes that LGBT home-pages, which he refers to as “homo-pages,” often lose their liberational qualities because lesbian women are forced to adopt a standard set of design procedures and options, thus removing the queer intentions of the community space. In other words, online space can only represent a partial view of the community, albeit the virtual, false, and someone aspirational aspects, of one’s personal identity (Alexander, 20002, p. 91).

Other scholars, however, argue that as lesbian communities move online it will limit the need for establishing new offline community social spaces (Pulle & Cooper, 2010). Yet, there is a significant lack of discourse that explores how lesbians feel about the effect of online spaces on their local offline & physical communities. This chapter hopes to shed light on this argument based on my participants’ conceptualization of space. In the following section, I list the results from the D.C. Women’s Initiative Survey, which was designed to capture a preliminary assessment about the desire for and potential uses of a new lesbian-focused women’s space in the Washington, D.C. metropolitan area. The results of the survey reveal that despite the existence of several online sites for lesbian women in the D.C. area, the women still desire new physical space to connect.

**Survey Results: What do lesbians want & need.**

Despite the fact that all of my informants participants are comfortable with being “out” and the overall safety for lesbians in the public space in the Washington, D.C. metropolitan area has improved over the years, a survey conducted by the D.C. Women’s Initiative reveals that lesbian women still desire a *physical* community space to gather and connect with other like-minded lesbian women [See Appendix B for Survey]. According to the results of the D.C. Women’s Initiative Spatial Survey, out of 178 responses 54.1% strongly agree, 39.6% agree, 5%
neither agree nor disagree, 0% disagree, and 1.2% strongly disagree with the following statement: “the Washington, D.C. metropolitan area is in need of a new Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer (LBTQ) Women’s Community space.”

Another interesting outcome of the survey is that the highest rated potential uses of the new space our of seven potential uses, including a social/meeting space, a visual performing arts, workshops/classes, a networking/professional event space, a support groups, a health/wellness program space, speakers/lectures, and retail space (woman-made goods), was a “social/meeting space.” Below this question, the survey respondents had the option to comment on the potential use of the new space. In Figure 1, I have selected seven specific quotes that highlight the need and desire by lesbian women for a new “social/meeting space.” I have also included the age range of the women who commented on the potential use.

**Figure 1. Selected Comments under Potential Uses for the D.C. Women’s Initiative New Community Space.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Comment #</th>
<th>Comment</th>
<th>Age Range</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>“I believe it’s most important to allow women to have a space for collective socializing as I feel that’s a current void in the community.”</td>
<td>21-30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>“Most spaces for us are for partying. We need more opportunities for education, arts &amp; performance, &amp; community support.”</td>
<td>31-40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>“Only been in area close to a year but there does seem to be many options to socialize with LBTQ women outside of clubs/lounges and these spaces mostly only cater to women on specific nights or special events. After meeting more women it would be great to have a space to count on for gatherings other than clubs/lounges.”</td>
<td>21-30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>“Social/meeting spaces would be awesome. Nice change from dark club.”</td>
<td>21-30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comment #</td>
<td>Comment</td>
<td>Age Range</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>“It would be so nice to have a women's social place to go. Where you could hear music, read a book, play a game, have a conversation, get a bite to eat, meet other women...of ALL ages and cultures. I also think that it is time that we talk about LGBTQ aging.”</td>
<td>61-70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>“I have benefited from Whitman Walker's support programs for coming out, but I think it would be great if a women's space could take over or supplement some of these types of groups. I would hope that a new space in the lesbian community could lead to the creation of a more ongoing type of support group/network that does not end after a set number of sessions.”</td>
<td>31-40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>“The LBTQ community in DC is fractured and often overlooked. A place where women can meet, learn, and grow is needed.”</td>
<td>21-30</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The theme of “safety” also appears in the comments from this survey. Comment #4 denotes a desire to have an alternative to the “dark club” spaces available to women of the LGBTQ community. In addition to this desire, Comment #7, also notes that her perception of the D.C. lesbian community is “fractured” and divided up into many organizations, which makes it difficult for women to “meet, learn, and grow.” More importantly, women from different age-ranges are stating similar concerns. For example, younger women, between ages 21-30, are expressing the same spatial concerns as women from 31-40 and 61-70.

Moving forward, however, it is important that the D.C. Women’s Initiative conduct a further needs assessment, to understand what woman would want out of a new “social-meeting space.” This potential use could lead to difficulties of execution, as the concept of a “social-meeting space” is rather broad and can take on a variety of activities and meanings depending on the lesbian-woman’s circle of influence: visibility, capital, and space. Despite this generality, the
clearest statement taken from the survey is that the women want an alternative to the closet, and most importantly, an alternative to the bar.

**Conclusion**

The purpose of this ethnography is to understand the most valued components of lesbian-oriented community space through the voices of lesbian leaders and lesbian community members. As an ethnographer, I have done my best to discover and interpret the cultural meanings embedded within this connected group of lesbians. To do this, I’ve included excerpts from transcripts of my subject’s audio and interviews to describe experiences and to lend credence to the legitimacy of their experiences. The excerpts and stories reveal two thematic commonalities: (i) the safety of a lesbian space, and (ii) the effects of integration on the need for sexuality-specific spaces. Based on the interviews, safety affects lesbian realities in two forms: (i) safety as in a desire to feel the comfort of other women, and (ii) a form of safety that protects lesbian women from dangerous and unhealthy environments, such as bars. Secondly, not only is lesbianism a more widely accepted lifestyle in the Washington, D.C. area, the access to the social networking sites has also contributed to the decline of offline lesbian space. Despite the proliferation of tools available to connect online, however, the D.C. Women’s Initiative survey results underscores the notion that lesbians still desire a new space for lesbians to connect and foster community.

As a result of this assessment, this chapter makes public the tools, surveys and programs, lesbian leaders in the Washington, D.C. metropolitan area used to create a safe and comfortable space for lesbians. The comments from the D.C. Women’s Initiative survey underscores the understanding that the Washington, D.C. metropolitan area needs to improve the social, cultural, and educational programs available to lesbian women of the D.C. area. The question about
whether or not integration has been healthy or not is still yet to take fruition as the D.C. Women’s Initiative begins the process of finding and building a new community space for lesbian women in the Washington, D.C. metropolitan area.

**CHAPTER FOUR: REFLECTIONS ON THE MULTIMEDIA PROCESS**

I began this thesis project with the quest to understand the spatial and communal needs of lesbian identified women in the Washington D.C. metropolitan area. My main purpose was to use the knowledge gained to not only theorize processes and mechanisms through which lesbian community spaces emerge but to also to provide a lens from which lesbian leaders can see how their organization fits into the history of lesbian space in the Washington, D.C. metropolitan area. This chapter provides a reflection, not only on the findings of this research, but also on the entire ethnographic process. It combines my fieldwork summaries with my own personal methodological and political considerations of using film in a research context. And lastly, it grapples with the multimediated fieldwork experiences that led to a rigorous post-fieldwork self-questioning.

During the defining stages of this research I struggled with the choice of an appropriate methodology for exploring lesbian spaces within the Washington, D.C. context. My initial choice was going to be archival and interview based. However, after many discussions with other community members and scholars, it led me to multimedia ethnography. Multimedia ethnography would allow me to not only rethink how a research project could utilize my skills as a filmmaker, but to also consider how a research project can engage with both the academic, film, and lesbian communities in the D.C. area simultaneously. Rather than merely documenting
and writing about this movement and culture of lesbian community space, I could now visualize my research to the community as a means to foster discussion about a new community space.

In order to engage a wider audience, I needed to diversify the histories and interview lesbian leaders from both the past and the present. Therefore, in 2011 I began to make contacts with lesbian leaders from organizations that provided lesbian women a social space to gather. These organizations or spaces, some defunct, are *The Gay Women’s Alternative* (GWA) (1980-1993), *Sapphire Sapphos* (1980-1990), *Bon Vivant* (1988-2005), *Lammas Bookstore* (1973-2001), *Lesbian Zipcode Groups* (1980 - Present), *Lesbian Services Program* (LSP) (1995-2006), *PhatGirlChic.com* (2005-Present) *LezGetTogether.com* (2011-Present), *Where The Girls Go* (2005-Present), and more (See APPENDIX A). During fieldwork, I used the interviews with the leaders of each organization, as well as their archives, as a means to understand what community means to the participants and leaders. I had the privilege of interacting with thirty-one lesbian leaders living in the Washington, D.C. metropolitan area. These included lesbian identified women whom at one time helped build a local socio-cultural organization for lesbian women in the Washington, D.C. metropolitan area.

The entire research process was guided by my understanding of current theories of ethnography and anthropology. Moreover, the knowledge I produced through this study was also filtered through my subjective human experience as a researcher, D.C. transplant, and lesbian identified woman. Therefore the findings of this study it is not total, but partial knowledge production through my personal perspectives, values, and interpretation of specific local forms of knowledge in the Washington, D.C. metropolitan area. I also believe the multifaceted nature of this research process, including the production of the film and the public screenings of the film,
places upon me, as the researcher, a responsibility that requires critical reflection on the various ethnographic interactions I engaged in.

The most interesting and challenging part of this research was the fact that I never really had a clear defined line between what was in the field and what out of the field. Indeed, the fact that I regularly socialize in the spaces that are considered “my field sites,” made it seem as though I never fully left the field. Due to the lack of distinction between being in and out of the field, my main concern was with the interpretation of the data I gathered. My primary focus on the field understanding the need and desire for a new lesbian community space. This focus, however, also directed me towards the problematics of the research process. The problematics included who was included and excluded from the project. For example, one of the largest critiques has been that there could have been more lesbian women of color representation in the film.

Similarly to Lengel (1997), a feminist ethnographer, I began to wonder if my interest in conducting a research project about lesbian community spaces was solely motivated by the need to obtain material to be used for my own purpose to graduate form my masters program only or if was also for the benefit of the community. I also question if I can simply highlight the interpretations I generate from the raw material without considering critical and problematic moments during fieldwork that impact that entire multimediated ethnographic process. To these questions, I underscore the critical need for post-fieldwork reflexivity. While the research process findings are important, in this field of work it is even more important to carefully consider what fieldwork experiences prompt the researchers to remember the implications of their research and why they are conducting it.
From my own fieldwork experiences, I learned that it is important to envision your informants as people who have their own agendas and realities that, in most cases, are different from that of your own. Fieldwork can also show moments of difference and affinity between the researcher and the informants. And it is the constant negotiation of these instances of difference and affinity in the field that allows the researcher to see participants as cultural producers in their own right, people with whom interactions are worth exploring and pursuing. The ability to hold such notions about participants, in most cases, requires extreme researcher attentiveness both in and out of the field. This is because fieldwork problematics are often rendered invisible by the research findings. Therefore, in the next paragraphs I highlight important “off-camera” interactions that impacted my research findings.

There were several “off camera” moments that underscore the negotiation of class, cultural, and educational differences between researcher and the participants. My interactions with one of my key informants, Denise Bump, can help elaborate these issues and highlight negotiation as a key ethnographic concern.

In addition to several formal interviews, I had the privilege of becoming good friends with Bump and several interviews. I first met Bump on my early days in the field (June 2012) at a lesbian potluck. One of our mutual friends introduced us and it was here that I learned that she was a former owner of Lammas Bookstore. After a week passed, I followed up with Bump to see if we could find a time to chat about my documentary research project.

Two weeks later, I met Bump at her office where I told her about the research project and my inspiration: the lack of civic engagement among lesbians in the Washington, D.C. metropolitan area. Bump, without much hesitation, became interested in helping fund my project. In a follow-up email she noted: “This project is especially interesting for me as I am attempting
to open a *NEW SPACE* for women in the DC metro area with an Initiative called The DC Women’s Initiative” (D. Bump, email communication, August 15, 2013). It was at this point that I realized that this project was no longer a historical investigation, but a project that could document a movement of women trying to build a new community space.

After I began to follow the D.C. Women’s Initiative endeavors, such as reading their email threads and filming their day-to-day meetings, Bump asked me to join the group and possibly help lead the group. She noted that she did not have the time or energy to devote to the group as she wanted, and thought I, as a young lesbian in the community, could help her.

I had to think about this. I was not expecting to participate in the group, I just saw myself as a researcher, hoping to document and obtain information for my thesis project. But after some consideration, I realized that my participants had different expectations than I and that they wanted the group to be successful. I then saw this as an opportunity to not only have more access, but to participate in a community movement. Once on-board, Bump wanted to meet to talk about the visual image of the D.C. Women’s Initiative. Being a white upper-class woman herself, and I, a young white female, Bump was concerned about the diversity of our image.

In addition to Bump’s concern, another lesbian leader, Michelle Ross, Founder of PhatGirlChic.com, a social calendar for queer women of color, noted that she had the impression that the D.C. Women’s Initiative catered and appealed to an exclusively white audience of lesbian women. She suggested that the D.C. Women’s Initiative webpage should to reflect images of lesbian women that come from a diverse array of backgrounds.

Whereas this interaction and suggestion seems typical, it became one of the fieldwork moments that continually defined and reminded me of the color of my skin. This interaction made me realize that the participants wanted to know more about my research goals. It was this
very concern for diversity that helped me realize how important it was to look outside of the
spaces I felt comfortable in. It also helped me realize that this project needed to be continually
negotiated throughout all my ethnographic interactions. For example, if I was interacting with an
informant from a defunct organization I gained rapport by appealing to their desire to archive
their past. If I was appealing to a present-day leader I had to appeal to their desire to collaborate
and build a new space to that we could both benefit from.

Nonetheless, in the middle of producing my film and interviewing women, Bump’s desire
to diversify the D.C. Women’s Initiative image consistently reminded me to critically examine
my class, race, culture, gender, and biases, in the same vein as I examine the meaning of lesbian
community building practices within the Washington D.C. metropolitan area. To all my
informants, when asked about my affiliation and goals with Labor of Love, I used two distinctive
identity markers. First, I aligned with them personally by telling them the difficulty I had finding
a local lesbian community when moving to the Washington, D.C. metropolitan area. Secondly, I
describe myself as a lesbian who has decided to conduct her primary thesis research within her
own community. The latter underscores the challenge a researcher faces when conducting
research within her own social circles. This became further complicated by my involvement in
the D.C. Women’s Initiative.

Although I am now a member of the Washington, D.C. lesbian community, I had a split
identity throughout the research project. In many ways my identity as a transplant from
California and my role as a Georgetown graduate student made it difficult for me to assume the
total native persona my participants have. I mistakenly ignored this dual identity thinking it
appeared much like Bumps’ and the other participants I interacted with. I also overlooked the
color of my skin, when interacting with others of different races.
Whereas my similarities, based on my sexuality, granted me access to and respect from most of my participants, I must state that for other potential participants, it had the opposite effect. A few people refused to be interviewed by me, not only because they did not want to be on camera, but they found the project to be exclusive of women only. In specific cases, especially with men, it was clear gender was an issue. David Mariner, the Executive Director of the *The D.C. Center*, saw my project as a threat to his organization. After watching the 13-minute preview of the film project on December 13th at the Washington Blade, David Mariner wrote the following in an email correspondence with me:

> The storyline of your movie seems to be that there is not currently as space that is friendly and welcoming to LBT women in the District and that there are a group people setting out to build one. This is naturally, a little heart breaking for me since I’ve spent the last five years striving to create such a space, and we continue to work towards that goal. There are many wonderful events that happen at the DC Center for lesbian/bi women and the transgender community (D. Mariner, email communication, Jan 21, 2013).

His main concern was rooted in this question: Why would the D.C. Women’s Initiative try and replicate the goals of *The DC Center*? This question is valid, however, based on the survey results, as stated in the previous chapter, lesbian women are not satisfied with the current community spaces available to them. Nonetheless, Mariner remained saddened by the prospect of the project. This is unfortunate, as his point of view would have enriched the history of lesbian leadership at the D.C. Center from a male perspective.

It was later discovered that part of this distrust he felt was built on an unsteady relationship that Denise Bump had with Mariner. My affiliation with Bump is part of the reason he refused an interview. In this instance, my identity as a researcher was transformed to be one that aligned with the goals of the Bump and D.C. Women’s Initiative, rather than for my role as a ethnographer interested in understanding the spatial needs of the lesbian community.
Despite the denial of access based on affiliation with D.C. Women’s Initiative, I still find several affinities I share with the participants. My understanding of lesbian culture offered me a subject position that partially connected me with the participant’s desire for a new community space to socialize in. For instance, my knowledge about lesbian community spaces in the Washington, D.C. area made it easy for me to gain the trust of the participants. “This girl did her research,” as they would often say. Most participants were delighted to have me come to their home, offering me food and water. I remember one participant sat down and took me through an entire box of personal mementos and archives from her work in the lesbian community during the 1980s. It was an act that also provided an extraordinary access into the most intimate aspects of this participant’s life stories. In addition, the connection that I struck with this particular participant became the foundation for a relationship that we have both been able to sustain beyond the fieldwork. I continue to communicate with this participant through emails and phone calls.

I recount these instances of connectivity together, as well as the differences to demonstrate the complexity of the subject-positions I occupied throughout the duration of project. This thesis by no means purports to speak “for” the participants I engaged with; neither does it seek to perpetuate stereotypical representations of lesbian subjects. I emphasize this because the knowledge produced through this research occurs within a complex and fluid ethnographic research process embedded within broader social relations. My findings should always be seen as interpretive and partial, yet also making visible stories that are often untold about the documentation and preservation of lesbian history, sexuality, power, and gender as they pertain to broader LGBT contexts. In addition, I hope that through this thesis the reader and researchers will begin to see lesbian leaders as active subjects who resist economic and social
subordination in order to create a social space for themselves. For this purpose my analysis does not enable or encourage dominant and stereotypical images of Washington, D.C. as a politically liberal city, but a city with varied opinions and diversity.

I analyze the stories of my research informants highlighting the contexts, histories, and everyday political struggle they engage in to improve the social infrastructure for their community. For instance, my analysis of the discourse of safety evident within the communication materials and interviews with women of the D.C. Women’s Initiative acknowledges how women in their own ways resist spaces that are unwelcoming to women, such as the bar scene and gay-male club space. Here I explore the participant’s interpretation and experiences of building a lesbian community space in the Washington, D.C. metropolitan area. I use the participants’ stories to theorize ambivalences that challenge the establish norms of what defines a lesbian community space. This finding suggests the various ways in which lesbian leaders seek to challenge the perceived dominate social and economic position of gay men in the LGBTQ community. I therefore, conclude that the D.C. Women’s Initiative has become a cultural force that reinvigorates wider social problems associated with community building, gender, sexuality, and power. Lesbian community spaces should be seen a phenomenon that has given renewed impetus to create more civic engagement among the community at large.

CONCLUSION

To conclude this thesis I want to explain not only how multimedia ethnography can educate your community of study, but how it can promote action amongst them. To engage the community and possibly find more women to include in the study I launched a fundraising campaign to assist the production of the film and additional research costs. I used a crowd-
funding platform entitled, StartSomeGood.com to raise money for the film portion of the research project, *Labor of Love*. People whom I interviewed, my friends, and colleagues were all invited to help contribute to my cause, “Preserve Lesbian History in Washington, D.C.” Where as some people donated $10 and others donated up to $1,500, it was through the power of the crowd or community that I was able to spread the message of the need to make a film to not only preserve and document history, but to help the D.C. Women’s initiative build a new physical community center to house it. In the end, my campaign successfully raise $14,720 dollars to fund the project and I was surprised by the generosity of friends and strangers. It was through the process of running *Labor of Love’s* fundraising campaign that questions raised by investors and participants expectations led me to re-envision a new and different direction for this project.

The lesbian woman that donated to the project wanted it to remain exclusively lesbian-oriented and to serve as a voice for their own ideas of what constitute a lesbian and woman-only space. I became accountable for creating a project that not only fit their idea of what a woman’s community is, but also one that safe and inclusive of all types of women within D.C.’s LGBTQ community, including non-cisgender identifying women. It was here that I was reminded of Bump and Ross’s statement about diversifying the image of *Labor of Love* and the D.C. Women’s Initiative.

In the field I realized it was not only participants’ expectations of donations that set this desire in motion. My conversation with professionals who work for organizations that address LGBTQ issues at a national level, such as the *Human Rights Campaign and The Mautner Project*, also had a similar understandings. For instance, their solutions to community building usually focused on broadening the scope and inclusivity of the mission statement. For example, *The Mautner Project*, the national lesbian health organization based in Washington, D.C.,
originally only included “lesbian” in their mission to serve patients suffering from cancer, but in recent years they opened up to include Lesbians, Bisexuals, and Transgender people in their mission statement. While their image may be regarded as inclusive, they often disregard ambiguities in the participants’ understanding of their identity and instead replace it with the identity of the organization. This attitude explains why many nationally oriented LGBTQ organizations disregard the histories, stories, and struggles of the local LGBTQ community, but instead, emphasize the expertise of those within the community in power, such as politicians and members of the community with more disposable income.

At this point I would like to problematize what is at stake here by broadly conceptualizing the implications nationally oriented LGBTQ organization have on the local and national members of Washington’s LGBTQ community. In this case, the strategies to improve the equality at the national level are partial because meaning-making and community building is not considered locally, but nationally. The presence of LGBTQ organizations in the city often creates a cultural gap, because the organizations generally do not appeal to the local needs of lesbians that exist within the Washington D.C. Metropolitan area. In this sense, national organizations will need to design local community building strategies to bridge this gap.

To address this conundrum, I suggest that the national agendas associated with LGBTQ organization must work with local socio-cultural organizations. One way of doing this is conducting a large-scale local needs assessment that can positively create dialogue between local community and larger national LGBTQ agendas. Through dialogue, the responses to a need for a lesbian oriented community space can weave both local and national forms of expertise to adequately address the lack of alternative community spaces for lesbians in the Washington, D.C. area. Also, lesbian leaders and other community builders must realize that this collaboration
between external (national) and internal (local) knowledge systems can only happen when national organizations and the individuals running local organizations think positively and realistically about the needs of the local community.

After the success of *Labor of Love’s* fundraising campaign, I realized this research project had the potential to mend the gap between the national and local LGBTQ organizations in the DC area. I re-imagined the next steps of this project as a long-term venture that engages the needs of the local lesbian community, but one that is also cautious of the possible power relations and exclusions that occur as well. This project not only explored the current needs and desires of lesbians seeking community spaces, but it also archived this movement in two senses: (i) producing a public visual archive of stories from local lesbian leaders, and (ii) beginning the initial stages of building a physical infrastructure to house it with the D.C. Women’s Initiative.

Finally, I must state that I am not presenting my final thoughts on the project and the visions I hold as a new model for multimedia ethnography. Rather, I hope the readers use this discussion to demonstrate the complexity of such a bottom-up approach to lesbian community development. Also, the creation of various methodological engagements, such as the *Labor of Love* website, the multiple screenings of the film, and this written text, is not only a reflection of my knowledge and praxis, but a way to facilitate new conversations, share certain visions with the community, and be held accountable for seeing and knowing in various sites that challenge and push lesbian empowerment.
# APPENDICES

Appendix A: List of participants in study. *Note: Participants are listed in alphabetical order.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Lesbian Organization</th>
<th>Organization Description</th>
<th>Title at Organization</th>
<th>Organization Years of Operation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ina Alterman</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>Gay Women’s Alternative (GWA)</td>
<td>A cultural, educational and social organization which sought to provide programs of interest to women in the social atmosphere for the Lesbian community of Washington, D.C. area. The slogan was “Alternative to the closet, an alternative to the bar.”</td>
<td>Co-Founder</td>
<td>1980-1993</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ebene Bell</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>Tagg Magazine</td>
<td>Tagg Magazine was created by women, for lesbian, bisexual, and transgender women to provide the DC Metropolitan Area queer women’s community with a central source for lesbian culture, news, and events.</td>
<td>Managing Editor</td>
<td>2012 - Present</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elizabeth Birch</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>Human Rights Campaign (HRC)</td>
<td>The Human Rights Campaign is the largest equality-rights advocacy group and political lobbying organization in the United States.</td>
<td>Former President</td>
<td>1980- Present</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lynne Brown</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>The Washington Blade</td>
<td>The Washington Blade, formerly <em>The Gay Blade</em>, is a lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) newspaper in the Washington, D.C. metropolitan area. It is the oldest LGBT newspaper in the United States and second largest by circulation.</td>
<td>Publisher</td>
<td>1969- Present</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Denise Bump</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>Lammas Bookstore &amp; The DC Women’s Initiative (DCWI)</td>
<td>Lammas Women’s Book &amp; More was a bookstore and cultural community center for lesbians in the Washington, D.C. metropolitan area.</td>
<td>Lammas, Owner DCWI, Founder</td>
<td>Lammas 1973-2001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Age</td>
<td>Lesbian Organization</td>
<td>Organization Description</td>
<td>Title at Organization</td>
<td>Organization Years of Operation</td>
</tr>
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<td>------------------</td>
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<td>----------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------------------------</td>
<td>----------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nikisha Carpenter</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>Women of Mova</td>
<td>A weekly happy-hour held at Mova Lounge (14th &amp; Wst NW) on Wednesdays for women of the LGBTQ community.</td>
<td>Founder</td>
<td>2011 - Present</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christina Cateurucci</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>Where The Girls Go</td>
<td>Where the Girls Go is an all you need to know blog on the District’s nightlife, fashion, and culture for the queer female scene. The organization also throws a seasonal tea dance party at Dodge City.</td>
<td>Writer</td>
<td>2005 - Present</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June Crenshaw</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>Lesbian Services Program (LSP)</td>
<td>LSP was a program that offered health and cultural wellness programs inside of the Whitman-Walker Clinic facilities. Some of the programs included, Starting Over, Coming-out after marriage and maybe-baby programs.</td>
<td>Board Member</td>
<td>1990 - 2006</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Karen Dhiel</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>Ladies of LUre</td>
<td>A women’s nightlife promotional event planning company in Virginia, Washington, D.C., and Maryland area.</td>
<td>Founder &amp; CEO</td>
<td>2009 - Present</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Margo Fitzpatrick</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>Bon Vivant</td>
<td>See previous entry.</td>
<td>Co-Founder</td>
<td>1988 - 2006</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eva Freund</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>National Organization of Women</td>
<td>An organization founded to support the advancement of women.</td>
<td>Board Member</td>
<td>1966 - Present</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leigh Geiger</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>Gay Women’s Alternative</td>
<td>See previous entry.</td>
<td>President &amp; Co-Founder</td>
<td>1980-1993</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jackie Gilbert</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>National Organization of Women</td>
<td>See previous entry.</td>
<td>Member</td>
<td>1966 - Present</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Age</td>
<td>Lesbian Organization</td>
<td>Organization Description</td>
<td>Title at Organization</td>
<td>Organizational Years of Operation</td>
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<td>--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Susan Hester</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>The Mautner Project</td>
<td>A national organization in the United States dedicated to improving the health of lesbians and other women who partner with women (WPW). It provides direct services, engages in community outreach and health education campaigns, and trains health care professionals to deliver cultural competent care.</td>
<td>Founder</td>
<td>1990 - Present</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sterling Higgins</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>Ladies of LUre</td>
<td>See previous entry.</td>
<td>Business Partner</td>
<td>2009 - Present</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jean Homza</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>The Phase One</td>
<td>The oldest continually operating lesbian bar in the country.</td>
<td>Door Manager</td>
<td>1970- Present</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ellen Kahn</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>Rainbow Families &amp; Human Rights Campaign</td>
<td></td>
<td>Director of LGBT Families</td>
<td>1980 - Present</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Esther Katzman</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>Gay Women’s Alternative</td>
<td>See previous entry.</td>
<td>Board Member</td>
<td>1980-1993</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kimberley Kelsey</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>The DC Women’s Initiative (DCWI)</td>
<td>The DC Women’s Initiative is dedicated to creating a safe and welcoming space for the diverse women of the LGBTQ community and their allies in the DC area.</td>
<td>Secretary</td>
<td>2012 - Present</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Angela Lombardi</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>The Phase One</td>
<td>See previous entry.</td>
<td>General Manager</td>
<td>1970- Present</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Papaya Mann</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>Sapphire Sapphos</td>
<td>The Sapphire Sapphos were DC’s earliest social, political and artistic group for African-American lesbians. The Sapphos met regularly at Northeast DC’s historic ENIKAleyle Coffeehouse.</td>
<td>Board Member</td>
<td>1980-1988</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sarah Marloff</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>Where The Girls Go</td>
<td>See previous entry.</td>
<td>Editor-in-Chief</td>
<td>2005 - Present</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Michaela McNichol</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>Bon Vivant</td>
<td>See previous entry.</td>
<td>Co-Founder</td>
<td>1988 - 2006</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Age</td>
<td>Lesbian Organization</td>
<td>Organization Description</td>
<td>Title at Organization</td>
<td>Organization Years of Operation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------</td>
<td>-----</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bonnie Morris</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>Lesbian Resource and Counseling Center (LRCC)</td>
<td>The LRCC offered support groups and counseling for lesbian issues and women’s health.</td>
<td>Member</td>
<td>1980-1988</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jeannette Paroly</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>Gay Women’s Alternative</td>
<td>See previous entry.</td>
<td>Board Member</td>
<td>1980-1993</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Katy Ray</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>The Phase One</td>
<td>See previous entry.</td>
<td>Promoter</td>
<td>1970 - Present</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cara Rockhill</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>Member of DC LGBT Community</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>Member</td>
<td>2006 - Present</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kim Rosenberg</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>Mixology</td>
<td>A premier gay and lesbian matchmaking service in the Washington, D.C. metropolitan area.</td>
<td>CEO</td>
<td>2009 - Present</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Michelle Ross</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>PhatGirlChic.Com</td>
<td>A premiere website for DC Lesbian Circuit events.</td>
<td>Founder</td>
<td>2006 - Present</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nikki Smith</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>Ladies Rock This</td>
<td>A space where lady musicians can network to book shows, find new players, and share information about the local music scene.</td>
<td>Founder</td>
<td>2011 - Present</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix B: D.C. Women's Initiative survey

The DC Women's Initiative is an organization formed to organize events, programs, and support groups for the women of DC's LGBTQ community. This group is ultimately hoping to bring LGBTQ women in the DC metro area together to create a SAFE PHYSICAL location. The space would be a central location for our ever-growing women's community.

In order to do that, we need your input! Please fill out this survey to let us know what you envision this space to be. This online survey consists of 10 questions and will take approximately 5 to 10 minutes to complete. Your responses will be kept confidential. If you choose to provide your email address for follow-up, it will only be shared with the DC Women's Initiative committee members. We will do our best to protect the confidentiality of your information. All data is stored in a password-protected electronic format. Thank you!

1. Indicate your level of agreement with the following statement: "The Washington, DC metro area community is in need of a new Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer (LBTQ) Women's Community Space."
   - [ ] Strongly Agree
   - [ ] Agree
   - [ ] Neither Agree nor Disagree
   - [ ] Disagree
   - [ ] Strongly Disagree

2. The following are some potential uses for a new LBTO Women's Community Space in Washington, DC. Please rank the following potential uses based on what you consider to be the most important or top priority uses. Rank each potential use from 1-8, for example #1 should be assigned to the most important or top priority, and so on.
   - Social/Meeting Space
   - Visual and Performing Arts
   - Workshops/Classes
   - Networking/Professional Events
   - Support Groups
   - Health/Wellness Programs
   -Speakers/Lectures
   - Retail Space (woman-made goods)

3. Please comment on the potential uses that you ranked above. Please also comment on any other potential uses that come to mind.

4. How much would you be willing to pay for an annual membership for the DC Women's Initiative Community Space?
   - [ ] I am not willing to pay for a membership
   - [ ] $25 or less
   - [ ] $26-$50
   - [ ] $51-$75
   - [ ] $76-$100
   - [ ] $101 or more
5. Indicate which of the following terms describe the way that you identify, both personally and publicly. For example, you may personally identify as transgender and lesbian, and publicly identify as queer. Or, you may identify as bisexual both personally and publicly. Indicate all terms that apply for you.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Personally Identify</th>
<th>Publicly Identify</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lesbian</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gay</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bisexual</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transgender (Male to Female)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transgender (Female to Male)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Queer</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Questioning</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Straight</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Something Else (please specify):

8. Indicate your age category.

- [ ] <40 years
- [ ] 21-30
- [ ] 31-40
- [ ] 41-50
- [ ] 51-60
- [ ] 61-70
- [ ] 71-80
- [ ] >80 years

7. Please identify your race/ethnicity.

- [ ] American Indian or Alaska Native
- [ ] Asian
- [ ] Black or African American
- [ ] Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander
- [ ] Hispanic or Latino
- [ ] White
- [ ] I'd rather not say

Other (Please Specify):
8. In what ZIP code is your home located? (enter 5-digit ZIP code; for example, 00544 or 94305)

9. Please indicate whether or not you would like to volunteer to help with the DC Women’s Initiative or if you would like to participate in a focus group as a follow-up to this survey.

☐ Yes, I would like to volunteer to help with the DC Women’s Initiative.
☐ Yes, I would like to join the DC Women’s Initiative Email List Serv.
☐ Yes, I would like to participate in a focus group as a follow-up to this survey.

10. If you said yes to any of the above activities, please note your contact information (name, address, phone number, e-mail address) in the comment box below. Your contact information will not be sold or shared beyond the DC Women’s Initiative.

Name:

Email:

Phone:

Address:

11. How did you hear about this survey?

☐ DC Women’s Initiative Facebook page
☐ Labor of Love website or email
☐ Tagg Magazine
☐ Washington Blade
☐ DC Center
☐ Community organization women’s event
☐ Meet-up group
☐ Through a friend
☐ Other (Please Specify)
Appendix C: IRB Human Research Curriculum Completion Report

CITI Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative

Human Research Curriculum Completion Report
Printed on 10/8/2011

Learner: Kelsay Brannan (username: kmb286)
Institution: Georgetown University
Contact Information 1421 Massachusetts Ave. NW Apt. 201
Washington, DC 20005 USA
Department: Communication, Culture, & Technology
Phone: 415-902-4310
Email: kmb286@georgetown.edu

Group 2: Social and behavioral research investigators and key personnel.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stage 1: Basic Course Passed on 10/08/11 (Ref# 6735468)</th>
<th>Date Completed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Required Modules</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>10/08/11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>History and Ethical Principles - SBR</td>
<td>10/08/11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4/4 (100%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Defining Research with Human Subjects - SBR</td>
<td>10/08/11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4/5 (80%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Regulations and the Social and Behavioral Sciences - SBR</td>
<td>10/08/11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5/5 (100%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assessing Risk in Social and Behavioral Sciences - SBR</td>
<td>10/08/11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4/5 (80%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Informed Consent - SBR</td>
<td>10/08/11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2/6 (40%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Privacy and Confidentiality - SBR</td>
<td>10/08/11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3/5 (60%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research with Children - SBR</td>
<td>10/08/11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2/4 (50%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research in Public Elementary and Secondary Schools - SBR</td>
<td>10/08/11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4/4 (100%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>International Research - SBR</td>
<td>10/08/11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3/3 (100%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internet Research - SBR</td>
<td>10/08/11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4/4 (100%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avoiding Group Harms: U.S. Research Perspectives</td>
<td>10/08/11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2/3 (67%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research and HIPAA Privacy Protections</td>
<td>10/08/11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5/5 (100%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vulnerable Subjects - Research Involving Workers/Employees</td>
<td>10/08/11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4/4 (100%)</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conflicts of Interest In Research Involving Human Subjects</td>
<td>10/08/11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4/5 (80%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Georgetown University</td>
<td>10/08/11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>no quiz</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For this Completion Report to be valid, the learner listed above must be affiliated with a CITI participating institution. Falsified information and unauthorized use of the CITI course site is unethical, and may be considered scientific misconduct by your institution.

Paul Braunschweiger Ph.D.
Appendix D: IRB approval. Note: The title of the study is not the same as the title of the dissertation. It evolved over course of study.

Georgetown University Institutional Review Board

Date: 4/10/2013
To: Kelsey Brannan
From: Bertram Doyle
Institutional Review Board
IRB #: 2012-1028
Title: Crossing Bridges: How Female leaders build and shape their LGBT community
Annual Approval Date: 9/14/2012
Expiration Date: 9/13/2013
Action: Initial Review - Expedited
Attachments being reviewed: 3 documents were reviewed as part of this submission:

Document | Version
---|---
Brannan_PhotoVideoConsent.doc | 0.01
ProductionAdvertisement_Flyer.pdf | 0.02
Brannan_InformedConsent(Audio).doc | 0.01

Stamped Documents:

Document | Version
---|---
Brannan_InformedConsent(Audio).doc.pdf | 0.02
Brannan_PhotoVideoConsent.doc.pdf | 0.02

The above-referenced protocol and consent form were approved through expedited review by Dr. Irit Sinai, the IRB Chair or the designee, on 4/4/2013. The Institutional Review Board has determined that the research involves no greater than minimal risk and falls under the following expedited review category:

6. Collection of data from voice, video, digital, or image recordings made for research purposes.
7. Research on:
(a) individual or group characteristics or behavior (including, but not limited to, research on perception, cognition, motivation, identity, language, communication, cultural beliefs or practices, and social behavior), OR
(b) research employing survey, interview, oral history, focus group, program evaluation, human factors
evaluation, or quality assurance methodologies.

This is to inform you that you may commence your project. Please note that this approval is granted through 9/13/2013.

Institutional Review Boards [IRBs] reviewing research have the authority to approve, require modifications in (to secure approval), or disapprove the research (45 CFR 46.109(a)).

Health and Human Services regulations at 45 CFR 46.102(h) define IRB approval as the determination of the IRB that the research has been reviewed and may be conducted at an institution within the constraints set forth by the IRB and by other institutional and federal requirements.

In the course of initial review of your research, the IRB staff requested minor changes to the recruitment materials.

By IRB approval with conditions, Office of Human Research Protections (OHRP) means that at the time when the IRB reviews and approves a research study, the IRB requires as a condition of approval that the investigator (a) make specified changes to the study documents; in this case, the study protocol and consent forms did not require any changes.

At the time of initial review, the IRB may approve some components of a proposed research study and allow an investigator to initiate research activities only related to those approved components, while deferring taking action on other components of the proposed study.

You submitted the revised recruitment materials on March 7, 2013; the IRB Vice Chair, Dr. Sinai, reviewed your protocol, consent form and revised recruitment materials and requested no changes to any study documents.

The Georgetown University Institutional Review Board [GU IRB] acknowledges that you conducted your research between September 2012 and March 2013, believing that you had IRB approval because there were no changes requested for your consent forms and study protocol.

The GU IRB stipulates that it de facto approved your consent form and study protocol prospectively and, therefore, although you submitted your revised recruitment materials on March 7, 2013, GU IRB will consider September 14, 2012 as the approval date for your study. GU IRB will consider April 4, 2013 as the approval date for your recruitment materials.

GU IRB acknowledges that you made the requested changes to your recruitment materials in September, 2012; however the revised recruitment materials were not submitted to the IRB and stayed in your eRIC (the IRB electronic submission system) Inbox until March 7, 2013.

Please be aware that IRB determinations are communicated to the investigators only in writing and the IRB approval is only issued prospectively.

** If promotional advertisements will be used for patient recruitment, they must be submitted for IRB review and approval prior to their use.

** Any incentives for participation in research are subject to IRB review and approval as well.

Please remember to:

1. Seek and obtain prior approval for any modifications to the approved protocol.
2. Promptly report any unexpected or otherwise significant adverse effects encountered in the course of this study to the IRB within seven (7) calendar days. This includes information obtained from sources outside GU or MHRI that reveals previously unknown risks from the procedures, drugs, or devices used in this study.
REFERENCES


remember-those-displaced/2012/10/08/a9eb5ebe-1158-11e2-a16b-2c110031514a_blog.html


