

**Queer-What-You-Can:
Queer community organizing in a gentrifying East
Vancouver**

by
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Bachelor of Arts (Sociology), University of Delaware, 2014

Project Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of
Master of Urban Studies

in the
Urban Studies Program
Faculty of Arts & Social Sciences

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Fall 2017

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Abstract

Queer studies and Urban studies rarely intersect, leaving an entire urban demographic understudied and under-represented in our conceptualizations of the city. Despite the lack of research or attention paid in particular to young queer adults in urban settings, these groups and individuals nevertheless shape our cities through their social organizing and subculture participation. Cities, in turn, shape these groups and individuals as well, as social organizing and sub-culture participation is shaped by forces like gentrification, changing social climates, and urban geographies.

Using semi-structured interviews with queer community organizers, I seek to understand the question: What challenges do queer young adults face when organizing community in an increasingly unaffordable and gentrified Vancouver? How do they meet those challenges? These interviews provide insight and context to how queerness shapes global cosmopolitan cities amidst increasing social and economic barriers which impact these place-based groups and identities.

Keywords: queer; LGBT; gentrification; Vancouver; community; organizing

Dedication

I dedicate this research to my families and community.

To my sister, Cara, for messaging me to get off the internet when I should be working on my thesis and for sending me a gift when I finally finished my draft.

To my mom for all of the hilarious, tender, or monotonous phone calls we shared despite the inconveniences of different time zones.

To my wonderful roommates for simultaneously indulging me with ridiculous distractions when you all very well knew I was trying to get work done, and for also supporting me when I would get to the point of saying “no really, I need to get this work done”.

To my best friend, Deanna, who was there when I got the news that I was accepted into the Urban Studies program, and who is still here as I see it to completion.

To my chosen family for all the healing, support, laughter and growth I have received by loving you.

And to my queer community for always challenging me to learn and for inviting each other to come together to celebrate this empowering identity of queerness we share.

Acknowledgements

Thank you to Dr. Karen Ferguson for all of your guidance, advice, and feedback. I cannot fathom how many research projects and term papers you read, edit, and shape week after week, so I am very grateful for your patience, constructive feedback, and impressively quick edits and replies over the course of the last year.

Thank you to the entire Urban Studies faculty and staff for passing along your collective knowledge and experience both inside and outside the classroom. You all have provided me with opportunities, dialogue, and support, and for that I am grateful.

Thank you to my fellow students in the Urban Studies program for bringing interesting and valuable experiences and discussions into the classroom. I learned a lot from each of you, and my research project was certainly shaped by each of you.

Thank you to my coworkers and managers who put their full faith and trust in me throughout my time in grad school. Your willingness to be flexible with my schedule, workload, and visa restrictions helped make this degree and research project possible. You are all the best colleagues I could have ever asked for and I will never forget your accommodations, support, and friendship.

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List of Acronyms

LGBTQIAP2+	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Intersex, Asexual, Pansexual, Two-Spirit, and other. Often shortened to LGBT or LGBTQ+.
QTBIPOC	Queer/Trans Black, Indigenous, & people of color. Used as an umbrella term—much like LGBT—to refer to Black people, Indigenous people, and people of color who are queer.
DTES	Downtown East Side in Vancouver, BC

Glossary

Cisgender	Refers to an individual who identifies with the sex and gender assigned to them at birth.
Non-Binary	An individual whose gender identity is not exclusively male or exclusively female, regardless of the sex and gender assigned to them at birth. This includes but is not limited to genderfluid people, genderqueer people, agender people, and other gender non-conforming people. Some non-binary people choose to use gender neutral pronouns, such as they/them/theirs, when referring to themselves.
Queer	When used as an identity, it is an umbrella term to describe LGBTQ+ sexualities and genders, including, but not limited to: lesbians, gay people, bisexual people, asexual people, pansexual people, genderqueer people, non-binary people, transgender people, intersex people, Two-Spirit people, or any individual who is not a cisgender-heterosexual person. The term 'queer' is also frequently used as a shorthand for the long LGBTQ+ acronym among younger generations of queer people and is a reclaimed slur.
Transgender	Any individual who does not identify with the sex and gender assigned to them at birth.

Chapter 1.

Introduction

1.1 Context

The City of Vancouver is currently undergoing rapid gentrification in many of its neighborhoods, including East Vancouver (Fynes, 2014). Areas such as the Downtown Eastside (DTES), Chinatown, and Main Street are experiencing rising costs of rent for both residential spaces as well as business spaces. Residents and business owners who have lived and operated in these neighborhoods for years are facing financial challenges and precarity due to those rising rent costs. As housing options contract and businesses close and relocate, multiple demographics of people that live and socialize in these neighborhoods are impacted, disrupted, and displaced.

One of these understudied demographics which has a long history across multiple neighborhoods in East Vancouver is the queer community, specifically queer women and transgender people. Young queer women and transgender people in Canadian cities who live and operate outside of the traditional gay district primarily operate through intricate and ever-changing social networks across multiple neighborhoods (Podmore, 2006). In the early stages of my research, I hypothesized that as homes and businesses close or relocate in these neighborhoods, the East Vancouver queer community would be disrupted and exist in a state of constant instability. I speculated that gentrification had become a huge barrier and obstacle to queer community organizers in East Vancouver. This thesis tests these hypotheses by examining the ways in which gentrification may be impacting queer community social dynamics and the queer community organizing efforts across the multiple neighborhoods of East Vancouver.

1.2 The East Vancouver Queer Community

The term 'community' is used across multiple disciplines, demographics, and ideologies, meaning something different to each individual community member, researcher, and reader. Here I will define what I mean by the 'queer community' with

regards to both my target demographic in research, as well as the ideological shared sense of 'community' among queer people in East Vancouver.

As I use the term "the queer community" throughout this text, I refer specifically to the queer community of this study, acknowledging that my research cannot capture all existing queer communities. The East Vancouver queer community of my study often simply refers to itself as "the queer community", which is why this term will be used in this text. Despite the unifying term of "queer community" being used by many queer people and myself, the term cannot possibly capture all of the identities, experiences, and beliefs of the queer communities. As such, Joseph argues that "while identity is often named as the bond among community members...communal participants are not identical and...do not participate in communal activities" (Joseph, 2002).

Spatially speaking, I focus on young queer women and transgender people in the queer community in East Vancouver, wherein East Vancouver is a collection of neighborhoods running east to west between Cambie Street and Boundary Road, and north to south between Vancouver Harbour and 41st Ave. This is the City of Vancouver's formal definition of East Vancouver, and it corresponds to the area where the community lives and organizes. Although my findings demonstrate a concentration of community venues along Main Street, East Hastings, and Commercial Drive, the organizers themselves and the queer community attending these events live all across East Vancouver. The events they organize are always held in East Vancouver even though some organizers have moved to Burnaby, New Westminister, and Surrey due to the rising costs of rent and housing within Vancouver itself. This is notable because of the continuous connectivity of queer women and other queer people despite being dispersed across different parts of a city (Lo & Healy, 2008) who come together in loosely defined neighborhoods across East Vancouver. They increasingly live outside of East Vancouver, while still keeping their community roots within East Vancouver even after moving elsewhere. These young adults organize community and actively organize for queer related topics and issues, meetings, parties, protests, and workshops which are hosted in one of the East Vancouver neighborhoods. Below is a map of the area of study. The neighbourhoods shaded in pink are what are included when I refer to "East Vancouver" within the project.

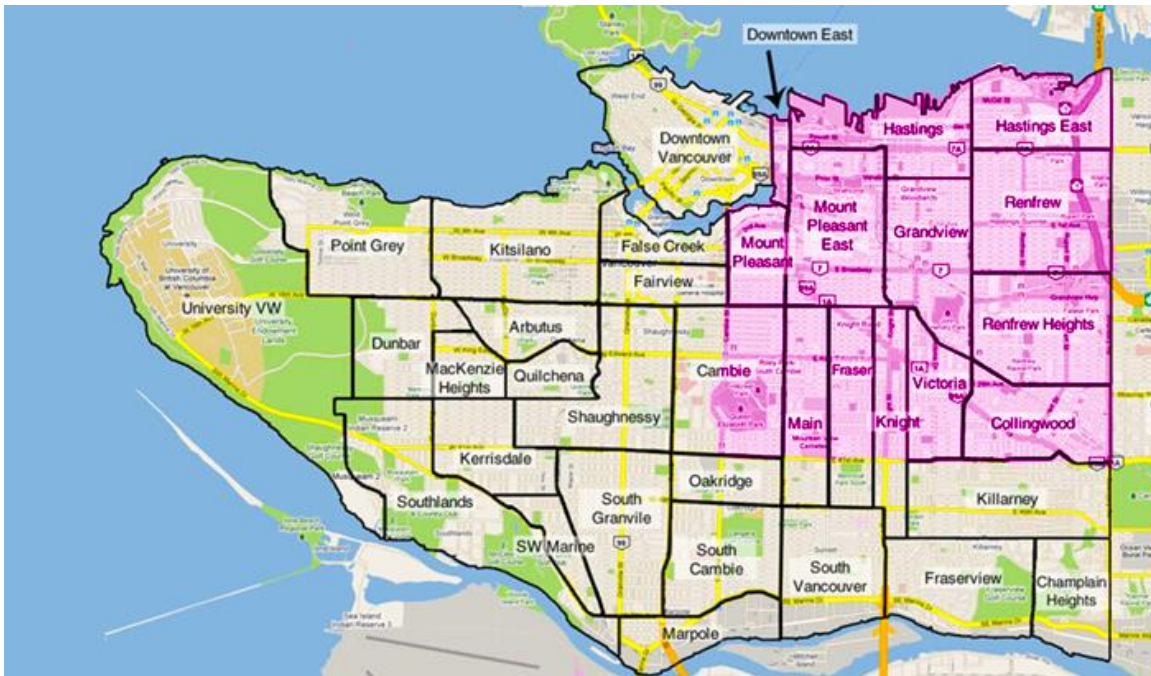


Figure 1 Map of East Vancouver, highlighted in pink.

Generally speaking, the East Vancouver queer community examined in this research is primarily composed of lesbians, bisexual women, genderqueer people, and transgender people, and people otherwise identified simply as 'queer'. These queer people tend to come together with people of similar ages, between the ages of 18 and mid-thirties. Most East Vancouver queer events target this younger crowd, although some events do occasionally attract multiple generations of queer people. This is evidenced through interviews and online event pages and guest lists.

1.3 Research Question

Despite the potentially severe challenges brought on by gentrification facing young queer people in East Vancouver, I knew that the community is managing to survive despite gentrification. I sought to understand how exactly queer community organizers are coping with the rising costs of living and organizing in East Vancouver. To understand and explore this phenomenon, my thesis answers the following question through qualitative research:

How do queer young adults organize community in an increasingly unaffordable and gentrified East Vancouver?

I specifically chose to focus on young adult queer people because the majority of queer community events and workshops in East Vancouver are organized by and targeted towards queer people in their twenties and thirties. Though older generations of queer people and teenagers may occasionally attend the events and workshops discussed in this research, they are in the minority and seem to find community elsewhere in their respective age demographics. Therefore, when I refer to young adults, I will be using the age brackets found in the Canadian Census which encompass ages 18 through 34 years. I also chose this age demographic because regardless of gender or sexual orientation, young adults in East Vancouver are facing challenges due to unaffordable rent, high home prices, and rising costs of living. This study will explore those challenges faced by Vancouver's young adults in the context of queer identities and communities and how those life experiences interact with gentrification.

This question was the foundation of my semi-structured interviews with eight organizers of ten separate queer community events or groups. The events include three dance parties, two drag performance events, a beer and cider tasting meetup, a femme¹ solidarity group, a collective house and its various public events, and queer artist groups and collectives. Two other queer groups including a QTBIPOC² group and a queer language-learning workshop declined an interview or could not be reached for an interview. These events and groups—both those who participated in the interviews and those who did not—are important to the queer community because they allow its members to meet, socialize, network, plan, unwind, and engage in activism or politics. Some of the organizers interviewed organize multiple events or collaborate with other organizers. Some organizers only organize one event. And finally, some organizers no longer organize, are on hiatus from organizing, or have moved on from organizing one event or group in order to organize another event or group.

¹ Femme: Originally referring to a 'feminine lesbian', this term currently serves as an identity label for feminine queer people of all genders, including femme lesbians, femme genderqueer and trans people, and sometimes, femme queer men.

² QTBIPOC: Queer, Trans, Intersex, Black, Indigenous, People of Color, denoting the population of the queer community which does not include white queer people. Highlights the intersection of marginalized race, ethnicity, sexuality, and gender identity.

1.4 Demographics

In many demographic fields of study, such as sociology or urban studies, queer individuals and communities are understudied, if they are studied at all. For example, the Canadian Census asks questions regarding a person's race, sex, language proficiencies, income, and education level, but will not ask about a person's sexuality or gender identity. Like other demographic identities, being queer intersects with other aspects contributing to one's privileges or marginalization in society, and therefore must be considered when trying to understand the full picture of individuals, groups, and society. Collectively, urban studies is greatly lacking in both qualitative and quantitative data on the broad demographic of queer people. Furthermore, the studies that do exist are almost exclusively related to gay men and gay villages, leaving lesbians, queer women, and transgender individuals all but invisible to the world of urban studies.

Take for example, the queer community in any major Canadian city, such as Vancouver, British Columbia. There is no demographic data collected by the federal, provincial, or municipal governments regarding sexual orientations or transgender identities, aside from census data collected on married or common-law same-sex partnerships in the years 2001, 2006, 2011, and 2016. This data excludes all queer people who are not married or in a common-law relationship, which leaves large holes in the data collected on young, single queer people, or queer people who have multiple partners or choose not to marry. This limited data also does not account at all for transgender individuals, especially non-binary transgender people who do not identify with the male and female options listed on the census to begin with. So while there is accessible demographic data regarding race, employment, or languages spoken at home, little is known about how queer identities intersect with other demographic identities, and how those queer identities shape communities and lifestyles in urban spaces.

By ignoring major demographics (i.e. race, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, socio-economic status, etc.) within cities, it is difficult for academics and planners to have a good understanding of a city's residents, and to use that understanding to benefit the city and its residents. Queer people and culture, like other demographics and cultures, cannot ever be wholly documented and accounted for, as the queer population of a city includes "more people than can be identified, more spaces than can be mapped beyond

a few reference points, and modes of feeling that can be learned rather than experienced as a birthright” (Oswin, 2015). Nevertheless, the little data collected to date regarding the intersection of queerness and urban life is still valuable in adding to our bodies of knowledge and shaping our understanding of our changing cities. This gap in knowledge between urban studies and queer studies begs the question: How may city officials, urban planners, academics, or city residents understand, interact with, and cater to these communities without basic foundational knowledge or data? Combining qualitative and quantitative data on queer urban life will therefore benefit urban planners, officials, researchers, academics, and city residents alike. This research is qualitative in nature, but it is my hope that my research is used to inspire or supplement demographic queer research in the future. By learning how this particular demographic of young adult queers meets the challenges of living and organizing in an increasingly unaffordable and gentrified East Vancouver, I hope that demographers and researchers will become inclined to include queer identities and experiences in their own data collection in order to study long term trends which help us all better understand not only the queer community, but also every demographic which intersects with queerness.

1.5 Rationale & Significance

Urban Studies scholars and professionals should care about this study because it seeks to better understand an under-represented subgroup within an already underrepresented demographic within cities, namely including Vancouver. There is very little demographic data collected about queer communities in Canadian cities, despite queer people being present across all urban gender, race, class, and ethnic demographics. Since census data is currently unavailable for gaining a quantitative perspective on queerness within cities, scholars and professionals have to rely on existing qualitative studies such as this one. In addition, queer people have been little studied by urban studies scholars. Poor queer people, young queer people, queer people of color, disabled queer people, and queer women are particularly invisible in the mainstream heterosexual society, which focuses on the dominant group of gay men when it considers the larger LGBTQ+ community at all. To understand urban demographics more fully, all queer people should be included in quantitative and qualitative demographic research.

For the same reasons that researchers, planners, and the Canadian census consider race, immigration, gender, income, and education, so too should queerness be considered. Finally acknowledging the young queer community's impacts on one of the largest Canadian cities (and in turn, how one of the largest Canadian cities impacts young queer people and their communities) will provide scholars and professionals with a more complete picture of how and why our cities function in the way that they do. This type of study will also be of interest to scholars and professionals who want to understand the shifting age demographics of cities and the reasons why young people come and go, as well as the contributions of young people, particularly young queer women and transgender folks, to the city.

This research focuses on the marginalized experiences of young adult queer women and transgender individuals who often exist outside of the dominant queer narrative of gay villages, gay affluence, and homonormativity. These queer women and transgender people often organize their communities through an intimate social network across several neighborhoods rather than organizing through set commercial spaces within gay villages. Young people participate in community and help to create and change local arts, social, political, and party cultures. For this reason, understanding the realities of being young and queer in Vancouver provides a crucial context for understanding the cultural climate of the region. Having a better understanding of the queer community and the social climate of the region may help scholars and professionals better plan and investigate city services, local economy, social and political climate, and even tourism.

There is a lot of organizing and leadership power among the young queer women and transgender queer folks of Vancouver, and exploring that will add context and knowledge to both queer studies and urban studies. By understanding how young adult queer people in Vancouver are able to organize their community in the face of gentrification and unaffordability, academics and professionals will gain a greater insight into the experiences of young Vancouverites as they come and go in a city that challenges their way of life.

In East Vancouver in particular, a portion of Vancouver that is undergoing rapid gentrification in several of its neighborhoods (Fynes, 2014), organizers of the queer community face multiple obstacles when bringing their community together through

parties, workshops, art, and other events. These obstacles include rising unaffordability in Vancouver, instability of housing and queer-friendly venues, and intra-community political and social issues. Their organizing efforts are noteworthy because they reflect the experiences of low-income young adults in the City of Vancouver who must tailor their financial, social, and personal lives around gentrification and rising unaffordability or leave to live and organize elsewhere (Moos, 2014). These queer young adults are important for understanding the resiliency of marginalized communities and their impact on the City of Vancouver as a whole as they shape the social fabric of the city by building and sustaining community.

1.6 Use of the term ‘Queer’

Throughout this study, I will be using the term ‘queer’ to refer to different LGBTQ+ individuals and groups. The term and identity ‘queer’ is always evolving and means many things to many different people. Even individuals who self-identify as queer may hold different understandings and definitions of the word (Gates, 2012). Bearing this in mind, I use the term queer in two ways throughout this project. Within the scope of this study, ‘queer’ is defined first as an umbrella term for multiple LGBTQ+ identities in the LGBTQ+ community or communities, and second as an individual political or social label adopted by some queer young adults to indicate their participation in the wider LGBTQ+ community or communities and their outspoken support of queer life and experiences (Gates, 2012). These two definitions of queer identities and communities are crucial for understanding the queer communities located in East Vancouver, as these queer people are not just united by their shared experience of queer genders and orientations, but are also motivated by shared values which they uphold and foster within queer events and spaces.

With regards to sexual orientation, the term queer includes lesbians, bisexuals, gay men, pansexuals, asexuals, and other sexual or romantic orientations which could not be categorized as heterosexual. As for gender identities, the term queer encompasses transgender men and women, non-binary transgender people, genderqueer people, Two-Spirit people, and gender non-conforming people who could not be categorized as cisgender. When used individually, ‘queer’ may designate a vague gender or sexuality label to suggest an identity that is neither heterosexual or cisgender, but something more complicated than existing LGBT labels (i.e. gay or bisexual), or may

be used in conjunction with more particular labels in order to designate a sense of belonging among other like minded queer individuals, regardless of shared orientation or gender identities (Gates, 2012). For example, a transgender lesbian may participate in transgender groups and events or lesbian groups and events, and still identify as 'queer' as well, indicating participation in communities which include more than just transgender women or lesbians, such as groups or events which target many different queer demographics at once. To think of this in another way, imagine someone who lives in the Commercial Drive neighborhood of East Vancouver who may primarily associate with their neighbors, but still identify more broadly as a Vancouverite, even if this individual rarely interacts with or shares commonalities with Vancouverites from different neighborhoods, such as Shaughnessy. This is the way in which queer is used as an umbrella term or non-specific LGBTQ+ identity. By referring to 'queer people' or 'the queer community', I include those individuals and groups which come together as one united demographic through their shared experiences of queer genders and sexualities.

The second way queer is used in this project is more political in nature, wherein queerness pushes back against notions of heteronormativity in mainstream society and homonormativity within LGBTQ+ circles. Heteronormativity is the normative narrative of mainstream society wherein individuals are expected to follow mainstream gender presentations, marry an individual of another gender, and raise offspring. Homonormativity refers to behaviors and lifestyles which are deemed acceptable by the mainstream heterosexual society to which some affluent gay couples and individuals assimilate (Stryker, 2008). Homonormativity places the focus on mainstream gays and lesbians and often silences transgender people, bisexual people, and asexual people in discussions on LGBTQ+ rights and oppression (Stryker, 2008). LGBTQ+ people who identify as queer in a political sense may not wish to assimilate in this way and instead continue to cultivate identity and community through less accepted means, such as through radical or leftist politics, non-monogamous or polyamorous relationships, collective living arrangements, and any other practices which may fall outside of what is deemed acceptable in the dominant heterosexual or homonormative narratives. This queer way of living is "willfully eccentric" through its "subcultural practices, alternative methods of alliance", "imagined life schedules, [and] eccentric economic patterns" as queerness may sometimes be separated from a mere sexual identity (Halberstam, 2005).

Throughout this research I will primarily refer to the East Vancouver queer community of queer identified women and transgender people who enact leftist politics in their community events and organizing, taking into account both of the above definitions and understandings of the word 'queer'. My study does not encompass the entirety of the queer community for multiple reasons. Firstly, there are more queer people than could ever be finitely identified, especially because some people do not disclose their queer identity. Secondly, I have chosen to focus on queer women and transgender people because they are the less studied queer groups in comparison to gay men, and their underground organizing efforts are worth understanding and documenting for social, demographic, historical, and organizational purposes. It is important to understand how marginalized communities are able to come together and overcome obstacles, just as the queer women and transgender people of East Vancouver's queer community do in the face of rising unaffordability and ongoing gentrification.

1.7 Note on Gender Neutral Pronoun Use

Throughout my thesis, I will be referring to interviewees and organizers by two sets of pronouns, including she/her/hers pronouns and they/them/their pronouns. It is common for non-binary transgender individuals, genderqueer individuals, and gender nonconforming individuals to use they/them/their pronouns as a singular, rather than a plural, pronoun. Please refer to the following example: Sam is genderqueer. They like to go to queer events in East Vancouver. Their favorite event is the dance party, and they love bringing all of their friends with them to go dancing.

Chapter 2.

Literature Review

2.1 Intersection of Urban Studies & Queer Studies

Though both urban studies and queer studies are rich topics on their own, these two disciplines do not often intersect. There exist few studies, theories, or articles outside of a small collection of works on queer urban geographies. This overall lack of collective literature between these two disciplines reflects a knowledge gap regarding our urban demographics and sub-cultures.

When studied, analyzed, and understood, queer subcultures and the lived experiences of queer individuals within cities can make the field of urban studies more complete and add depth and richness to city demographics and urban research (Binnie, 2014; Oswin, 2015). Binnie claims that having an understanding of queer urban life “is necessary because sexuality and intimacy are fundamental dimensions of urban life” (Binnie, 2014), and that queer urban experiences are important not just on an individual and personal level, but because they are “deeply implicated in the ways that cities work as sites of social and economic reproduction, as seen through demographics, community building, and place making” (Binnie, 2014).

2.1.1 Defining Community

For decades, North American queer women have referred to themselves as the ‘lesbian community’, the ‘queer community’, or simply ‘the community’ (Rothblum, 2010). In the 1970s, Elizabeth Barnhart stated that the small intersection of women who share a queer identity and also advocate the beliefs and values of queer counterculture (i.e. anti-oppression politics and social justice) referred to themselves as ‘the Community’ (Barnhart, 1975; Rothblum, 2010). This understanding of the ‘the Community’ remains to this day, and queer East Vancouverites often refer to themselves as simply ‘the queer community’.

Though the identity of ‘queer’ is shared among these individuals, they come from different racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic backgrounds, and have varying types of

physical and mental abilities. Queer community is “is rooted in politics and action, yet is manifested through performances, costumes and parties...a culture that resists many mainstream ideals...with its own cultural reference points, jokes, aesthetics, etc” (Hogan, 2005). Queer people are brought together by their shared identity of queerness and their experiences of being queer in a heteronormative society, and they foster their community through displays of pride, solidarity, and celebration. Radical queer people who push back against heteronormativity and homonormativity often stand in opposition “to the institutions of family, heterosexuality, and reproduction”, developing their own logics of location, movement, and identification” (Halberstam, 2005). When I refer to “community”, particularly with regards to the East Vancouver queer community, I am describing a social assemblage of collective action and solidarity with shared values and norms among radical queer young-adults who stand in opposition to heteronormativity. These social networks keep the East Vancouver queer community of this study connected through online and face-to-face interactions, discussions, and organizing. This queer community typically operates outside of gay villages, challenging where “being visibly queer is acceptable” (Hogan, 2005). In this way, the queer community tends to be a social assemblage which focuses on social networks and shared resources. These social assemblages change and evolve and shape their communities because:

Radical queers work to expand the boundaries of safe spaces and thereby expand the range of acceptable behaviour and identity categories. The intentional blurring of the lines is an attempt to deconstruct the oversimplification of an identity based on sexual orientation alone, by fighting against homophobia along with racism, trans-activism, poverty issues and so on (Hogan, 2005).

The queer community shapes public spaces to make them queer friendly, and in turn is shaped by those same spaces. In addition, they challenge oppression within their community spaces, thereby upholding the values of inclusivity, diversity, and solidarity within the queer community and the spaces in which they gather. Its core defining factor, in addition to a shared experience of queerness, is the sense of shared interest in radical queer politics that differentiates them from other LGBTQ+ people within the same city (Lo & Healy, 2008; Halberstam, 2005).

What is particularly notable about many queer women and transgender people and their conceptualization and experience of community is that they form a community that focuses more on friendship networks and social or political action, whereas

heterosexual women have been found more likely to be connected to families and religious organizations, and thus have less need to form 'families of choice' (Rothblum, 2010), meaning intimate networks comprised of friends, roommates, ex-partners, and current partners, rather than relatives, children, and spouses, become the focus of queer community social networks and chosen families (Rothblum, 2010). Queer women and transgender people in the queer community are more likely than cisgender heterosexual women to form and find community through joining organizations and forming diverse social networks from which they have access to socializing and support. Therefore, queer culture, organizations, and events become a staple to forming and building 'community' among queer people, especially queer people who are not bound spatially (Rothblum, 2010; Giesecking 2016).

As with any community, the queer communities of Vancouver, particularly the East Vancouver queer community of this study, is not without their own sets of issues and disagreements. The negative aspects of community may go beyond arguments around relationships, communication styles, or organizing methods. At times, queer communities can replicate forms of oppression within their own social hierarchies. This may be seen, for example, by placing an unbalanced value of lesbians over bisexual women (referred to as biphobia), or by focusing on white queer people at the exclusion of queer people of color. By prioritizing the narratives of white, gay, cisgender women, queer communities may effectively leave out queer people who are "simultaneously...faced with oppressions based on race or class" (Joseph, 2002).

2.1.2 Space Making

The broader queer community separates itself from the gayborhood and spreads itself throughout many neighborhoods in a metropolitan area in order for queer people to engage with more queer community members (Murray, 2016: 58). Queer communities of queer women and transgender people at the urban scale are not bound by single neighborhoods, districts, or designated spaces, since their communities are constituted through social networks rather than commercial sites (Podmore, 2006; 595). This leaves queer women and transgender individuals to find and form their own communities across entire sections of cities, bound only by shared identities and interests rather than shared territories, which contrasts the gay villages frequented by many gay men.

Space making for a community not settled into one specific place is played out in the organizing efforts of queer women and transgender young adults in Vancouver's queer community. Organizers foster a sense of community and identity across the city by creating spaces to suit their purposes. These spaces are temporary and unstable as venues and meetings spaces change from event to event. Academics and urban professionals can improve their understanding of how queer constituencies claim urban public space, services, and rights to direct political action, public assembly, and protest by putting this into the context of 'the right to the city' (Murray, 2016:59). The 'right to the city' was an idea formed in 1968 by Henri Lefebvre, which was further explored David Harvey. Harvey explains that:

...the right to the city is far more than the individual liberty to access urban resources: it is a right to change ourselves by changing the city. It is, moreover, a common rather than an individual right since this transformation inevitably depends upon the exercise of a collective power to reshape the processes of urbanization (Harvey, 2003).

Urban queer women and transgender individuals exercise their right to the city by finding public and private spaces that are not otherwise deemed as a queer community space, and shape those spaces to suit their needs (Murray, 2016; Podmore, 2006; Rothblum, 2010). The right to the city in the context of East Vancouver queer organizing is the queer community's ability to take spaces which are not 'theirs'—that is, not designed specifically for the queer community—and make them into temporary sites of queer culture. The organizers find venues which suit their needs and then work to create anti-oppressive, inclusive, safe spaces for members of the queer community to come together for socializing, fun, learning, and political action. The East Vancouver queer community organizers are putting this into practice as they organize community events, gatherings, workshops, and resources across multiple neighborhoods within East Vancouver.

To date, there are a handful of human geography studies on the territories and lives of queer women and transgender people. From these ethnographies, case studies, and mapping projects, scholars have noted some differences regarding the lived experiences of queer women and transgender people as compared to the generalizations made about the gay male community that are often applied to the entirety of the queer community. First, theories of territory within the literary canon of

queer geographies often frame queer territories (or territories in general) as “based on economic buying power and property ownership” (Giesecking, 2016), whereas in reality:

...urban lesbians and queer women carve out public space for themselves in intermittent iterations across formal neighbourhood boundaries. With less political and economic power, these women produce shared material spaces as driven by sociality and fleeting, fragmented economies rather than through the more longer term social and economic territorialisation associated with the gaybourhoods of gay men. (Giesecking, 2016).

This means that queer women and transgender people often do not have one stable space or neighborhood in which they can gather and organize, but instead use venues and locations based upon which venues are made accessible to them through social connections and resources shared among other queer community members. Queer communities of queer women and transgender people, especially those existing completely outside of gay villages, include an unidentifiable number of individuals and spaces than can be clearly mapped as a coherent neighborhood in the ways that a gay village can be mapped (Oswin, 2015). These “shared material spaces...[and] fragmented economies” are in contrast to the dominant narrative on queer urban life, which centers gay villages, or ‘gayborhoods’ (Murray, 2016; Binnie, 2011; Hogan, 2005). In major cities, such as Vancouver, the focus of cities and urban professionals remains on these gay villages, despite being sites of culture only for affluent gay men (Bell and Binnie, 2004; Binnie, 2014). The City of Vancouver’s focus on Davie Street when discussing Vancouver’s LGBTQ+ community supports the narrative that centers commercialized, gay male spaces. Major cities are likely to have gay villages, pink or rainbow structures, Pride parades, and even queer focused non-profit organizations or social enterprises, but often fail to stand in solidarity with other marginalized queer demographics (Binnie, 2011; Bell & Binnie, 2003), such as the low-income young adults in the East Vancouver queer community. The stereotype of gay affluence masks the narrative of working-class experiences of queer people, which may fall outside of the realm of gay villages, Pride events, and other mainstream gay male culture (Binnie, 2011; Hogan, 2005). This is especially true when considering the lived experiences of urban queer women and transgender individuals in comparison to this dominant gay male narrative, since queer women are more likely to operate through social networks across many neighborhoods, rather than operating within set, commercialized neighborhoods such as those often found in gay villages (Oswin, 2015; Lo & Healy, 2008). While gay villages may be seen

as the idyllic space for queer culture and politics, they are also the “site of profound injustices for queer women, particularly for youth and women of colour” (Giesecking, 2016) who have experienced misogyny, racism, transphobia, and other forms of verbal or physical violence in predominantly gay male spaces (Giesecking, 2016). For this reason, much of lesbian and transgender organizing exists outside of gay villages (Hogan, 2005).

2.2 Queer Studies and Community Organizing

Within the queer community, such as in the East Vancouver queer community of this research, there are core values of radical politics which hold great importance to individual members of the queer community, as well as shape the collective discourse of the community. These politics focus on anti-oppression and accessibility, meaning organizers strive to create community spaces which are physically, financially, and emotionally accessible to queer people of all races, abilities, genders, ethnicities, and religions, all while remaining self-critical about how they and other community members may still be acting out their privilege through oppressive societal structures. These politics are different from homonormative gay politics because radical queer community celebrates differences and fights oppression in multiple forms, while mainstream gay politics prioritize inclusion, assimilation, and acceptance in mainstream society (Hogan, 2005). Fighting multiple forms of oppression is the core value of queer community politics because it is not possible to examine one type of oppression, such as homophobia, without putting it into context with other types of oppression, such as racism, “because they are all connected” (Pharr, 1997). Thus, queer theory is applied to society as a whole, allowing the systems of sexism, racism, classism, ableism, and other forms of oppression to be viewed through a queer-focused lens (Pullen, 2015). By subverting the dominant narratives of society, especially the narratives of wealth, heterosexuality, patriarchy, whiteness, physical or mental ability, and colonialism, queer community organizers are creating spaces which are politically transgressive (Pullen, 2015).

Inclusivity and accessibility are positive forces in the queer community. While much of the research on queer young adults has been problem focused—i.e. identifying rates of suicide, homelessness, sexually transmitted infections, harassment, and abuse—emerging literature and research now highlights the importance of positive

factors in the lives of queer young adults which help them thrive and subvert a mainstream heterosexual society (Higa, 2012). Higa emphasizes community connectedness, access to resources, outside support, and self-determination as the major positive influences to queer young adults and queer youth. Resources and environments created or maintained by people who do not understand the interconnectedness of identities and experiences, tend to be less helpful and positive for young queer people. In his qualitative research, Higa (2012) found that,

Youth of color and young women described additional experiences [to homophobia] of rejection that they saw as related to the ways their sexual identity overlapped with their racial/ethnic background and gender. For example, a bisexual multiracial female described the lack of safe spaces that simultaneously acknowledged her multiple identities.

His research, among others, demonstrates this need for an inclusive, anti-oppressive space for all queer young adults to create and enjoy. Without spaces that value the intersections of queerness, race, gender, religion, and physical ability, queer people may remain alienated from one or more aspects of their overlapping identities (Higa, 2012; Yescavage, 1999). It is for this reason that many radical queer community organizers now center radical anti-oppressive politics and inclusivity in their groups, events, and workshops.

In the context of queer community organizing, organizers must balance, and at times prioritize, the expectations and demands of bringing community together and creating accessible space for all. This demands a high state of awareness and openness to critique in order for organizers to receive and implement community feedback in their organizing, because “it takes attacking oppression from both the outside and within ourselves to move forward” (Yescavage, 1999). With internal reflection and queer community dynamics in mind, organizers are tasked with creating fun and enjoyable community space, while also meeting often conflicting, but equally important, accessibility needs (i.e. a venue which is cheap may be a venue that is not physically accessible to people with mobility devices).

2.2.1 Callout Culture

When one aspect of meeting all needs in a community event fails, is unbalanced, or is perceived to be less of a priority than other aspects of anti-oppressive community

space, organizers will often face what is referred to as a 'callout', meaning one or more community members will publicly express their disappointment and hurt with an organizer with the aim to hold the organizer accountable for any mistakes or oppressive behavior. Sometimes these callouts are justified and helpful, and at other times, these callouts lack context and are expressions of animosity rather than solidarity. Today, callouts commonly happen through social media, where multiple people can contribute to and share the discussion with other community members and organizers. Organizers must therefore be both self-aware and quite educated on radical queer politics in order to create a successful community event, be well-liked, and avoid being called out. This is a tricky balance to strike, as fighting for one queer value through organizing efforts can sometimes lead to working against another queer value, thereby creating intra-community problems and infighting as oppressed people perpetuate the oppression of other oppressed people (Yescavage, 1999; Pharr, 1997). Though some needs in community space may be in conflict at times, many queer community organizers, individuals, and queer scholars do believe that in order to eliminate one type of oppression, they must, as a collective, aim to eliminate all forms of oppression (Barnoff, 2007). When addressing oppressive behaviors or values in radical queer spaces, callouts are considered important and valuable, especially because they give a voice to otherwise silenced and marginalized groups. When these groups are silenced, the intra-community "struggle continues to occur because members of each group perceive that there is a lack of attention to the form or forms of oppression that are most politically important to them" (Barnoff, 2007).

Nevertheless, online callout culture can sometimes backfire and hold a community back, leading to "higher levels of interpersonal misunderstanding, hostility and aggression...relative to face-to-face interactions" (Xu, 2015). In this way, callout culture can be seen as an expression of lateral violence, wherein traumatized, stigmatized, and marginalized queer people enact trauma laterally onto each other as an unhealthy coping mechanism (Cvetkovich, 2003). Trauma is "a social and cultural [experience] that emerges in response to the demands of grappling with the psychic consequences of historical events" (Cvetkovich, 2003). Because of historical and ongoing trauma, many individuals in the queer community are working and searching very hard for safer spaces that push back on oppression and violence. When events or organizers in the East Vancouver queer community of this study fall short of creating that

safe space, lateral violence occurs as individuals within the community push the blame onto the organizers themselves for not meeting every need of the East Vancouver queer community.

As a relatively new phenomenon, there is very little academic discussion or research on callout culture in particular, but there are studies about aggressive online behavior in online communities. Youth who were online bullies are actually more likely to be the victims of offline bullying (Xu et al., 2015; Ydarra et al., 2004), showing that offline harassment and oppression can translate into unhealthy coping mechanisms and lashing out online. Similarly, Xu states that, “users who experience aggressive activities may choose to leave the community or initiate more aggression in return, which makes the community a place of conflict” (Xu et al. 2015). The more aggressive expressions of callout culture may be happening in the East Vancouver queer community because some individuals use callout posts online to lash out at organizers and other community members. Some of those community members may be using callouts to bolster their own credibility and gain respect from their peers because they are demonstrating a superficial engagement with social justice values by co-opting social justice language in a way that puts down other queer community organizers and individuals. This phenomenon is seen in many other online communities as well, wherein “members assert their credibility to gain authority to speak, [fighting facts] with personal experience...[and] generating discourse that legitimates their beliefs” (Edy & Risley-Baird, 2016).

In this way, callout culture can miss the mark, ending up being problematic to the queer community rather than being a tool to engage with social justice in a valuable and constructive manner. So long as individual community members use callout culture and social justice jargon to boost their own credibility and vent their anger rather than meeting other organizers and community members with empathy and solutions, callout culture will continue to negatively impact the organizing efforts of the East Vancouver queer community alongside the impacts of gentrification and organizer burnout, as outlined in the findings chapters.

Unsurprisingly, there is quite an extensive dialogue about the pros and cons on callout culture in non-academic online publications and forums. Callout culture draws attention to a problematic behavior and allows anyone with access to internet to get

publicly involved in the discussion. This means that any mistakes that are made are quite public and damaging, leading *Huffington Post UK* contributor Lucy Uprichard to write that “one bad tweet can effectively ruin a career” (2016). Uprichard sees many flaws in callout culture, and says that at times, it is merely a way to condemn and criticize others anonymously online, without actually offering solutions to the problematic behavior and instead perpetuating judgement and shaming (Uprichard, 2016).

Other online articles posted on *Black Girl Dangerous* and *Feministing* also support the original intention of callouts and accountability, but also lament the misuse of callout culture for being a shaming practice which leaves people behind rather than educating people and bringing them together. Some go even further when discussing callout culture, claiming that the online platform of such callouts “values anonymity, promotes chaotic discourse and fosters a hostile, an abusive atmosphere” (Sandberg, 2014). Indeed, callout culture can be the best and worst thing for radical communities that seek to create anti-oppressive community spaces online and offline. While callout culture may be a part of accessible community dialogue, it can also inflame existing tension among community members who may be eager to criticize those with whom they disagree. Callouts are therefore neither wholly good or wholly detrimental to community building; they can be a means through which community may be radically restructured around anti-oppressive practices at best, and isolated, suppressed, and limited in potential by animosity and hesitation at worst. Several interviewees suggested that the prevalence of callout culture in the East Vancouver queer community stems from past experiences of oppression in other communities and distrust of organizers who are more privileged (i.e. white or cisgender organizers working with people of color and transgender people). Callout culture has led to improvements in accessibility in some East Vancouver queer events, but has also pushed some organizers away due to the stress and anxiety surrounding the intensity and antagonism of callout culture.

2.3 Gentrification

Gentrification is predicated on “socio-spatial change and the transfer of residential occupancy across class boundaries” (Ley, 2003:2538) in such a way that a space or neighborhood shifts towards middle- or upper- class values and tastes, moving away from what was once working- or lower-class. “Gentrification involves the transition of inner-city neighbourhoods from a status of relative poverty and limited property

investment to a state of commodification and reinvestment” (Ley, 2003:2527). This is seen quite clearly across Vancouver, British Columbia, in neighborhoods along East Hastings and Main streets, notably in Chinatown, the Downtown East Side, Strathcona, Mount Pleasant, and Riley Park. Note the property value increases in red along Main Street, East Hastings, Broadway, and Kingsway on the map below. Gentrification in those areas is significant because they are frequently the sites of queer community events. As those neighborhoods continue to gentrify, queer community organizers continue to lose access to affordable, accessible, and suitable spaces.

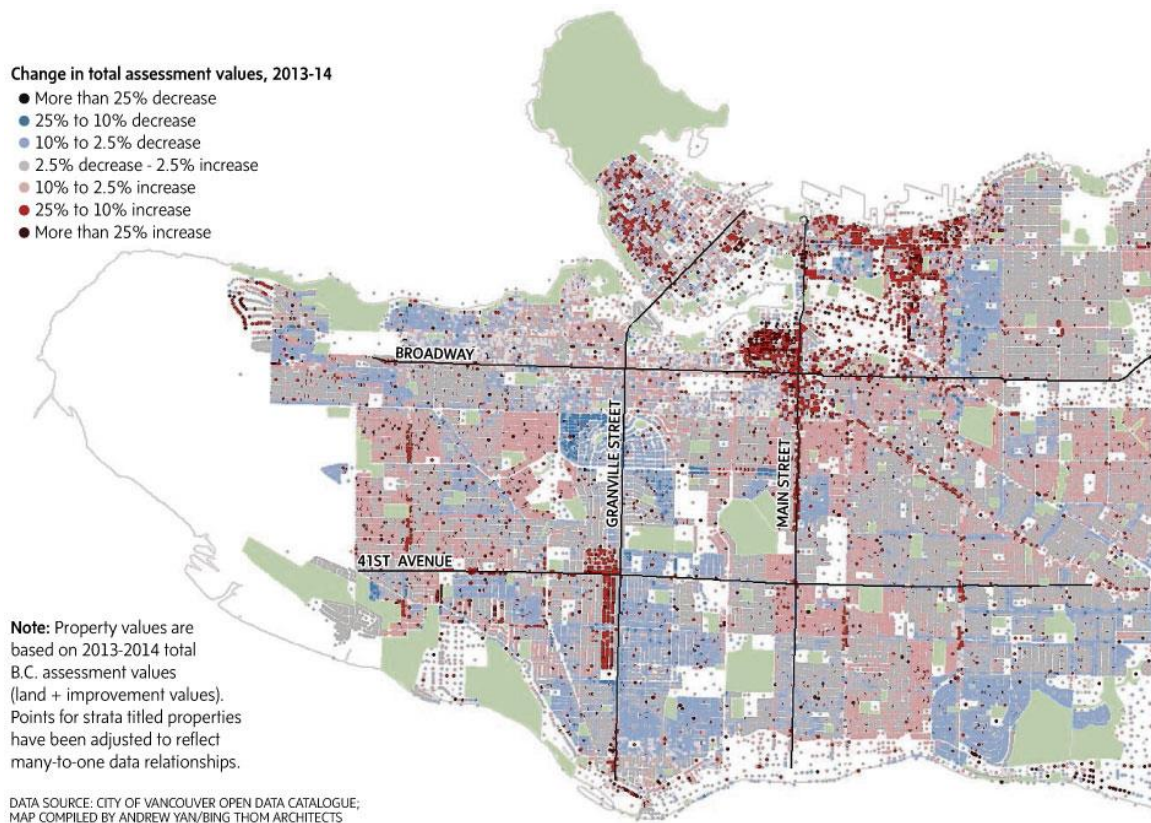


Figure 2 Change in total property assessment values. Source: *Globe & Mail*, January 30, 2014.

2.3.1 Framework for Understanding Gentrification in the Context of East Vancouver Queer Community Organizing

Gentrification is often disguised as “urban revitalization”, “urban renewal” or “social mixing” (Lees, 2008). By reframing gentrification, the focus is instead placed upon the perceived positive aspects of “upgrading” a neighborhood. For decades now, there has been much debate about whether gentrification is good or bad, with some, like Altshuler (1969), Lowry (1960), and Smith (1971), believing that gentrification’s positive

impacts will eventually benefit the lower classes, while others, like Holcomb and Beauregard (1981), dismiss this idea. Lees explains that despite the “debate on whether or not gentrification leads to displacement, segregation, and polarisation” (Lees, 2008), gentrification is becoming more accepted among policy-makers on the grounds that it leads to social mixing and social cohesion. However, Lees argues that there “is a poor evidence base for [this] widespread policy assumption” (Lees 2008:2450).

This assumption is especially at play in Vancouver, since the City’s programs, while rhetorically valuing the notion of social mixing, tend to encourage gentrification by replacing marginalized, and often stigmatized, community members who are transitory (non-property owning), with new community members who are property owners (Blomley, 2004:89). Regarding the argument that phrases like “urban revitalization” and “social mixing” neutralize the negative image associated with gentrification, Lees states, “[social mixing and urban revitalization] is a policy language that never uses the word ‘gentrification’ and thus consistently deflects criticism and resistance” (Lees, 2008:2451-2452). By erasing the negative aspects of gentrification through this “urban renewal” and “social mixing” framework, the associated problems with gentrification—primarily unaffordability and displacement—cannot be mitigated or discussed. This particularly impacts the queer community in East Vancouver, because organizers face a constant struggle to both keep their events affordable and accessible, while also struggling to hold their events at stable and consistent venues. When gentrification is reframed as a social good, bringing a mixing of social classes and renewed public and private space, it constructs the conversation around helping the poor and building community, but it ignores the already existing communities that are threatened by the introduction of wealthier residents and businesses (Lees, 2008). Queer community organizers who have few venue options outside of these low-income areas are thereby displaced when social mixing and urban renewal are introduced into the neighborhoods in which they meet, organize, party, and come together in one space.

Regardless of how the dialogue is framed, gentrification is clearly shaping and reshaping neighborhoods across Vancouver. As developers buy existing properties in low-income neighborhoods and revitalize them, existing businesses, organizations, and residents are pushed out, either to be relocated or closed permanently. This directly impacts the organizing efforts of queer young adults in East Vancouver who organize queer community spaces, because the instability caused by gentrification makes

securing appropriate venues difficult. The increasing unaffordability of rent, licenses, goods, and services creates financial obstacles and barriers for these organizers. This is especially true since the queer community is bound by identity, social ties, and political action, rather than by commercial ties or property ownership (Podmore, 2006; Oswin, 2015; Geisking, 2016).

Furthermore, gentrification has been the cause for queer people being pushed out of designated gay villages and gayborhoods in the first place, dispersing low-income queer people from heavily commercialized gay spaces and causing gay villages to become less tolerant of queer people over time (Doan, 2011; Binnie, 2014). Davie Village was not always the homonormative, consumerist, affluent neighborhood it now has a reputation of being. Historically it had been a site of queer solidarity in the face of criminalized homosexuality and pervasive homophobia. Gay men and lesbians historically had to fight for a space such as Davie Village. It is only over time that the neighborhood has become inaccessible to the more marginalized individuals in Vancouver's queer communities by becoming a homonormative commercial street for affluent gay people and heterosexual people to visit and enjoy (Holliday, 2014). Development, redevelopment, and renewal in popular gay villages has made them more attractive to heterosexual residents and families, resulting in the closure of queer owned businesses and relocation and displacement of low-income queer people, pushing queer people and businesses further from downtown cores and into dispersed, low-income neighborhoods (Doan, 2016). This especially impacts transgender people, bisexual people, and gender non-conforming people, such as androgynous women or non-binary people because are most often left behind by the dominant gay male narrative of mainstream society and therefore lose access to LGBTQ+ spaces and resources as gayborhoods increasingly focus on gay men and heterosexual allyship (Doan, 2011; Browne, 2006). Inclusivity for these members of the queer community is then created by queer community activists and organizers in spaces that are temporary and anti-assimilationist, meaning that marginalized queer people, such as transgender people, bisexual people, and gender non-conforming people, now have temporary spaces to gather and share resources outside of the homonormative gayborhoods which have pushed them out over time (Doan, 2011).

Being pushed out of gayborhoods or being forced to organize in temporary spaces is particularly challenging for this portion of the queer community, especially as

queer women experience more negative aspects of gentrification than men, as they are less likely to have developed territories because of lower incomes and wealth (Alder & Brenner, 1992). The queer community in many North American cities worries that a dispersed community due to gentrification will make community organizing more difficult (Doan, 2016). The aspect of social mixing in gentrification is therefore not beneficial to low-income queer residents who are both displaced by upper-income, largely straight residents and upscale businesses, as well as dispersed across many neighborhoods due to the lack of affordable housing in a single stable queer-friendly neighborhood (Doan, 2016).

And so, low-income queer residents continue to carve out temporary spaces for themselves in the face of gentrification through social networks across large spatial boundaries (Murray, 2016; Doan, 2016; Podmore, 2006) because having queer-friendly spaces to meet, socialize, date, and network is essential to the queer community's existence within a city (Doan, 2016). Historically, Vancouver's queer women's community reflects the trend of forming large social networks across many neighborhoods, especially with regards to the lesbian community of the 1970s and 1980s.

The types of physical spaces that lesbians in mid-to-late 20th century Vancouver carved out for themselves to create community often consisted of underground lesbian bars and cafes, collectives, and organizations. These were dispersed across East Vancouver. Despite this dispersal, there still were plenty of spaces for queer women to meet in the 1970s and 80s, but these locations no longer exist today (Boulay, 2014). Both queer women and the scholars that study them argue that this is because specifically queer women's access to space is impacted by gendered economic disparities as well as different needs, resources, and ideologies of space (Lo and Healy, 2000; Boulay 2014). This is in contrast to gay male spaces which are thriving in modern global cities because of the mainstream acceptance of homonormativity and because of the consumption of gay male culture by both gay men and heterosexual people (Binnie, 2004, 2011, 2014). The mainstream acceptance of gay male spaces happens on two levels. First, gay spaces are homonormative and designed for a very specific type of queer experience, almost always for gay men whose lifestyles have gained social acceptance in mainstream society. Respectability politics for sexual and gender identities exclude queer people who have not assimilated to mainstream social and

cultural values, such as queer sex workers, people who openly present their fetishes and kinks, butch lesbians, non-passing transgender people, impoverished or low-income queer people, and otherwise radical or anti-assimilationist queer people. These 'unwanted others' are “pushed into the underground, back to dive bars, back alleys, and other less visible spaces” (Bell and Binnie 2004). Therefore, lesbian communities and modern queer communities in East Vancouver have been pushed out or kept out of gay villages due to the dominant narrative and have lost access to space over time, resulting in fewer queer women’s spaces in modern day Vancouver. This has occurred in the context of gentrification which makes property investment for lesbian and queer businesses in an increasingly gentrified East Vancouver less and less of a possibility.

Chapter 3.

Methodology

3.1 Introduction

I sought to answer my research question using qualitative research methods. I began my research with the hypothesis that gentrification is created obstacles to queer community organizing, which became the basis for my question: How do queer young adults organize community in an increasingly unaffordable and gentrified East Vancouver? I gathered data through semi-structured interviews which I manually transcribed, coded, and analyzed.

3.1.1 Semi-Structured Interviews

In collecting my data, I conducted six semi-structured interviews. The interviews were conducted one-on-one or in small groups either in person or via Skype-to-Skype calling. The eight individuals interviewed represent ten East Vancouver queer community events, parties, workshops, or groups targeting young adult queer women and transgender people. This is a qualitative research project that uses a series of cases, like an ethnography, rather than a mixed-methods research project using a sample. My study is not generalizable to the entire population, but will nevertheless contribute to the body of knowledge between urban studies and queer studies, as well as incite academics and planners to consider the roles that queer young adults have in shaping the social climate within cities like Vancouver.

These interviews closely resemble methodology used in similar studies interviewing queer women about their communities, using open ended questions for hour long interviews which were recorded, transcribed, and thematically coded much like Rothblum's 2010 study on lesbian communities. Similarly, my interview methodology also follows that of Sutama Ghosh, a researcher who conducted semi-structured interviews with 30 individuals. Her semi-structured interview model was chosen as a guide to my own research because ethnographic study on Bangladeshi immigrant community and their occupation of urban space focused on the same themes of

community and shared space as my own study on queer community in East Vancouver. In 2014, Ghosh published *Everyday Lives in Vertical Neighbourhoods: Exploring Bangladeshi Residential Spaces in Toronto's Inner Suburbs*, in which she sought to understand the culture of new Bangladeshi immigrants living in old high-rise apartment buildings outside of Toronto. Like Ghosh and Rothblum, I have a set of sample questions that I asked participants, but left the interview open to new topics and areas of discussion as they naturally arose in the conversation.

3.1.2 Coding

After collecting the data from my semi-structured interviews, I manually transcribed the interviews in full so that they could be coded and analyzed. For this step of data analysis, I followed the coding methods outlined by Johnny Saldaña in his book *The Coding Manual for Qualitative Researchers*. I coded and analyzed in three steps, moving from sorting to synthesizing to theorizing via the application of notes, categories, and themes (Saldaña, 2015). This included highlighting text, making comments, taking notes in a separate document of my major categories and themes.

3.2 Data Collection

My research method consisted of in-person interviews with individuals and small groups of selected participants meeting all my inclusion criteria, which is that an individual had to:

- Be living in Vancouver;
- Be self-identified as a queer woman or non-binary transgender individual, including trans women, cisgender lesbian and bisexual women, genderqueer women, or non-binary transgender people identifying as gender fluid, agender, two-spirit, or other related identities. This excludes cisgender gay and bisexual men as well as trans men;
- Be between the ages of 18-34 years; and
- Participate in the Vancouver queer community by organizing events (parties, workshops, protests, etc), organizing space (queer communal homes, queer safer spaces, queer event spaces), or by connecting community (facilitating workshops, leading queer groups, offering time or resources for event organizing, hosting events, etc).

Those groups and individuals meeting my inclusion criteria were contacted via email using an ethics approved recruitment script which disclosed my research question and purpose. I requested either small group or individual interviews depending upon the preference of the groups and individuals contacted. The choice between one-on-one interviews or small group interviews of individuals from the same group (ex: 3 organizers of a queer workshop) was solely the interviewees'--some participants may have felt more comfortable discussing the topic with their co-organizers, while others may have felt more comfortable discussing the topic one-on-one. All data collected from these interviews was critically analyzed and used to fill the gaps in existing literature around understudied queer urban subcultures.

My interviews were conducted within Vancouver at locations that met the needs and conveniences of my participants. The locations of interviews included the personal homes of multiple organizers, a coffee shop, and Skype-to-Skype calling.

These interviews were digitally recorded on a phone or laptop while I manually took notes in a notebook or Microsoft Word document. Following the completion of each interview, the audio recordings were uploaded to SFU Vault and deleted from the recording device. Next, within one week of holding the interview, the audio recordings were transcribed to a Microsoft Word document and deleted from SFU Vault. All digital transcriptions and notes were stored in SFU Vault and accessed only by myself.

3.3 Data Analysis

I did a critical analysis of the content of interview responses. This included looking at themes, patterns, or contradictions in responses. My analytical efforts were formulated on the methodologies of many ethnographic studies which precede my own. As mentioned, Sutama Ghosh selected 30 households to be interviewed based upon predetermined inclusion criteria. Ghosh then used these semi-structured interviews to analyze how new immigrants from Bangladesh were able to create a sense of 'para' (Bangladeshi for 'neighborhood') in their unaffordable high-rise complexes in the Toronto CMA (Ghosh, 2014). Similarly, I use the answers from my own semi-structured interviews to look for common themes, experiences, and sentiments from the many organizers that I interview and how the queer community organizers are able to foster and maintain community in an increasingly unaffordable and gentrified East Vancouver. I

manually transcribed, coded, and analyzed my data, and in doing so I became quite intimately familiar with the data, which I then manually sorted and organized based upon emerging themes or important points.

Chapter 4. Organizing Community in Queer East Vancouver

Introduction

In order to understand how gentrification impacts, or is impacted by, queer community organizing, it is important to give context to the organizing efforts themselves. Queer community organizers have a high standard for strong morals, politics, goals, and visions that they strive to foster and maintain. Organizers face many obstacles to organizing queer community events on individual and queer community levels which are entwined with the obstacles of gentrification, accessibility, and other Vancouver related factors. This chapter will discuss the accessibility factors of venues and meeting spaces, as well as Vancouver specific queer community issues. The obstacles created by gentrification will be discussed in the following chapter. Key components and obstacles of organizing queer community events, workshops, parties, and meet ups in East Vancouver include accessibility considerations, intra-community systems of mutual aid, and intra-community issues with regards to the practice and discussion of radical queer politics. Organizers across all event types expressed the difficulty of finding affordable venues that are easy to get to, as well as physically easy to navigate. In addition, organizers described the solidarity of mutual support among organizers, while also noting the difficulties some have experienced with other community members with whom there have been tension. This chapter explores the challenges, successes, and shortcomings experienced by queer young adults who organize community events in East Vancouver.

4.1 Community

Community is a mutable population of collective action and solidarity with shared values and norms. It is mutable because of the contextual nature of who is “included” and who is “excluded” according to different individuals, organizers, and events, as well as the changing nature of who is moving in and out of Vancouver. There is little stasis and stability in the East Vancouver queer community. Organizers across multiple events and groups expressed sentiments of intra-community dependency for resources, emotional support, finances, and advice. In addition, all organizers shared similar

political leanings common in the radical politics of the East Vancouver queer community which values anti-oppressive thought and action, supports marginalized QTBIPOC individuals, and resists the pervasiveness of capitalism. Many of these organizers and community members would describe their politics as 'leftist' and 'anti-capitalist'. These political beliefs influence the organizing efforts of those who facilitate bringing the queer community together through dance parties, arts spaces, workshops, collective homes, and other social or activist spaces. Organizers therefore are very conscious of physical accessibility and financial barriers to attending events, and the organizers create community spaces which are actively challenging racism, transphobia, Islamophobia, xenophobia, and ableism.

4.1.1 Solidarity

Intra-community solidarity among East Vancouver queer people is foundational to the organizing efforts of the young adults who bring the queer community together. This is seen through the creation of chosen families (i.e. trusted networks of close friends and partners who replace the roles, and assume the responsibilities of, natal families), systems of support, and the fostering of an environment of collaboration rather than competition among organizers. The community thrives through this extensive system of codependence.

Systems of support created by the queer community for one another primarily include, but are not limited to, emotional support, financial support, and resource sharing. Through one-on-one and small group interviews with organizers, it became clear that emotional support was essential for fighting organizer burnout as well as developing new events. Emotional support among the organizers of different events is quite common, as they tend to lean on each other for assistance, guidance, and friendship through various personal, professional, and organizing related obstacles. Organizers repeatedly expressed a feeling of mutual understanding and empathy among one another with regards to the ups and downs of community organizing. Many also made reference to the emotional support that their events provide participant members of the queer community.

Financial support and resource sharing is especially important in the context of unaffordability and a high cost of living in the City of Vancouver. Financial support often

comes in the form of donations. For the queer housing collective, financial support means calling on their community for donations to cover the costs of moving, hosting free events, and saving money for house projects or rent safety nets—in which a roommate may use a safety fund to cover part of the cost of one month’s rent in times of financial emergency. For the organizers of larger events, financial support was less related to receiving donations for covering fees, food, and alcohol, and more related to extending support by giving other groups donations with their own group’s money or the lending or giving of resources, such as large metal fans, art supplies, or volunteer time in demonstration of solidarity with other local and international initiatives. An organizer for one of the several nightlife events indicated that a portion of their profits go to a Chinatown organization which fights gentrification and empowers local residents. Other organizers used donations to donate to popular causes at home and abroad such as donating to Black Lives Matter or donating to fight the Dakota Access Pipeline on the lands belonging to the Standing Rock tribe in the United States.

Resource sharing between both events that are on hiatus, completely discontinued, and currently ongoing events was also a common feature of the larger, successful events. Organizers from events which were stopped for any variety of reasons—i.e. lost a venue to gentrification, fighting and drama among group members, organizer burnout—were quick to lend any resources, leftover funds, and supplies they had accumulated to the other organizers who were either just starting out a new event or were working to continue an ongoing event. Some organizers for larger parties keep a storage locker of party supplies which they reuse for each event or loan to other events. Items on loan included large fans for keeping sweaty, dancing bodies cool, party decorations, sound equipment, button makers, and craft supplies. It was not uncommon for organizers with fewer resources to request help from their community or from allies to their community. One organizer of a solidarity group for femmes in the Lower Mainland requested help in the form of monetary donations, food, crafting materials, and set-up/take-down assistance from masculine identified queer people who wish to stand in solidarity with femme queer spaces. This particular organizer received roughly \$100 in assistance from masculine queer people and straight men who follow and support the femme group via Facebook. With that money, this organizer was able to feed everyone at the next event due to the financial help they had received.

Ultimately, the feeling of solidarity between organizers, participants, and allies all stemmed from the feeling of wanting a “chosen family” which is a key element to what comprises the notion of “community” among queer people in East Vancouver. Because young queer people may be more likely to have poor connections with biological families due to homophobia and transphobia, and are proven to face increased rates of homelessness when compared to cisgender-heterosexual young adults, the idea of choosing one’s family is a popular one. Queer chosen families offer all kinds of support, which is why one organizer passionately cited coming together as a family and community as their primary reason for keeping queer events accessible for all queer people, especially the most marginalized queer people in the community. The support from chosen queer families may include emotional support, financial support, temporary housing, and other resources which become necessary when overcoming life’s many obstacles.

Among the interviewees, the value of having a chosen queer family was especially prominent in the queer communal home, where ‘members’—roommates—lived together with an intention of mutual aid, care, and support, much like the function of a loving biological family. Not only do the members try to support each other, but they also strive to support their extended queer community. The extended community of the queer collective house primarily comprises of partners and friends, but sometimes includes colleagues from jobs or from other community organizing groups. Queer collective houses are often connected to each other and members may go to each others’ events or trade resources such as bulk food items, tools, or housewares. These houses are rising in popularity among young queer adults in East Vancouver, primarily due to the rising cost of rent and the financial relief that comes with sharing a single home with upwards of 11 tenants. One queer collective house organizer explained this phenomenon from their point of view, stating:

I think Vancouver...is a cold city emotionally, like it’s not a very friendly city, and when you are a community oriented person and you can’t really afford to live in the place you need...it can be hard to break into [social groups and the queer community], and a really good way to...create a community is through a communal house. And I think that those things combined are pretty big reasons why there’s so many communal houses in Vancouver (Interview).

Here the organizer also touches upon their experience of a time in which they were new to Vancouver and found the overall social atmosphere of the city to be rather cold and socially detached, a sentiment shared among several other interviewees who also referred to the difficult nature of finding community and making friends when new to Vancouver. Even the queer organizers who had been born and raised in the Lower Mainland acknowledged the same experience of an anti-social atmosphere in Vancouver and attributed a lot of their success as organizers to the privileges they have in forging long term connections with many different types of people both inside the queer community and outside of it.

4.1.2 Intra-community Issues

Despite this solidarity, the queer community is not without its own intra-community tensions and challenges. Organizers have cited a radical queer political climate in Vancouver which focuses on 'callout culture' as a major reason for organizer burnout across all types of queer community organizing, be it nightlife, arts, or activism work. Callouts refer to the practice of publicly addressing a problematic person, group, or business so that other people are aware of an ongoing problem and can see that the problematic person, group, or business has been contacted and called to address the issue. Callout culture then refers to the phenomenon of using very public 'callouts' to address any and all interpersonal or intra-community issues. Callout culture debatably has its pros and cons, since it both holds individuals and groups accountable for their actions and intentions, and can cause strife between individuals who could be addressing their issues privately and compassionately, rather than in an aggressive, public way. Sometimes, these callouts will involve racism within queer community events and organizing, which is another major issue in the East Vancouver queer community because the majority of popular organizers are white queer people trying to create spaces for all queer people, which can sometimes cause tension. At other times, callouts may address accessibility needs not being met at specific venues or meeting spaces. Callouts may also become personal attacks on individuals, leading to some community members to boycott events associated with the individual who was called out for problems unrelated to the event itself.

To quote one interviewee, "the benefit of the doubt gets taken away from you when you're an organizer" (Interview). Similar thoughts were shared by every single

interviewee, with the exception of the queer communal home organizer. These interviewees confided:

You have to be superhuman. As soon as you're an organizer—even if you're friends with that person or have known them for years—you're automatically just on this different [level] where you have to be perfect and you have to have thought of all things beyond your own experience and you have to already be at a place [of perfection] ... no one is at that place, we're all learning to get there (Interview).

Another [point] is just the emotional challenge of like organizing in a radical queer community. It does sort of feel like you're putting a target on your back and it can be really discouraging because I think people have really good intentions but really just—especially with social media—come at angles of just shutting everything down of like any event that has any sort of flaw or issue. They just do really aggressive callouts instead of starting conversations or seeing that maybe people would be interested in changing. And I guess too that the queer community is just so used to other people being assholes that I think sometimes people get in that state of mind and will approach people that are most likely to be their allies and then treat them as an adversary. I think that happens a lot in queer organizing, especially with social media where you're not talking to someone face to face (Interview).

It's like I'm asking the city to go to prom with me and I'm naked. It feels like this very vulnerable act and I'm just like 'please come, it'll be cool I promise and I'm going to try to do everything right, and I might not, and if I don't you're going to be really upset with me' (laughs) (Interview).

It's almost like you can't do anything right so it's a very emotionally draining thing (Interview).

It's actually really intimidating to be organizing because when you're organizing you're really putting an idea out there, and in Vancouver [the queer community] is pretty rife with a lot of callout culture... it can be really scary... there tends to be a lot of...shaming that happens in queer organizing in Vancouver (Interview).

I have a fear of fucking up or doing something oppressive or like doing a bad job basically...like the fear I have of fucking up does feel like a lot of work to keep up with, [because I'm always asking myself] 'what is the word on the street, what are the politics around this word or that word?' ... It's a lot of pressure and I wish there was more support around the messy process [of] learning as opposed to like callout culture... And that's in no way to say that you can't call out people, but it just makes facilitating for me really scary. Because I'm one human and I'm very much in a learning process (Interview).

Your actions are not all visible by any means and people will think a lot of things about what you are doing without having the whole story...in a heavily politicized, and in a lot of ways polarized, queer community with like callout culture and organizer burnout and all these factors, sometimes it just [creates] rifts in the community where like whole swaths of people will stop going to an event because some organizer made like a problematic Facebook update or there was some problematic drag performance so they'll just never go back to that event (Interview).

All of these organizers express quite clearly the pressure placed upon them by their community. They are expected to know everything about accessibility and social justice, while also always be learning about accessibility and social justice, thereby placing them in a catch-22 of sorts wherein they cannot possibly have learned all there is to know about anti-oppression, but they are expected to enact anti-oppression politics in a near-flawless manner. This often leads to burnout and the end of events or groups. Several organizers felt as though they would be better equipped to handle these demands and expectations if queer community organizing were actually their paid full-time career. But this is not the case. No matter how much an organizer loves or hates the demands of organizing, they must balance these demands with other professional full-time or part-time jobs, leaving very little time for meeting their own individual needs. Because these organizers are often working multiple jobs at once to pay for rent, food, and miscellaneous organizing expenses, they must use their free time to audit venues, plan events, address community concerns, and manage their public and social media presences. Coming under attack, so to speak, for their often unpaid labor, is not only stressful and anxiety inducing, but also discouraging and draining for many of the interviewees, even when the interviewees take into consideration the positive outcomes some callouts have had in the queer community of East Vancouver.

4.2 Lack of Accessible Spaces

Accessibility is one of the greatest considerations of and challenges to the organizers within East Vancouver's queer community. Typically, the broad topic of accessibility is conceptualized as just a space that is navigable by physically disabled individuals. There are, however, other accessibility considerations for organizing the queer community that come into play in addition to physical accessibility. When planning for an event and selecting a venue, organizers are conscious of the locational accessibility of the venue, the physical accessibility of the venue, and the financial

accessibility of the venue for not only the attendees but also for the organizers themselves.

4.2.1 Locational Accessibility

The locational accessibility of a venue or meeting space covers geographical locations of venues, the venues' reputations within their neighborhoods, and the attendee capacity of the venues. Organizers want to keep their events within East Vancouver as much as possible while still choosing venues that are “good neighbors”—meaning that in the eyes of the organizers, these venues engage with and support the local community rather than force out locals who have been there prior to the venue—and that can accommodate the number of attendees expected to attend the event.

The most critical factor is that a venue be located in East Vancouver near public transit. There are several factors for this reasoning according to the organizers. The first and foremost factor is organizers' conceptualization that queer women and transgender people are primarily living and working within East Vancouver. When asked about why a queer brewery meetup does not meet downtown or in Davie Village, instead only choosing venues within East Vancouver, one organizer said, “this is where I know and this is where I live and this is where everyone lives” (Interview). Other organizers stated that they “never go [to Davie Village]” and that “Davie Village feels like another city” (Interviews). The sentiment of not aligning their identities and communities with Davie Village rang true across every single interview. To quote one organizer, “...Often with my interactions with folks in [Davie Village] I've seen and experienced a lot of racism and fatphobia and misogyny. So those are big reasons why that space doesn't feel safe or accessible to me” (Interview).

Organizers want people to come to their events, and by choosing a central location for the majority of community members, they can maximize event turnout. If a venue is in East Vancouver and located near transit, it will allow those living in East Vancouver to commute to the event via walking, biking, or transit, while still allowing those who have moved elsewhere in Metro Vancouver to commute in via the Skytrain, Canada Line, or buses. Currently, the majority of events are held along Main Street, East Hastings, and the surrounding side streets including E Cordova and E Pender. In the past, events were held along Commercial Drive as well, though many of these

events are currently on hiatus or permanently disbanded, with the exception of one. This is partially due to the fact that one larger event which used two locations along Commercial Drive is no longer in existence, while other reasons may include venue size, since many venues, cafes, or restaurants along Commercial Drive are only fit for smaller community events. Below is a map indicating the approximate locations of venues used (past and present) by the East Vancouver queer community organizers. In recent years, many of the events have been held in the northwest cluster of venues along Main Street and East Hastings, where there still remain a dwindling number of affordable venues, despite intense and ongoing gentrification.

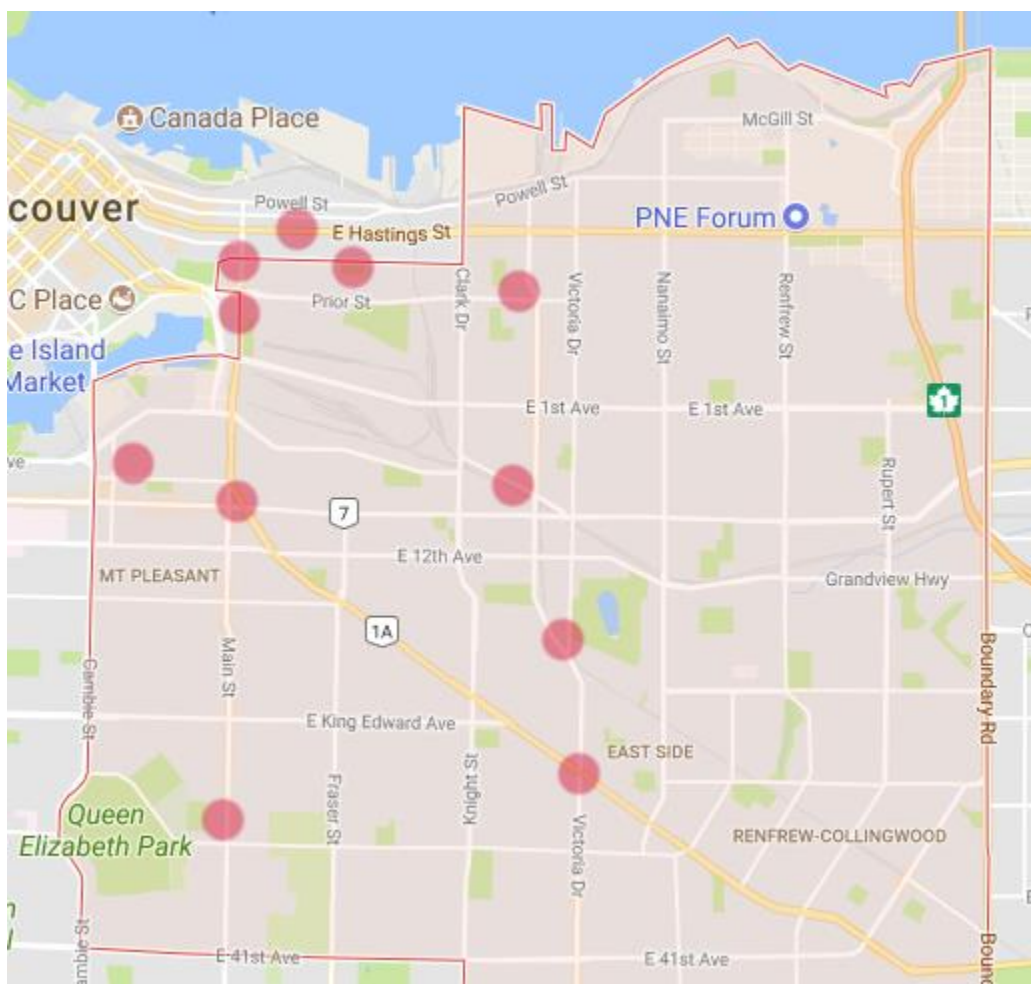


Figure 3 Approximate locations of venues represented by red markers. Exact locations and names of venues obscured for anonymity. Original map sourced from Google Maps, July 2017.

As mentioned, the reputation of the venue within the neighborhood is an important factor for the majority of queer organizers. Especially in the face of ongoing gentrification, organizers are tasked with the process of gauging whether or not a venue

is engaging in a meaningful way with its surrounding community. The criteria of “meaningful community engagement” means different things to different organizers and venues. When discussing her relationship with a local performance arts space, one organizer praised the venue, stating:

As an East Vancouver venue they wanted to support the queer community and they wanted to have that as part of their programming because the theatre scene in Vancouver is a white male wank fest. So I think that having these kinds of shows made them feel good about their external programming...The [Venue] is community minded, [they] want to be a part of the community in a meaningful way. If they had not charged us the non-profit rate, which is half of their total fees, [then] we wouldn't have been able to perform there and that would have changed the way that gentrified [venue] impacted the [neighborhood] (Interview).

Here, the organizer sees this gentrified performance arts space as both accessible to East Vancouverites, as well as community oriented. She even touches on the distinction between what she sees as her queer community, versus other queer communities. When she says “white male wank fest”, she is not only referring to white straight men, but refers to white gay and bisexual men as well. These demographics rarely intersect with the East Vancouver queer community of queer women and transgender people, and typically the white gay male community has more consumer power and mainstream popularity than queer women and transgender individuals, meaning they tend to occupy other spaces and neighborhoods of higher socio-economic status, such as Davie Village (Bell & Binnie, 2004; Binnie 2011, 2014; Podmore, 2006).

The organizer and venue share the opinion that the Vancouver theatre scene is not so diverse if it is only showcasing white male talent, which is why the organizer chose to call the Vancouver theatre scene a “white male wank fest”. The organizer is pleased that the venue recognizes this tendency and has chosen to support a lower income queer performance arts group focused on queer women and transgender individuals. Similarly, another queer arts organizer had a lot of success at a community centre near Commercial Drive which allowed her queer arts group to use the community centre as a place to meet, organize, and make art. In exchange for this free space, the artists performed at senior citizen events at the community centre a few times each year. She speaks highly of this community centre, saying that “the beautiful events we were a part of really grounded us in community. It truly was a mutually beneficial true community partnership where we both got a lot out of it” (Interview).

On the other hand, some venues were passed up because of their relationship to their neighboring communities. A poor relationship to the community was typically described in terms of businesses or venues complicit in gentrification without any regard for the existing residents and businesses, specifically when the gentrifying venue or business does not engage with the local neighborhood and instead brings its business from elsewhere. In particular, a Strathcona based brewery had earned a bad reputation in the eyes of one social events organizer. As she put it:

[The brewery owners] are not from Strathcona neighborhood and like they obviously had millions and millions of dollars and like that is going to be a big gentrifier in the neighborhood and I think like they're probably nice guys but because of that I'm not going to have them in my events because I'm not really seeing that they're really doing anything for that neighborhood other than driving the rent up there, right? (Interview).

This organizer believes that if she were to support this brewery at her event, then it would serve as an endorsement to their gentrification and business practices. Because she does not want to support gentrification in low-income East Vancouver neighborhoods, she has made the decision not to include their brewery despite the event being a beer tasting event for many local craft breweries. She told me that by not supporting this business she hopes this awareness trickles down to the queer community members who attend her event by thinking critically about why some breweries are selected and why some are ignored based upon their business models and location.

Of the venues in these neighborhoods, organizers face the additional challenge of finding venues with appropriate attendee capacity. While some events, especially workshops, will have under 30 participants, other events bring in hundreds of attendees. The larger events are often nightlife events with a focus on dancing or drag performances. The venue must be able to hold hundreds of queer young adults who often do not have another official queer event in the city to choose from on the same evening. It is common for some venues to be filled well over capacity despite the fact that venue capacities are put in place for physical safety (Interview). Choosing between a large enough venue space and a physically accessible venue space (e.g. one with no stairs that is wheelchair accessible) can therefore become a painful choice for some organizers. Another organizer spoke on this topic for their event, which has also brought in hundreds of people. The venue has multiple rooms for dancing, socializing, or

drinking, but is not at all accessible to people with some physical disabilities. The organizer states:

...and that was sort of important to us that it be a space that is physically able to accommodate hundreds of people and also it being a multiroom space because that's something that everybody so clearly favors over your average one big box of a room sort of night club space. And they're all craving that and that's...kind of a priority. And that's kind of awkward to prioritize—or rather, I feel conflicted prioritizing those factors over like physical accessibility and not supporting a gentrifying venue, but it is conflicting because like doing [the event] where we do it we'll bring in 600 people. So obviously there is an accessibility factor even if it's not one of physical accessibility for people with physical disabilities or what have you, that kind of space and neighborhood is appealing for other reasons for all those folks (Interview).

The point here is that some organizers may be considering multiple accessibility factors that may be in conflict with each other rather than in conjunction. This organizer chose locational accessibility—large dance floor, multiple rooms, central location, connections to the venue's bar manager—over other accessibility factors—no wheelchair accessibility, many stairs to be climbed outside and inside the venue, and choosing a gentrifying venue that harms rather than positively engages with the Downtown East Side and Chinatown communities. It becomes clear that multiple accessibility factors do not always overlap and do in fact lie in opposition to one another at times. Organizers feel the pressure to meet all of these accessibility factors to keep everyone happy and to meet the standards of their own anti-oppression values and politics, but feel extremely limited by the venue options in East Vancouver. Essentially, these organizers know that they cannot have it all when it comes to larger events, and as decisions are made to meet one need and not another, tension and conflict is born within the community as people feel left out or ignored. The theme of meeting conflicting accessibility needs while organizing community will be explored in depth with the discussion around community in the next section on physical accessibility.

4.2.2 Physical Accessibility

Once a list of potential East Vancouver venues is created by an organizer for a specific event, the list dwindles drastically once physical accessibility is taken into account. Physical accessibility includes, but is not limited to: no stairs, wheelchair ramps, gender neutral washrooms, wide doorways and washroom stalls, appropriate seating

with regards to chair height and seat width, scent reduction, and the heights of tables, bars, and ATMs. Though these factors are not obviously 'queer specific' needs, they absolutely do intersect with the queer community. Queer people come from many intersecting demographics. There are, of course, disabled queer people, queer immigrants, queer people of color, fat queer people, mentally ill queer people, poor queer people, etc. If only thin, white, able-bodied, middle-class queer people are considered by organizers who plan events for the community, then entire chunks of the queer community are excluded. And community is about inclusion rather than exclusion when it is conceptualized as bringing individuals together who share the identity and experiences of 'queerness'. A queer collective home organizer passionately described why having an inclusive community is important to them:

Well, I think especially in queer community look at how many aspects of our identities are stigmatized and pathologized and how many of us have experienced so much hate in our lives. And people definitely have different experiences depending upon where they grew up or what culture they're living in but we need to have a space where it's safe to express our sexuality and our gender and whatever parts of ourselves that is outside of the dominant norms and narratives of our society. Because as individuals the thing we're all searching for most is a sense of belonging. And that's something that really lacks for a lot of queer and trans folks and that's why there's higher rates of suicide, addiction, and homelessness, is isolation and ostracization by the family and friends and communities you've come from. If there's no one there to take you in when you've gone through all that, then what's left? Especially for queer and trans folks, and especially queer and trans folks of colour, community saves our lives. I honestly don't think I would be alive today if it wasn't for the communities I've had the honor to be a part of and in those communities, I have found family. I've found friendship and I've found family. And that's a really important aspect of my mental health (Interview).

Without having access to community, this individual, as both an organizer and a participant in the East Vancouver queer community, indicates that they would have a lower quality of life. By having access to and creating a community that is accessible for them, people like them, and other people of different life experiences, they feel as though they can grow, learn, be cared for, offer support, and have fun. Therefore, having an accessible space for all queer people to have community is a top priority for this interviewee and all interviewees across the board.

Understanding the importance of accessibility in community space, the organizers have standards that venues must meet in order to be considered accessible

for their events. One of the biggest uses of time and energy for organizers is visiting potential venues to do accessibility audits and meet with staff. One organizer has a full file of accessibility audits on bars, venues, and breweries across East Vancouver and has even taken it upon herself to submit feedback to managers and owners on the accessibility of their space, providing suggestions on how to improve. She explains,

It's very interesting to me how [the venues] react, like for example, one of them ended up putting up a handrail in their bathroom because they didn't have one. Where I think at [brewery name redacted], I was like 'you have an accessible washroom but you put your storage in there so it's no longer accessible' and they were like, 'oh well, then where will we put our storage?' They weren't interested in [accessibility]. So, I got to see the attitudes that different breweries had on their own spaces (Interview).

This is clearly an ethical issue beyond the responsibility of the individual organizer and should be addressed by the staff of the brewery and other such venues. And yet, the task of finding physically accessible spaces and maintaining those spaces falls onto the shoulders of the individual organizers. It is not legally required or expected of the organizers to do this work on their own, but if they do not do the accessibility audits then it seems that no one will. And to forego an accessibility audit is out of the question when one of the priorities of every single event organizer is to create a space for everyone to feel welcome to attend, regardless of physical ability or financial status. This is because organizers make the claims of being "inclusive and anti-oppressive" and therefore must either live up to those claims and help to facilitate a venue space which does in fact include many different queer people, or acknowledge that the event or venue space is exclusive, therefore limiting who is able to attend. The latter is very undesirable for most of the organizers on an ethical and political level, because to them, "community is a space we create together" (Interview), and to exclude certain marginalized demographics of the queer community is to limit the potential growth, learning, solidarity, and enjoyment of the entire queer community. Furthermore, to claim the label of an "inclusive and anti-oppressive" event while knowingly choosing to use a physically inaccessible space would very likely result in a callout from community members. Though the callout would be making a reasonable point—the need for physically accessible spaces—it would still cause the organizer stress and cost the organizer time and energy to mitigate and address the callout. When considering that not only would community members be excluded from a physically inaccessible venue, but also that the organizers themselves would have to deal with the inevitable callout,

the organizers' energies are much better put to use in finding a physically accessible space to begin with despite the challenges of conducting accessibility audits on their own time. The standards and expectations are high, and hard work and accountability are necessary if organizers want to meet those standards.

Some queer arts organizers would even schedule individual meetings on weekends with venue staff and disabled artists in order to completely test the physical parameters of venue or meeting space. In addition, they noted, "A lot of the venues that are renovated to the City of Vancouver accessibility standards, you can't afford. Because they cost thousands of thousands of thousands of dollars [to rent or reserve]" (Interview). To accommodate all of the physically disabled queer artists in the group would have been extremely costly and barred low-income queer artists from participating as well, creating an opposition between physical accessibility needs and financial accessibility needs. This is one of the many reasons that many organizers keep a log of accessibility audits to refer back to later to cross check conflicting accessibility needs in various venues or spaces. By having accessibility audits of spaces, queer organizers are able to refer back to notes made by each other and determine if a space is suitable for the needs of the community. Together, the organizers are working to keep track of the shrinking number of spaces that best help bring together, facilitate, and organize community. These physical needs are closely tied to other needs within finding space. The organizer for a queer brewery meetup explains:

Once you start listing all the needs of spaces they just get so small. I want something with outdoor space, I want something that's physically accessible, I want something that either has a lot of [beer] taps or the space to bring in a lot of taps, I need something that has a capacity of at least 300, maybe 250, it needs to be in East Vancouver. I'm just trying to think of how many venues actually fit those needs off the top of my head and its like the ones that do [meet those needs] aren't cool. Like you could rent a hall, but you don't want it to be like a high school gymnasium or something like that. Renting a hall [gives] a much more neutered vibe to the event. And then you worry about the owners of the bar. Are they shitty people? Are they going to take advantage of my event? Are the staff not going to be good to my queer [guests]? (Interview).

The physical needs of the space are so intertwined with the other requirements for a space and cannot be separated. Here, an organizer expects her venue of choice to meet all of the criteria of being physically accessible, large enough, located in East Vancouver, and of course, queer friendly. The physical accessibility specifications of the

venue are as equally important to this organizer as is the quality of beer taps and the attendee capacity.

During these accessibility audits, it is quite uncommon to come across gender neutral washrooms already existing within the venues. So, the organizers are then tasked with creating a temporary solution to gender binary washrooms. Organizers will often meet with the staff and managers to talk about transgender and non-binary gender identities, stressing the importance of safe and accessible washrooms for attendees. Many organizers and staff will then tape up “all gender washroom” signs over the otherwise permanent gender markers of “Women’s” and “Men’s” washrooms, and bring staff up to speed on respecting the choice of individuals to use the washroom they feel most comfortable using. Because a few of the events have a long-standing relationship with the managers and staff after years of events, this need for gender neutral washrooms goes unquestioned and respected for two of the organizers. Newer events and events that move around from one location to another are not always so lucky, but all organizers note that there is often at least one single-serve washroom commonly reserved for families with young children or folks in wheelchairs that can be used as an all genders washroom.

Finally, organizers will measure the heights and widths of all stairs, doorways, and surfaces in the venue prior to the event and post them online on the event’s Facebook event page under a subsection labeled “Accessibility Info”. This information allows for physically disabled individuals to plan accordingly for any issues or challenges they may encounter due to the structure or design of the venue. For example, a queer collective house which holds open mic nights for the community states on their event page:

The house is not wheelchair accessible. There are 10 stairs up to the main floor with railings. Main floor is level with the kitchen, a bathroom, and a few living room spaces. Chairs and couches are available for seating. The backyard is wheelchair accessible from a paved driveway that extends into the backyard to a grassy section. Seating options include grass, a hammock, and outdoor chairs. Not a scent-free home, but we request that attendees come without scented products to make the space more accessible to folks with sensitivities (Communal Home Facebook Page, 2016).

Though this is not a formal venue, the roommates in the communal home care very much about the comfort of their guests in their home and want to keep their events accessible not only to old friends and partners, but to other queer people looking to strengthen their relationship to the queer community as well. By having an accessibility statement for their own home, they do not take for granted the needs of others and demonstrate solidarity with marginalized queer people in their community, especially disabled queer people. Similarly, a larger, more formally organized event states a very detailed description of the physical space for accessibility purposes. The accessibility details are included below in full in order to demonstrate the thoroughness of queer community accessibility audits for larger events:

Venue is not wheelchair accessible, and not scent reduced.

Due to the nature of the venue, and the many different kinds of events that happen at [venue] throughout the week, we are unable to ensure this will be a scent reduced space. We ask event guests to refrain from using chemically scented body products for this event.

Venue entrance is just above sidewalk level, via a short ramp (9" rise by 30" depth). Entrance doorway is 38" wide.

ATM is just to the left inside front entrance, with 36" high keypad.

There are 4 sets of steps to the main floor where the event takes place, with landings separating each set of steps. There is a 32" high railing the entire way. Three steps to first landing (landing is 64"x70"), 11 steps to next landing (59"x60"), 5 steps to next landing (60"x60"), and 10 more steps to main floor.

Coat check counter is 40" high.

Bar is 43" high.

There is one wheelchair accessible single stall washroom equipped with a 36" high grab bar. This washroom is usually locked; key is available at bar. The doorway is 35" wide; light switch 49" high; sink is 32.5" high and 19" deep with lever faucets; push soap dispenser 53" high on wall, toilet paper dispenser 30" high.

The washroom usually marked "women's" (all genders for this event) has 35" entrance doorway, with 5 stalls, each with 22" doorways. There are 4

sinks, 36" high and 26" deep with lever faucets. Two push soap dispensers 56" high on wall. Two automatic hand dryers 39" high.

The washroom usually marked "men's" (all genders for this event) has 36" entrance doorway, and a short hallway that turns a corner. There is one stall with 22" doorway, and 3 urinals, 21", 25", and 25" high respectively. Two sinks 35" high by 16" deep, with push timer faucets. Push soap 50" high, automatic hand dryer 43" high.

The [First Room] and [Second Room] each have 33" doorway entrances.

There is a raised seating and bar area in the centre of the main room, with ramp access from the front (4.5" rise by 36" depth), and steps on each side.

Event organizers are working to complete a full accessibility audit of this multi-level, multi-room venue. Future ... events may make use of some of these other rooms (Event Facebook Page, 2016).

The physical accessibility notes are as long as the general description for the event, and the notes are clearly very detailed. The organizer is trying to consider as many physical barriers to the space as possible. By listing specific measurements of heights and widths of interactive spaces (bar, ATM, washroom stalls, seats), the organizer is giving the potential attendees as much information as possible in order for the attendees to plan ahead and have as few surprises and challenges as possible once at the venue. It helps disabled attendees know what to expect and how to mentally or physically prepare for the event prior to their arrival. This is all part of the accessibility audit held by multiple queer organizers in order to bring the community together.

4.2.3 Financial Accessibility

Financial accessibility is also on the minds of participants and organizers in East Vancouver's queer scene. Most notably, this topic has arisen in conversations around entrance fees for the various workshops, parties, and events in the community. For example, individuals who are attending a dance party are often expected to pay a cover fee at the door, in addition to paying for coat check and drinks. In queer events outside of the target demographic, primarily events targeting gay and bisexual men, cover fees may be as high as \$80 at some gay venues and events, with prices rising during Pride season every summer. This fee is not financially feasible for many members of the queer community for whom these parties are organized. More accessible fees for attending

East Vancouver queer events are then negotiated in a variety of ways, especially through venue selection and flexible cover fee payment systems.

Of the organizers interviewed, several used personal relationships with prospective venues in order to secure spaces for cheaper rates. For example, the queer collective house only hosts events in their own home, the queer drag cabaret organizer had a professional working connection to the owner of an event venue, and the organizer for the femme solidarity group had access to facilities as a full-time student in one of the Lower Mainland's universities. These connections, especially for larger event organizers for parties and large social events, gave organizers the privilege of waiving venue rental fees, thereby drastically cutting the cost of hosting an event. In the case of the drag cabaret, the organizer is a relatively well-known event host, and therefore often does not need to pay any venue fees as their events have a reputation of drawing large crowds. This allows organizers to focus more on paying for DJs, artists, set up and take down, door staff, bar staff, and other similar expenses. All of these are covered by the door sales, and in some cases, bar sales. Because facility fees are low or non-existent, the door cost is able to be lowered to meet the needs of the attendees. Despite the benefits of building a relationship with a venue, some organizers still found that their venue of choice would still be closed or relocated due to gentrification, preventing any real sense of stability and security for their events.

Once the budget is established and a revenue goal is set, the organizers are able to set the cover fee. The most notable difference between these queer community events and some other comparable gay events in Vancouver is the sliding scale or pay-what-you-can (PWYC) system which is embraced by all organizers and events as standard practice. On event Facebook pages or on posters, an event will list a suggested cover fee rather than an absolute one, for example, \$10-15 at the door and \$8 online. Attendees are then given the freedom to pay the amount that feels most appropriate for them. For some, paying the full \$15 is insignificant, while low-income attendees are only able to pay \$10 or even less. A common feature for these events is the endnote of "no one turned away for lack of funds" following the suggested sliding scale cover fee. It is therefore possible to attend all of the East Vancouver queer community events for free or nearly free, if need be.

Some organizers expressed their hesitation about this system in the early stages of its use, with worries that some attendees might take advantage of the sliding scale PWYC system for the sake of saving a few dollars. This has not proven to be true. Attendees most often do pay some amount of cover fee, and these events have not seen a dramatic loss in money earned through cover fees because of it. Instead, they find that more individuals are able to come out to the events knowing that these parties, events, and workshops are indeed within their budget. Thus, a climate of financial accessibility is created and maintained through inter-class respect and solidarity among East Vancouver queer people sharing the same event spaces together. More people are able to attend an event which is cheaper, which ultimately makes up for any loss of revenue that an organizer would have worried about. In addition, if the event in question serves alcohol, then attendees tend to spend more on drinks at events when the cover fee is sliding scale, which boosts profit for the venue's bar sales. Increased bar sales also help at least one organizer who frequently hosts events at bars, because the organizer receives a portion of the bar sales which they then use to pay their DJs and artists.

Smaller scale events are often kept completely free for all attendees, with no cover fees. Attendees for those events have the option to purchase items or donate to the organizers in other ways. For example, a local queer collective house which hosts open mic night performances and the occasional party will never charge for guests to attend, but may sell homemade art, deodorants, shampoos, or patches as a fundraiser in order to contribute to rent, moving, or household upkeep. At parties, they will also sell beer, mixed drinks, and non-alcoholic beverages for very cheap prices so that partygoers do not have to spend more money by bringing their own alcohol and can feel good about supporting their friends' and partners' collective house. For example, a partygoer to this event could choose to spend \$15 on their own six-pack of beer, or could pay just \$5 for unlimited use of a beer keg purchased by the collective house. As one roommate put it,

When money is involved in community it's about assisting and helping each other further ourselves. It's not about lining our own pockets. Which is why when we did decide to do the fundraisers we had conversations around [how we don't want to gain money just to line our own pockets]. We're only doing that to ask our community to help take care of us financially is essentially what we're doing. And it was very voluntary. If they wanted to

or if they could then that was their choice, but they weren't obligated to [donate] (Interview).

As for membership organizations within the queer community, a local arts group used sliding scale membership fees in order to cover the costs of renting or using private arts facilities. By keeping the membership fees flexible, financially stable artists who paid more money per month made it feasible for lower-income artists to participate in the same group, because the fees for lower-income artists could be lowered significantly while still allowing the organizers to consistently rent or pay for arts spaces in the city. Ultimately this ended up benefitting the majority of the members, because the organizers were able to prioritize a physically accessible studio, performance space, or gallery for artists with mobility issues, scent-related chemical sensitivities, or other barriers.

Chapter 5. The Challenges of Organizing Community in the Context of Gentrification

Introduction

The rising costs of rent for low-income young adults and small businesses existing in now gentrifying neighbourhoods is causing tension and financial stress that bleeds into other aspects of life. This is especially true for queer community organizers who must balance not only their personal lives, but also the demands of community organizing. This is made more difficult when combining the multiple factors of gentrification which tend to impact the queer organizing efforts in East Vancouver. These factors include the of closing or relocating venues, the community's ability to pay the door fees for events, the common practice of young adults working full-time to cover their own financial responsibilities, and the attempt to cultivate and maintain community culture in East Vancouver.

5.1 Instability of Queer Events and Organizing Caused by Gentrification

As revealed in the interviews, queer communities are uncertain of their futures in Vancouver given the rapid rates of gentrification occurring in the city, and particularly in East Vancouver. This most effects the stability of events at the organizers' and attendees' venue of choice. None of the organizers had a concrete backup plan on what to do in the event that their current venue was closed down, and only two organizers (who organize 5 events between the two of them) had a loose sense of where to start if their venues closed down. Despite the lack of a backup plans, several of the organizers were acutely aware that they should start making those backup plans sooner rather than later. Organizers of two groups had no intention of creating backup plans at the time of the interview.

One event being directly impacted by the locational instability of gentrification is a popular dance party hosted at a local art gallery. The art gallery had already been "renovicted"—i.e. evicted for the purpose of renovation—once before from its downtown location to be replaced by an upscale restaurant, and now once again the cost of rent at

the current location is rising now that a lot of property in the neighborhood is owned by Lulu Lemon founder Chip Wilson, and the City of Vancouver has rezoned that strip for residential development (Korstrom, 2016). When discussing this specific instance of gentrification, one of the organizers for this dance party says, “It’s massively impacting [the dance party] ...It’s quite directly impacting it” (Interview). Throughout this interview, the two organizers continued to make references to gentrification and its specific impact on their venue of choice and their organizing activity. These organizers are not unaware of gentrification and they are acutely aware of its impact on their organizing, particularly when it comes down to venue choice and the future of the event as it stands. The organizers for one event which frequently takes place in an art gallery reflect on the first time the art gallery had to move due to gentrification:

I was going to the [venue] in their old location when they were forced out due to gentrification, and the building that got bought and turned into a fancy restaurant. [The venue] made a very big stink about it and they yelled from the mountaintops about the lack of arts spaces in the city (Interview).

Not only were the organizers impacted and upset, but so too were the venue owners and staff. This particular venue strives to be a community oriented arts space, and its location downtown had made it popular and accessible. By losing this space, the staff, patrons, and organizers were displaced and disrupted by the need to find a new space to gather and to put projects on hiatus during the moving process. This prevented stability for not only artists but for queer community organizers as well. Furthermore, the organizers say:

We’ve had conversations to casually brainstorm as to where we could go and we haven’t come up with anything yet that we know of that meet all of our accessibility guidelines, that would feel right for the dance party, you know? I’m sure that it’s possible, but it’s just like a very real [possibility of relocating] because the [venue] is actively under threat of being shut down at that location because they are owned by a very big development company now and their rent keeps getting increased drastically (Interview).

The organizers are worried that they will face this same challenge time and time again. Because the events are on a “month-to-month basis” now, the organizers are not even sure as to when they should be expecting to move their event or go on hiatus, because the venue itself is not quite sure as to when their move will occur. Because the venue’s

future is uncertain, the queer community events become uncertain as well. The organizers continue this explanation:

Well because these events need spaces, and in order for the event—especially a community event—to continue, it needs a consistent space. But there's so much precarity happening in terms of real-estate. We can't create these spaces to gather. But in order to have those community events where we can actually continue these relationships and then from there build friendship [with the venue and queer community] and be able to continue these conversations and grow as a community, we need to have consistent space. And that can be like private or public space or whatever. But gentrification is massively impacting that [opportunity]. If you think about all the spaces that have closed like [venue], there's Hot Art Wet City that's closing down, Heartwood Cafe, and Gallery Gachet lost funding, and Foundation is closing. And...there are different organizations that are able to continue because they do have like real-estate [art studio] which is another location where queer events happen. Yeah, [gentrification] will massively impact [the events] not having a space [to organize in] and also the kind of social engineering that happens in those spaces for us to feel safer in (Interview).

With the closure and relocation of five venues in the above quote alone, it becomes clear how much venue instability impacts the organizers in their organizing life as well as in their personal life. The closure of the Heartwood Café in 2016 was particularly upsetting to the East Vancouver queer community because the café was a site of solidarity among several communities. Organizers could meet at the cafe to host accessible events such as open mic nights or workshops and often were able to have face-to-face meetings at this venue to do anti-oppression work and coordinate with other organizers and community members. With so many central locations in precarious situations, it becomes near impossible to have a set queer space for community to gather and build around, forcing the community to use facilities across multiple neighborhoods in East Vancouver and choose between conflicting accessibility needs just to be able to stay within East Vancouver.

It is clear that gentrification is a huge barrier to queer community organizers from creating the type of safe, engaging, and fun community spaces that they desire. Organizers want to create a stable space for the queer community to access and use not only for events, but for healthy community growth. The obstacle of creating stable queer community space in the face of ongoing gentrification is evidenced in each of the interviews and is highlighted in one quote below:

How do we create and build more resources...so that we can figure out how we can pave the way for each other? You know, there's always the idea of paving the way for the future queers, but...we need to start paving the way for ourselves and for each other right now. I personally would like to see more stuff going around like business audits, and having more people connecting with [venue owners], [and creating] a database for [queer friendly, accessible businesses] and make that accessible [to the queer community]. Because there are actually so many spaces in Vancouver [that] we just don't know [about] and also there are a lot of spaces where we could be talking to the people that own it and [ask them] "hey, what does solidarity look like to you?" and build those connections from there. If we don't feel like those connections are there then how do we build [solidarity]? It just seems like right now that there's just a lot of barriers because it's like "oh god there's no space and there's no money" [which leads to] a lot of burnout (Interview).

The organizers see a lot of potential to build and share resources with each other and with the queer community. A stable, affordable, queer community space would help organizers navigate the queer-friendly, accessible, and affordable venue options in East Vancouver. This queer space could be used to discuss intra-community issues, such as callouts, bring the community together to make big decisions, and to keep the community engaged on local, national, and international issues of interest and concern. Without this stable space, these organizers are aware of their limitations to grow and come together as a community and their limitations to form connections and solidarity with more venues and businesses.

This was not the only group of organizers that demonstrated an awareness of gentrification and the precarity it creates for their events and venues. In fact, each organizer expressed concern about the impact gentrification has already had on their organizing. Members of the queer communal home were especially impacted, as they discussed their most recent move from one 7-bedroom home in Kensington Cedar Cottage to a 7-bedroom home in Riley Park which took roughly 9 months and cost the house members a total of \$6,000 for moving fees, damage deposits, and the cost of a month's rent for the duration of the lease overlap. All of this effort for a home on a 1-year lease set for "renoviction" by 2018 at the latest. The \$6,000 loss was steep for these young adults, and they had to come up with creative ways to pay for the cost of the move and attempt to reimburse themselves over time. A large part of the cost was because the old lease and the new lease overlapped by one month. One member describes the whole repayment ordeal:

Some people had just enough money to cover. So we split it up in terms of what our rent was going to be at the new house. So basically, we had to pay 2 months' rent in one month. So, we're paying double rent in one month and then we had to pay for a damage deposit, and we got most of our [old] damage deposit back but not all of it. So, some people were able to pay their own two months' rent and dip into their savings or whatever and other people had to borrow money and that was mostly how it was done. There were a couple of people who had extra money in their savings or from student loans or personal savings or like whatever—they had the cash available to cover it. People have been slowly getting paid back from our fundraisers. And from our fundraisers but also from our communal money. Every few months we have a bit of money taken off of our rent out of communal money[W]e used to have about \$200 per month coming into communal money but now we have \$100 month coming into our communal money (Interview).

Despite the huge costs to time, energy, and finances, members chose to keep their queer communal family together and push through to find an affordable home that could house all of the roommates. Financially stable roommates were able to cover the cost of 'double rent' for low-income roommates, and several roommates were able to find people to sub-let rooms for one month to stay at the old house and contribute to rent. With all of this energy and budgeting, the communal house members are still not fully repaid for a move that happened 9 months prior to the time of the interview. At the time of the interview, their lease would be up for renewal or termination within a matter of months, meaning that the house had to consider the need to start budgeting for a second move if they would like to stay together, despite still not having made back the \$6,000 loss of last year's move. In a follow up discussion, one of the collective house members confided that at the end of their one-year lease in the Spring of 2017, the landlord would be switching to fixed short-term leases lasting six months each. She expressed frustration with the six-month lease, because the landlord will be using this practice to raise rent more than the annual allowance of inflation plus two percent by having long-term tenants sign continuous short-term leases. The Tenant Resource and Advisory Centre of British Columbia does not support this practice, "as it can be used as a strategy to avoid the rent control provisions set out in the Residential Tenancy Act" (Sakamoto, 2014). Such instability inhibits the queer communal home organizers from effectively budgeting for the next move and investing in their home(s) for the long term, as they are constantly aware of the looming threat of renoviction and the struggle to find a large enough house that all of the members can afford to rent.

Instability of venue locations even impacts the queer brewery meet up group, which meets at different bars and breweries in East Vancouver by choice rather than by necessity. The organizer knows that as real-estate continues to be purchased and developed, the rent for the existing bars and breweries rises, which means that their beer prices also go up. To keep costs down for the attendees for the sake of financial accessibility, the organizer has at times offered to give the bars kegs of beer for free from breweries who help sponsor the event, just so that rising beer costs would not be passed down onto the queer attendees:

It's always a back and forth around...pricing because from my mindset I want to keep prices really low and they want to make money. It's not like they're greedy or bad but when you're looking at things from the perspective of a business, you're trying to make the most money that you can. Before a couple of events I've been told 'oh our beer prices are rising' and I've had to counter and be like 'okay but what if I gave you all the sponsorship kegs for free or at a much more discounted rate' or something like that. I haven't ended up having to do that with them because when I voiced that it would drive down sales a lot they've been [responsive]. Because it's honest. If they raise their prices, I know that queer people will just drink less. Like it's not the same crowd that they're used to at like straight events where they'll just make the same amount of money. It's also just the rising cost of rent as part of the reason why they want to raise their beer prices, right. Because like everything has just jumped in expenses in terms of rent (Interview).

The organizer is trying to be creative in offering solutions to the bars and breweries as she continues to build a relationship with bar managers through her event organizing. This organizer feels that she and the bar managers have built a relationship that allows them to be frank with each other, which is why she was able to say that "if they raise their prices...queer people will just drink less". She knows her event demographic well enough to know that the majority of attendees are lower-income queer people who will only spend a set amount of money on beer, choosing to stay within that budget rather than opt for a second or third beer. The bar managers trust her on this and have agreed to help keep prices low, knowing that the organizer will bring in a lot of business to the bar on a Sunday afternoon. This relationship would not be possible if these bars were to close down or become too expensive for the queer community, and if this venue were to close, the organizer admits: "if that was off the table I don't know where I'd go. I could start brainstorming some" (Interview). Because this space has been relatively stable and accessible to the organizer, the organizer has been able to settle

into her organizing practices a bit more comfortably than some of the other organizers who were interviewed.

5.2 Organizer Burnout Exacerbated by Factors of Gentrification

While organizer burnout, intra-community drama or fighting, and high political and moral standards are not a uniquely urban issue or more specifically an issue in a gentrifying city, they seem to be exacerbated by the high cost of living in the Vancouver. As several organizers put it, the emotional demands placed upon organizers to mitigate conflict, address community callouts, engage with and learn from community members, and address concerns feels more or less like a full-time job, causing some organizers to comment that in queer community organizing, “you feel very consumed” (Interview). It is important to note here that every single interviewee brought up and used the term “burnout” without my prompting. When discussing burnout, interviewees often went on long tangents as they confided in me about the stress of organizing events and spaces for the East Vancouver queer community. This was an unexpected finding that is tied very closely to both the impacts of gentrification as well as callout culture.

The first way in which gentrification directly impacts organizers’ levels of stress and burnout when organizing their specific events and groups is through trying to find appropriate venues at which to hold the events. This was discussed in length in the previous chapter, as organizers juggle the needs of locational accessibility, physical accessibility, and affordability. Once an organizer has gone through the lengthy process of securing a venue—meeting with building or bar managers, bringing in disabled community members to try out the space, meeting with staff to train them on pay-what-you-can door payments and correct gender and pronoun use—the organizer then begins to worry about how long their event can feasibly stay at the venue.

Some organizers confided that their events are on a month-to-month basis now, and the organizers are under a constant stress to both maintain the current pace and quality of their event, while also searching for and evaluating potential new venues. This often takes up more time and energy than the organizers typically have available to dedicate to the event, especially as they try to balance other aspects of their lives such

as dating, building a career, going to school, keeping up with family, participating in hobbies, or socializing with friends.

Some organizers who facilitated a queer arts group disclosed that in addition to their full-time jobs, they “did an obscene amount of venue searching” in their free time on evenings and weekends (Interview).

To find a [performance arts] venue in Vancouver that is accessible to the audience and the performers and to find one that’s [within] a community arts budget where a lot of people are [low-income and only pay what they can], ... was next to impossible, like just ridiculous. And [the venue is] not even 100% accessible. Like the stage part, you have to go outside and come in this other entrance [if you use a mobility device or wheelchair], whereas people who can [climb] stairs can go up the stage from the [dressing room]. So still not ideal, but literally it was the best thing that we could find (Interview).

Despite their best efforts and considerations of multiple accessibility needs, some of which were in conflict (i.e. needing a scent reduced space but also having group members who needed to take cigarette breaks to manage anxiety issues), organizers seriously struggled to meet the needs of their community while also balancing their own personal lives, jobs, and mental health. Because so many spaces are either physically accessible or financially accessible but not both, these organizers endured quite a huge amount of stress in order to make ends meet and create accessible community space.

Other organizers who have since put their events on hiatus or have discontinued their groups altogether confided that their quality of life increased dramatically once they quit organizing or took an indefinite break from it. They now have time to do simple things such as “stay in on a Friday night drinking wine and doing yoga while everyone else goes out and parties” (Interview). Therefore, the lack of venue stability due to the rising costs of rent and the relocation or closure of venues creates indefinite precarity for the organizers that impedes their ability to focus on other aspects of both their personal lives and improving the overall quality of their event. Distancing themselves from the demands of organizing, especially in the context of Vancouver’s gentrification, has improved their quality of life despite the cost of disengaging from their queer community.

The other way in which gentrification impacts organizing efforts in the East Vancouver queer community is through its impacts on community members individually. As more and more members of the queer community work multiple jobs, move from

home to home or apartment to apartment, they feel a greater financial pressure. The stress of not having stable housing and not being able to afford things like rent or food may cause significant stress on individual community members. Some organizers perceive the community members to be taking out some of this stress onto each other.

I haven't had a really intense community callout ever, and I'd like to think that's because I'm doing things right, but it also may be because I haven't pissed off certain people (laughs). But I know that there is a real genuine interest among queer organizers of making their spaces better and less shitty and more conscious of race and capitalism and social inequality and that kind of stuff. But I think that sometimes what happens is I see that kind of interest in organizers get kind of squashed because people get so—I don't want to say mean, but—mean. And I think that's because they're so used to being shit on, so it's cyclical. They're not mean because they're bad people, they're mean because the world is terrible to them. [The world] doesn't usually care, it doesn't usually listen. So when they see especially white, queer organizers, why would they expect them to be their allies? So, I think that there can be a real issue with how things are done and talked about in our community right now, but I don't have any answers that I see because I don't think it's those people's fault for being mean. It's definitely a system. Definitely the responsibility is on white queer organizers to be really accessible and really open to critique and really open to conversations or making time in their schedule to meet with people and admitting when they've done something wrong (Interview).

This may be one of the causes of callout culture in the East Vancouver queer community. Burnt out and hurt individuals are looking for an outlet for both their experiences of oppression and their general life stressors, and place the responsibility of a healthier and safer community directly onto the organizers of said community. But the organizers of these events and groups do not believe solving community issues on their own is so simple. As two organizers put it, "community is a space we create together", and so, members of the community must work with the organizers in order to see the healthier, safer, and more affordable events they desire. The organizers, however, understand that it's much easier said than done to call community members in to help create these spaces. Because individuals work multiple jobs, may deal with physical and mental health issues, or may experience oppression in East Vancouver queer spaces, it can be difficult to encourage community members to come out and take part in the community building process.

I mean it would be great if there was a queer space. That would make it feel just so much more fulfilling...But like, everything is so expensive. The cost of everything is just...like you make your ends meet with your party

and you're able to kind of pay yourself, but it's not like you could actually do it as a job because everything costs so much. It'd be great if there were more spaces for anti-oppression work to feel like community building rather than community callouts. And that's going to be really hard to start and create but it'd be great if there were more platforms other than Facebook for people to talk about things and share ideas and like work on solving things as opposed to dragging³ each other. I mean part of that is that the internet is convenient and you can voice your opinion from inside your house. It would be a lot harder to get people out like every couple [of] months [to] have a town hall meeting. That'd be really hard to get people to go to. Because people who are in Vancouver are busy because everyone is working two jobs and that changes the mentality. Like I don't take time off work very much. I work two jobs, and I'd have to be really fucking sick to call out from either of them because the idea of going without that day's pay is stressful (Interview).

It would not be so simple to ask the queer community to organize for a town-hall type meeting in which they all address their concerns and ideas. Despite the unlikely possibility of bringing large numbers of the East Vancouver queer community together in one time and place to work on their issues and brainstorm for the present and future, many organizers do wish it were possible, and feel that having more support and input from the community in their organizing would make their organizing experience more fulfilling, as well as make the events safer and more enjoyable for everyone. But, neither the organizers or the majority of community members seem to have the time or space to organize in such a constructive way due to the lack of available queer community spaces.

5.3 Queer Organizers' Level of Understanding of Gentrification

Whether individual members of the East Vancouver queer community are aware of their specific role in gentrification or not, each organizer interview did express at least a basic comprehension of the complexity of being impacted by gentrification while also trying to remain critical of their real or perceived complicity in gentrification. The majority of organizers interviewed expressed they sometimes see themselves as gentrifiers. Those particular organizers were aware that while yes, they and their events or groups are directly impacted by gentrification in a negative way, they reflect on whether they

³ Dragging is a slang term originating from African American Vernacular English (AAVE) which means to disrespect or humiliate a person in a public manner.

could also be benefitting from various aspects of gentrification. There is a difference between the process of gentrification as defined and explored by urban studies literature, and the perception and interpretation of gentrification by some organizers within the East Vancouver queer community.

5.3.1 The Queer Community's Complicity in Gentrification

As expressed by a pair of organizers, arts spaces are usually the first spaces to gentrify a neighborhood, because young artists move in to an area for cheap housing and art studio rentals (Stuart & Coaffee, 2006; Ley, 2003).

In queer organizing there's a lot of stuff that's centered around the arts. Gentrification—the first thing that gentrifiers usually do is use the arts to infiltrate into communities that are marginalized, you know? So, you know it's not as black and white and we are all complicit in gentrification, definitely queers are totally complicit in gentrification whether we like it or not. Being in solidarity you know for example like Chinatown action groups, the elders that are living there, the DTES, indigenous solidarity because we are here on stolen land you know? So yeah like it will push us out but also we will be part of the pushing out (Interview).

Often, these artists will make a neighborhood hip or exciting, bringing in other creative individuals and businesses (Florida, 2002). As a neighborhood becomes more desirable, the demand for space in the area rises, leading to a rise in rent and property taxes, meaning future low-income artists must move onto a new neighborhood that is more affordable (Ley, 2003; Ley & Dobson, 2008). Queer community events in East Vancouver have functioned similarly in the past, especially one queer dance party which is held in an East Vancouver art gallery. The organizers, like the artists who maintain the gallery space, believe they are complicit in gentrifying this DTES neighborhood, but also lack other affordable options and face relocation in the very immediate future, thus continuing the cycle.

Similarly, organizers of the queer communal home were in fact aware that the neighborhood in which they currently live had historically not been occupied by groups of young adults renting together, and had typically been a neighborhood for working-class families. The gentrification of Main Street had made the neighborhood desirable and accessible to hip, middle-class young adults and families, making the neighborhood a good fit despite the rising cost of living in the area because it gave the queer collective

house members access to frequent and reliable public transit, a safe and quiet residential street, and proximity to stores, cafes, and jobs. They feel that they are gentrifiers because they are not a part of the original demographic of the neighbourhood. This however does not take away from the stress and hardships they are experiencing due to gentrification. The collective house members are still worried about the reality of being pushed out themselves, as noted in this quote:

[Our] house even has been getting weird realtor hand written letters and stuff... it makes me feel like many of the things I like or want to be here forever have this expiry date that's within like the next 5 years basically. Like what is Vancouver even going to be in the next 5 years? And just even with the house I live in, it took us so long to find this house and it has a two-year expiry date on it from when we signed the lease. And it's like how are we ever going to find another house that's this good with this low of rent? And where the house is, like having a house that's in East Vancouver is pretty important to everyone in the house... Maybe that's why I never made a network outside of the university because I know that I'm not going to be here forever you know? (Interview).

Here their relationship to gentrification gets complicated, as the communal members feel they are both complicit in gentrification as well as directly impacted by it. Their home is in a desirable location, which makes it easy for hosting events and inviting community members into their home for parties and open mic nights. It shows that the communal house members struggle to fully understand the complicated nature of gentrification in East Vancouver. They are part of the young and hip demographic being catered to as the neighborhood gentrifies, but lack the financial resources and disposable income to frequent the more expensive, hip shops and restaurants. As lower-class residents, they are constantly faced with the threat of being pushed out or are struggling to balance a budget with the rising cost of living in the neighbourhood. The above quoted communal house member really struggles with the cost of living and housing insecurity, having been low-income their entire life, and cannot imagine staying in Vancouver past university due to the financial strain they had experienced in recent years after moving to Vancouver to study in an undergraduate program. Despite being a low-income household full of students and low-income workers, the communal house members have become self-critical when trying to understand their role in gentrification and their place within Vancouver. These communal house members see themselves as a new addition to a previously working-class, mixed-race neighborhood, and therefore see themselves as gentrifiers without considering that they are not part of the middle-

class property owners and business patrons that have already begun gentrifying the neighborhood prior to their arrival.

The queer collective house members ultimately felt as though they were complicit in gentrification because they saw themselves as outsiders to their neighborhood. This perception does not match reality, however, as the communal home members are low-income tenants of a temporarily rented home, while they tell me that many of the other residents in the neighborhood are homeowners of their large, single-family homes. This overly self-critical analysis about individual roles in gentrification may reflect the stress and burnout caused by trying to organize an idyllic queer community space.

Perhaps the most complicated relationship to gentrification was expressed by some of the larger event organizers, particularly those who organize nightlife events that draw in huge crowds. One event which is periodically held at a venue in Chinatown has been called out for being inaccessible and negatively complicit in the gentrification of the neighborhood. Vancouver's Chinatown has experienced a period of disinvestment followed by rapid gentrification, which has negatively impacted the long standing Chinese community in the neighborhood which is now comprised primarily of elders (Fung, 2016). As gentrification brings in more businesses targeting the young and affluent, such as hip cafes, bars, restaurants, and nightlife, the quality of life and accessibility of the neighborhood declines for those Chinese elders who are displaced and excluded from their homes and neighborhood (Fung, 2016). Because this particular queer nightlife event chose a venue within Chinatown, some people believed this made the organizer and all who attended the event directly complicit in Chinatown's gentrification. A queer Chinese community member, Yulanda Liu, contacted the organizers of this event first privately, and then publicly, and published a full letter to the organizers for the entire queer community to read. The letter takes a gentle tone as the community member explains to the organizers the ways in which they are working against, rather than with, the Chinese-Canadian community in Chinatown⁴. The letter provides insight into how gentrification is experienced, understood, and discussed by

⁴ Reading the letter will provide a solid example of what a well-written callout post or letter entails, as the writer speaks privately and directly to the organizers in a patient, empathetic tone. Please note how the author conveys the ways in which the event was not accessible and could be more so in the future, as well as the next steps the community member would like to see going forward.

some members of the queer community, and how they feel gentrification relates to some of the queer community events held in East Vancouver. The letter, in part, reads:

...I was unable to attend [Event Title] on the Labour Day weekend for several reasons. I was unable to attend despite very much wanting to because of where this party was held, at [Venue Title] in Vancouver's Chinatown. Vancouver's Chinatown has been and continues to be facing a terrible and very real threat of fast-moving gentrification, displacing generational family businesses and low income Chinese residents, many of which who are our non-English speaking elders. This community is fighting against the attacks of development that seeks to serve the upper middle class over the needs of the community that is already living and building there. I choose not to support businesses that play a role in gentrifying Chinatown ... Your party was [held at] ... a business actively contributing to the gentrification of Chinatown ... [and was] not accessible to me because of the venue you decided to hold [the event] at and support. ... I am disappointed by this event. As a queer person of colour, I want to find joy in queer spaces ... I scrolled through the [event Facebook page] description trying to find recognition that this [event] ... was being held in Chinatown, but there was no statement about it. Nowhere did I see any acknowledgement that this party was being held in the middle of a thriving and beautiful Chinese community formed despite over a century of racist discrimination and exclusion, ... how this community continues to fight against racist violence and denial of space and existence today. Nowhere did I see recognition that this party was held at a business complicit and actively perpetuating this violence... I saw the work you are doing in recognizing the colonial violence against this land, in naming the Nations that care for this land ... [and] the work you are doing to support Black Lives Matter and recognize the way dance culture has grown out of Black culture. I saw the work that is being done around accessibility. I saw these things and I am proud of queer communities for doing this work. But there is more work to be done. I am confused and disappointed that there was no recognition that this event was being held in Chinatown and actively supporting a business contributing to gentrification...What I am asking for is a conversation. I am tired of queer spaces and events ignoring their role in gentrification. I am asking for a dialogue about your responsibility as an event organizer (Lui, 2016).

This letter was a catalyst for the East Vancouver queer community's dialogue on their role in gentrification. The community member, Lui, points out that the organizers must not only list accessibility information in event descriptions and donate funds to organizations and groups, but also be aware of their event's impact on the neighborhoods in which it is held. Does the event stand in solidarity with local communities? Or does it serve to alienate them further in the face of gentrification? Despite raising these questions and issues with the organizers, the organizers of the above-mentioned event initially continued their events without meeting with Lui, which

caused even more hurt, frustration, and online discussion between the organizers and the community. The discussion online grew heated and began to stray from the original letter's gentle tone and hope for solidarity, leading eventually to aggressive posts. In time, the organizers decided to put their event on an indefinite hiatus as announced in a public post on social media made on behalf of the five organizers⁵. The self-criticism and self-reflection show that organizers take the criticisms in the callouts seriously. The response in part:

We have previously believed that we were doing our best, or doing enough, to be as universally inclusive with [Event Title] as possible. We see now that we were not. We have failed to listen, to communicate, and to respond appropriately to ongoing community criticism, while using rhetoric of integrity and accountability within our public event pages. While monetary donations may sometimes be one piece of meaningful solidarity with struggles against oppression, they are tokenistic if not accompanied by support and relationship building in other forms. Since [Event] began in September 2016, it has been repeatedly called out for its failure to be accessible to certain members of our community, such as those in struggle against the gentrification of Chinatown, those with physical mobility challenges, and Black [people] and other [people of colour] who are especially harmed by cultural appropriation ... We have learned a lot from the generous investment of time and emotional labour from community members who have voluntarily dedicated themselves to holding us accountable. Each of us as organizers and as individuals has a new understanding of the responsibility we hold in organizing queer events. We know we need to actively and rigorously work to understand our privileges, to bring many voices to the table, to be willing to listen and change, and sometimes to step back from our positions of power. We have a responsibility as party organizers to always be willing to do better, especially if we're going to call our events inclusive...[Event Title] is going on an indefinite hiatus ... A community dialogue is currently in the works (Anonymous Event, 2017).

The organizers for this event realized that they had slighted Lui by never following up with her letter, thereby receiving a more public community callout online. This callout raised the difficult question of queer community's potential complicity in displacing or alienating residents of gentrifying neighborhoods. Despite the limited amount of accessible, affordable, and suitable venues, community members and organizers alike are grappling with the impacts of gentrification on not only the queer community, but also on the communities of those with whom they'd like to stand with in

⁵ The post demonstrates a typical public response to a callout wherein the organizer or organizers attempt to hold themselves accountable for the problems discussed in community callouts.

solidarity. The pressures and challenges of hosting a large-scale event that is safe and enjoyable for queer women and transgender people, is physically and financially accessible, and also does not gentrify existing neighborhoods, seems to be too much for many organizers to handle. The standards and stakes are high, as demonstrated above, and these particular organizers will be unable to continue their event without being called out for being complicit in the ongoing gentrification of Chinatown. And so, this East Vancouver queer community event, like many others, has ceased to exist (at least temporarily) directly resulting from gentrification, the lack of accessible venues, callout culture, and the resulting organizer burnout.

One thing of note is the pressure placed upon queer community organizers to take responsibility for existing gentrification. In the case of the Chinatown event, the venue has been operating in the neighborhood long before the queer event was founded, and is in fact owned by two young Chinese-Canadian men who publicly responded to the dialogue on Facebook in support of the event, stating that they first opened the club in Chinatown because they wanted a club and music space that their friends could enjoy within Chinatown. The venue owners enjoy the diversity of events hosted in their space, and were dismayed at the discussion taking place online.

Chinatown in Vancouver has followed a rather textbook pattern of gentrification over the years, going through a period of disinvestment—despite the thriving Chinese community discussed by Liu—and was then partially rezoned and redeveloped by investors in order to bring in new businesses and residents (Fung, 2016). This has displaced local businesses and residents who can no longer afford the cost of rent in the area or who now need to travel far outside of the neighborhood to access resources, for example, elders who now have to travel to other neighborhoods to visit their family doctors (Fung, 2016). Liu's argument is that the queer community should stand in solidarity with the Chinatown community by taking queer nightlife elsewhere, while other individuals in the queer community argue that the organizers themselves are not complicit in the gentrification of the neighborhood that long precedes their event and that the organizers are in fact supporting a local business by working with a venue owned by Chinese-Canadian locals. Lui is not blaming the organizers for the entire process of gentrification itself, but is merely pointing out that the organizers are complicit in the ongoing gentrification by supporting venues in the area which do not cater to the Chinese community which is increasingly pushed out and excluded. Liu would rather see

queer nightlife events held elsewhere with direct community action in support of the Chinese elders if the queer community really wanted to engage with this neighborhood in a meaningful act of solidarity. This argument between queer nightlife and gentrification has become quite divisive, causing some community members to say “we just want to dance” while others cannot reconcile their silence on a divested and gentrified neighborhood in which they attend events not targeting the original community’s demographic of Chinese-speaking elders with the anti-oppressive, inclusive, accessible rhetoric being used to promote the event.

Regardless of the opinion held, emotions ran high during this discussion. Many queer community members who had previously attended the event chose not to attend the final dance party in February 2017 due to the letter published by Liu and the Facebook callout posts that followed. Ultimately the event was discontinued due to this discussion, and the primary organizer of the event has since moved on to focus on other queer community events. Some queer party-goers continue to attend events hosted or co-hosted by this organizer, while others have decided to boycott events hosted by this organizer altogether. This begs the question of whether callout culture, when combined with the added pressures of gentrification, is beneficial for the struggling queer community in East Vancouver. With all of the pressures, callouts, and accessibility needs, it makes event organizing far less spontaneous and far more taxing. Though this does help keep organizers and event attendees accountable to their actions and privileges, it also prevents community from coming together in many ways due to the pressure placed upon existing organizers to create a fully inclusive event and the intimidation felt by potential new organizers who are afraid of callouts for any mistakes they may make early in their organizing career. The queer community in East Vancouver is therefore highly self-critical on both an individual and community-wide level, which encourages dialogue and accountability, but discourages, at times taking risks and learning by doing.

5.3.2 Benefits of Gentrification to Portions of the Queer Community

One queer communal home member who also organizes a queer community workshop separate from the communal home goes onto explain the complicated relationship they have with gentrification as they explain:

I do want to be clear that it's sometimes not always sharing space but more invading space and I want to be ... legitimate around that phenomena. I think that gentrification is in definite conflict with grassroots queer organizing [with] mostly people who are more marginalized in the queer community, but I think that gentrification works out awesome for wealthier queers...Like I know plenty of people in my university that are upper-middle-class, mostly white, queer folks who get like lots of money from New West Pride or Pride Society or whatever those organizations are that seem to have money to give people. Or the like academic older queers who do writing groups—which is awesome! And I don't think that gentrification is really fucking with them that hard to be honest. In fact, it may even be helping them out. So, I wouldn't say it's all queer organizing that's being affected by gentrification (Interview).

Here the organizer is very aware that not all organizers, events, and queer community members are benefitting from gentrification and mainstream queer organizations such as the Pride Society, noting that it's primarily wealthier, older, white queers who are fortunate enough to receive grants or funding and benefit from gentrification. Younger queers, especially queer young adults who are low-income and may face other aspects of marginalization, such as racism, are not benefitting from gentrification. This is yet another reason why it is important for academics and urban professionals to understand the intersections of demographics and how queer identities and experiences shape, and are shaped by, other demographic identities. For the predominately low-income young-adult queers whom are the focus of this study, gentrification hinders their organizing. This is not the case for older, middle-class, white queer people who have more financial and social resources to support their organizing. The organizer quoted above comes from a low-income family and does not feel comfortable or stable in Vancouver financially. They believe that gentrification has impacted their psychological and emotional ability to organize:

Vancouver as a city has its own sort of feeling to me which is one of wealth, and like having material wealth, and I feel like I'm always faking it. And that bleeds into facilitating in certain ways like I feel like out of place in Vancouver all of the time even though for lots of other reasons I could feel in place like as a white person or able-bodied person—stuff like that. I still like very regularly feel very alienated. Even as a facilitator it's like a clown act. I just never feel in place here. I don't know how that impacts my facilitating, it's just this anxiety feeling of wanting to get out of here. It's just this generalized anxiety feeling of being here (Interview).

This organizer feels the anxiety and pressure of living in an unaffordable Vancouver despite the fact that they have benefitted from both living in a collective

home, and receiving funding from a major Lower Mainland university to run their queer workshop centering self-identified femmes. So even this organizer, who has the privilege of receiving much needed funding to run their group, also faces very real pressures in their personal life and in their organizing in order to fit in with other East Vancouver queer people who are middle- and upper-class in comparison.

Another organizer was quite transparent in how gentrification has continuously benefitted their event over the last eight years of its existence. After the closure of a downtown lesbian bar and the SROs it shared a building with, one nightlife event moved to a dive bar in the DTES. When the event started at this bar, the organizer remembers the poor state of the washrooms and the lack of wheelchair accessibility. Over the years, as the event grew in popularity, it drew more and more members of the queer community to the bar. An organizer states rather bluntly, “we gentrified that bar” (Interview), meaning that the bar had a rapid increase in revenue and success directly caused by the events the organizer was holding there for the queer community. The bar had previously been a dive bar in terrible condition, but is now quite hip and popular within East Vancouver.

Over time, the washrooms were improved and the venue became more physically accessible for individuals with mobility devices. The bar now holds a number of queer events for the East Vancouver queer community, and one of the organizers is quite proud of this. When discussing how gentrification has helped both their individual organizing efforts, their community, and the bar itself, they are especially happy that the neighborhood has become safer for queer women and transgender people to walk through at night:

We’ve been pretty stable and happy at the [venue] but we definitely did have challenges there with regards to safety with the neighborhood being in the DTES amongst poverty in an area where there’s a lot of violence against women, a lot of mental health struggles, and there are SROs upstairs. So we haven’t been without challenges in that respect. But over the years...the bulldozer of gentrification has...effects on our safety as queer people as [it becomes a] young hipster kind of community that feels a bit more comfortable and entitled to the space as lower-income people are pushed out so obviously that’s a sad thing that’s happening but it does have interesting consequences for other minority groups (Interview).

There has been less violence against women in the area since the start of the event at this location, meaning that more community members can commute to the area with less danger. About a decade ago, the Downtown East Side had seen a rate of violent crime 20 times higher than most other census tracts in the City of Vancouver (Ley & Dobson, 2008; Andresen, 2006). Safer nights out are important for this organizer, who continues to build a foundation of safety inside the venue as well with a “buddy system” in which sober organizers and walk around the party with water, snacks, and Naloxone and NARCAN⁶ kits, in order to prevent dehydration, alcohol poisoning, or drug overdose during the Lower Mainland’s Fentanyl and opioid crisis. These party buddies are also trained to mitigate conflict inside the event, to ensure the physical safety and emotional wellbeing of these events. Without the increased safety in the neighborhood, caused in the organizer’s opinion by gentrification, as well as the cooperation and support of the bar staff, this level of safety may not have been possible for this event.

Other organizers also made a direct link to gentrification and improved physical accessibility of venue spaces. Several queer arts organizers noted that art studios and performance arts areas had been renovated to meet the City of Vancouver’s accessibility guidelines because of their financial success. Many of these spaces were financially unaffordable to these queer organizers, meaning that at times some queer arts organizers were faced with balancing a group budget while also finding an accessible studio, theatre, or rehearsal space. While one particular queer arts organizer did not feel that gentrification was directly improving the spaces to which she had access, it was improving more expensive arts spaces, which wealthier queer people, especially wealthier gay men, were gaining access to. So, physical accessibility improved for wealthier queer groups and wealthier arts groups in general, but did not improve for the low-income or free queer arts groups organized in East Vancouver.

Finally, the nature of the queer brewery meetup is tied rather closely to the rising popularity of craft beers and microbreweries in Vancouver. These breweries cost upwards of a million dollars to open and require a very large brewery space for brewing the beers, and so, the costs of these beer taps, kegs, and bottles are quite high and therefore are usually purchased by individuals who have the expendable income to drink

⁶ NARCAN is naloxone hydrochloride. It is a medicine that counteracts the life-threatening effects of opioid overdose. Since most accidental overdoses occur in a home setting, it was developed for first responders, as well as family, friends, and caregivers (ADAPT Pharma Inc., 2016).

craft beer. Gentrification of neighborhoods via the rising popularity and trendiness of local breweries and bars helps make this particular event possible and worthwhile because there are so many bars and breweries operating in and around East Vancouver, making it easy for the organizer to establish a rapport with certain bars and breweries. It is fulfilling to the organizer to be able to build relationships with these bars and breweries as her event gains popularity. Her event is popular among many different income levels despite the high cost of craft beers and ciders. Though the cost of visiting trendy bars and breweries would normally prevent most low-income queer people from drinking craft beers and ciders, she works hard to keep the event financially accessible to lower-income attendees to be able to come out and participate in beer tastings.

Chapter 6. Discussion & Conclusion

6.1 The Impact of Gentrification on East Vancouver's Queer Community Events and Organizers

Through the interview responses, I found that gentrification has a significant impact on the organizing efforts of the East Vancouver queer community by exacerbating stress, creating venue instability, and fostering precarity and tension within the queer community. In particular, I found that a combination of external forces, internal forces, and organizer burnout coalesce to create challenges and obstacles which queer community organizers must overcome in order to have their events or groups thrive. The external forces include the lack of accessible venues and the unstable nature of venues as they move or close down, causing organizers to worry “oh god there’s no space and there’s no money” (Interview). The internal factors primarily consist of striving to meet accessibility needs and host anti-oppressive events, as well as facing callout culture online, which is made worse by the stress of gentrification as all the pressures of housing and venue unaffordability wear the queer community thin. Meeting accessibility needs, dealing with callout culture, and organizing in a gentrifying city all combine to create overlapping pressures and obstacles for queer community organizers to address. Organizers face the impossible task to uphold their values, negotiate conflicting opinions, needs, and callouts from stressed out community members, and find affordable, accessible, and suitable venues. These factors are discussed in the following sections.

6.1.1 External Forces: Instability of Events and Venues

Because the affordable, queer-friendly, easily accessible venues used by East Vancouver queer organizers are in a state of precarity due to gentrification, it has become increasingly difficult for the queer community to put down roots and establish their own queer neighborhoods and venues. Unlike affluent gay men and older lesbians in the West End and Davie Village who have been able to build a gay village through commercialization, the young adult queer people of East Vancouver are unable to invest in stable, accessible, queer businesses and spaces, which historically has been true for the queer women’s community in Vancouver as they have lost sites of queer women’s

culture over the decades (Boulay, 2014; Lo & Healy, 2000). This leads to several obstacles including the short lifespan of queer events, groups, and workshops; the difficulty of passing along resources to the next generation of queer organizers; and the challenge of creating groups and events with longevity and stability without access to shared space and resources.

Many organizers who have been involved in the queer community by hosting larger scale events have tried to share their resources with the organizers of newer or smaller events as often as possible. The resources—electronic equipment, fans, party supplies, tables, etc.—are often personally stored by the organizers themselves in storage lockers or their own homes. Without a common venue, storage facility, or community center to store these resources, these large items become difficult and costly to store with an individual organizer's own money, or store in their personal living space. This is especially true as personal finances are often quite limited and living spaces are small and also often temporary, given that organizers face multiple moves between rising rents and evictions. Over time these items must be passed along entirely or sold off. If both the venues and the living arrangements of the organizers were more stable and not under constant threat of relocation or closure, it would be easier for organizers to keep shared resources in one place, making the resources more accessible to all community members.

In addition to losing shared space and resources, organizers and community members may also find it hard to create and maintain long-term events, groups, or workshops. Without shared community spaces, especially after the closure of the Heartwood Café in 2016 (mentioned by interviewees in Chapter 5.1) where queer organizers frequently came together, the options for an accessible, queer friendly (or better yet, queer owned), affordable, and comfortable place to meet, socialize, and organize are scarce. Without a stable, multipurpose community space for queer people of all demographics to come together, it is difficult for the community to stay united and connected outside of social media. With social media as the only consistent platform for planning events and holding discussions, issues such as callout culture and poor communication become huge problems for an already marginalized and stressed out community.

6.1.2 Internal Forces: Callout Culture in Conjunction with the Pressures of Gentrification

In addition to the financial pressures and venue instability that young adult queer organizers deal with, they are also increasingly facing pressure and criticisms from within their own community regarding their ability to meet multiple layers of accessibility needs and create spaces which feel safe and welcoming for all attendees. Meeting accessibility needs and creating inclusive safer spaces is a standard that the organizers truly want to uphold; organizers will do everything within their power to ensure that an event is physically and financially accessible and free of bigotry and discrimination.

For an organizer to label themselves or their event as anti-oppressive and inclusive means that the organizer is opening themselves and their event to critique and feedback. This is because organizers genuinely want their events to build solidarity and be enjoyable for everyone in the queer community, regardless of race, physical or mental ability, religion, and socioeconomic background. This is a huge task to undertake, especially for individual or small teams of organizers of large events hosting anywhere from dozens to hundreds of people. They begin to be held responsible for the behavior and attitudes of the attendees, meaning that when something oppressive or harmful happens at an event—for example, Islamophobia or white aggression at a dance party—the organizers themselves are held accountable and called out, even if they were not in the room when these particular incidents and acts of violence happen. Another example would be an event, group, or project being called out for not being diverse or inclusive enough, even when it is, because those doing the callout speak before understanding the actual situation and composition of the group. Organizers are also called out when they fail to meet accessibility needs in their event planning, or when they choose to hold an event at specific venues—such as the large dance party held at a nightclub in the gentrifying Chinatown, which additionally had no wheelchair or mobility device access for disabled queer attendees. This is not to say that some of these callouts were unfounded; at many times they point to important issues in the queer community that can be addressed or improved upon. The problem, however, lies in the fact that those doing the callouts are more often than not quick to anger and lacking facts or context, thereby creating tension and causing fighting. Those doing the callouts are sometimes lashing out on those organizers who are trying to work with others in solidarity. This is not a critique of some valid points made by concerned community members, but is specifically

referring to the more aggressive callouts that happen quite frequently. The organizers from most interviews had a lot to say about the pressures of organizing a perfectly accessible space with no conflict, as outlined in the findings. The pressures of having to “know everything and remember everything” while still simultaneously acknowledging that you don’t know everything and will always be learning are simply too much for the organizers to handle after long periods of time, especially when balancing this with their personal lives. In an interview, one organizer discussed the pressures of meeting accessibility needs and the callouts she faced when community members felt she had failed to meet specific needs. Those community members seemed to criticize her for the sake of putting her down, rather than criticizing her for the sake of offering help and solidarity to create more accessible community events. The organizer explained:

We kind of almost consume social justice rather than [social justice] being a community experience. That anger is valid...but I do think that there has been this shift from “hey these community events are happening and here’s how we could make it better”. Social media has made it move towards this consumption—in this very almost capitalist way—of social justice culture instead of actively participating [in social justice] and being like “hey I noticed the venue wasn’t super scent reduced do you know where to get a humidifier? I could help you with that next time” ... [It’s] this ‘more radical than thou’ mentality [that] comes in where other[s] who are eager to prove how radical they are [point out] “well why didn’t you think of this, this isn’t accessible in all these ways” and that’s where [as an organizer] you’re just like, “well actually the person who has this accessibility need was in with us this weekend and we were working through it”. The attitude [of those who work with us to meet an accessibility need] is like one of total gratefulness...versus the [attitude of those pointing out] “well have you thought of this” when they’re not doing [anything] on behalf of anyone or advocating for anyone in anyway (Interview).

This organizer is referring to multiple experiences she has had when dealing with community callouts. When she speaks about consuming social justice culture, she is referring to the phenomena of individuals adopting social justice language in order to bolster their own credibility and reputation in leftist circles without actually engaging in social justice in any meaningful way to help build intra- and inter-community solidarity. This relates to the assertion made by Uprichard that callout culture is, at times, merely a way to condemn and criticize others anonymously online, without actually offering solutions to the problematic behavior and instead perpetuating judgement and shaming (Uprichard, 2016). With regards to having a ‘more radical than thou’ mentality, the organizer quoted above refers specifically to those queer community members who lash

out on social media with callouts without having any understanding or empathy for the organizers or those impacted by the accessibility needs or anti-oppression work. Rather than coming to organizers with an attitude of wanting to help, those individuals doing the callout come to the organizers with an attitude of wanting to put down the event and organizer. Callout culture is problematic because it stops seeing events and organizers for what they are—progressive spaces open to growth and learning in order to create a more inclusive, safe, and accessible queer community—and sees them instead as failures for their imperfect solidarity.

Callout culture in the East Vancouver queer community is being made worse by the effects of gentrification. Just as adverse offline effects such as poor family situations and inadequate K-12 schooling climates impact the aggression levels of adolescents online (Xu et al., 2015), so too do the financial burdens, housing costs, and venue instability impact the young adults in East Vancouver's queer community. Many of the young adult queer people doing the online callouts are already victims of homophobia, transphobia, racism, ableism, sexism, and other forms of bigotry offline and online by individuals inside and outside of the queer community. The repeated exposure to oppression can foster anger, distrust, and hurt, which in turn could lead to more aggressive behavior on behalf of the oppressed individual or group. One organizer says that many of those individuals doing the callouts are actually attacking organizers who are trying to be good allies to everyone in the queer community. The organizers are working and organizing in solidarity, and so those doing the callouts are misdirecting their compounding stress and pain towards those within their own community.

Gentrification is directly impacting callout culture by gentrification's added stress to the entire queer community and the limitation of acceptable venues. Organizers struggle to find affordable, fun, and accessible venues, which means that sometimes venues are in less than ideal locations, such as in the gentrifying Chinatown neighborhood along Main Street. Organizers are strapped by the limited number of suitable venues, especially for larger events, and sometimes that makes their events inaccessible to other members of the queer community, such as the Chinese-Canadian queer people who are standing in solidarity with not only their queer community, but also the community of Chinese elders in Chinatown. Organizers facing such callouts and obstacles are then left with few options for hosting anti-oppressive and inclusive events—they can either continue their event along with any problematic elements

associated with their venue of choice, or they can undergo the labor of finding new venues or putting their events on hiatus. Organizers choosing to avoid problematic venues by going on hiatus or searching for better locations face the unfortunate consequence of limiting the frequency of opportunities for the queer community to come together. The less often the community can come together in physical space, the more often they must resort to communicating online, thereby limiting the chances to have constructive, healthy face-to-face dialogue about intra-community issues. If organizers were not limited by venue instability and rising unaffordability, they would be better equipped to host the types of anti-oppressive and inclusive events and groups that the East Vancouver queer community wants and deserves.

6.1.3 Organizer Burnout

With the multiple challenges and stressors that organizers face, it is unsurprising the rate of burn out I discovered from the interviews. Each organizer I interviewed was either currently burnt out or had been recently burnt out. One organizer described several aspects leading to burnout: “When I think about burnout, usually the way that I understand it is because of three reasons: Lack of resources and funding, lack of community support, and not being able to see the change that you are making” (Interview). Taking into consideration gentrification, callout culture and intra-community issues, and the lack of longevity and stability for many East Vancouver queer events, the organizer quoted above doesn’t really see any way not to burn out.

Many organizers noted that when they reach a period of feeling burnt out, they need to step away from organizing temporarily or indefinitely. Some interviewees noted that when an organizer burns out and stops their event, the event is rarely continued by other organizers because potential new organizers may be intimidated by the demands placed upon queer community organizers. Several of those interviewees noted the fear of being called out as being a primary dissuading factor for some new organizers. In addition, the levels of stress and anxiety felt by organizers who have faced callouts despite their hard work to meet multiple—often conflicting—accessibility needs, have lead to three organizers withdrawing from community organizing and community engagement altogether, and has caused some current organizers to abandon old events or groups in order to start entirely new organizing projects. One example of this is the organizer mentioned in chapter five who would rather “stay in on a Friday night drinking

wine and doing yoga” (Interview). This is a very solitary way to spend time, and is quite the antithesis of queer community organizing. The level of stress these organizers face is not manageable or sustainable, and some organizers have had to step away from queer community events altogether in order for their own mental health and overall quality of life to improve. Burnout is leading to decreased event longevity, even when the organizer has happened to secure an accessible, affordable, stable venue for their event or group.

With so few venues meeting the long list of needs in the queer community to choose from, some organizers are beginning to question if they even enjoy what they do, even up to the day of the event. When combined with outside factors in the organizers’ personal lives—such as rent, jobs, health, and hobbies—organizers struggle to maintain their well-being. Note the level of stress expressed by one organizer:

I remember like literally right before the [event] started I just like went into my car and cried uncontrollably outside the venue because it was so stressful, and [I didn’t] want to like cry in front of the group...I think the other piece is the amount of emotional management that is expected of organizers by the queer community. It’s really interesting, and I think there is two sides to it. Like within the group, I found that there was an epic amount of emotional management that was necessary and like if conflict was brought into the space—into an anti-oppressive space that we’re trying to keep safe and accessible as possible—we’re expected to mediate that conflict even though it has nothing to do with the group. So it does require a certain amount of like emotional babysitting that just became so stressful and unsustainable with having to manage...personal tragedy...full-time jobs...running this queer community... [and] our mental health and well-being (Interview).

The organizers are expected to manage not only their events, but also the moods and attitudes of those in attendance. This organizer refers to the mood management as “emotional babysitting”, wherein she had to deal with fighting, drama, callout culture, and organizing a successful and accessible event, all while dealing with her own mental health and personal tragedies at the same time. Similarly, other organizers felt as though some community members forget that the organizers are only human and have to deal with their own health, well-being, and personal challenges as well. There is a real disconnect between the organizers and community members when the community members forget to meet the organizers with empathy and fail to offer ways to contribute to the group or event in a helpful and constructive manner. In this way, burnout is a

combination of the impacts of gentrification on venue availability, accessibility, financial stability, and intra-community callout culture and related issues.

6.2 Strengths of the East Vancouver Queer Community

Despite the burnout experienced by organizers as they try to meet accessibility needs and navigate intra-community issues, the efforts made by organizers to take feedback and implement constructive criticism when planning more accessible, more inclusive, and safer events builds empathy and connection across the East Vancouver queer community, even while some community members may still engage in callout culture. Based upon the interview responses, it becomes apparent that the accessibility of queer community events in East Vancouver is what is keeping the queer community alive in the face of rapid gentrification and rising unaffordability. Organizers and community members are continuously challenged to come up with creative solutions to finding cheap, accessible, and fun venues as the city grows and evolves and displaces low-income communities. Organizers have found, or are trying to find, solidarity among queer people in multiple demographics in order to pull resources together and create safe, inclusive spaces for many different types of attendees.

6.2.1 Accessibility

Hosting accessible events is a top priority for queer community organizers in East Vancouver because it allows the community members to come together and encourages both the organizers and the attendees to be aware of other people's needs and lived experiences. Though these events are not perfect and often not perfectly accessible, the organizers of these events are more self-critical and willing to meet accessibility needs than many other mainstream Vancouver events outside of the East Vancouver queer community. Bringing the queer community together despite physical and financial barriers has allowed the community to party, heal, engage in politics, learn, and support one another. If the events held by queer community organizers in East Vancouver did not at all attempt to be physically, financially, and geographically accessible, then the community would shrink in size and lose access to a lot of creativity, problem solving, different perspectives, fresh ideas, and helpful resources. Accessibility needs are difficult for individuals or small teams of organizers of large events to meet in

full at times, and therefore it would benefit these organizers to have more formal support from the City of Vancouver in order to have access to more accessible venues and overcome the obstacles of gentrification which create additional barriers to physical and financial accessibility in East Vancouver. These needs and hopes for the future are discussed later in the chapter, in section three.

6.2.2 Pay-What-You-Can Admission Systems

The financial flexibility of East Vancouver queer events makes community events more accessible to attendees who could not otherwise afford to spend money on workshops, parties, or other similar events. With the high demand placed upon young adults in Vancouver with regards to paying rent, covering the cost of multiple moves, and paying other bills, the pay-what-you-can system in particular allows queer community events and groups to continue without an additional financial strain. This makes the queer community a foundation and a support network for marginalized queer people—something that will always be there even when money may not be—rather than leaving community as a privilege or afterthought. Creating a community that does not center profit or monetary exchange—an anti-capitalist community—puts the focus on queer community values such as community care, social networking, chosen families, and accessibility. Without the pay-what-you-can admission system for events, it is doubtful that events and workshops would be able to maintain popularity and longevity. To be sure, financially stable queer people would continue to attend these events (or create their own), but so many queer young adults would simply no longer have the ability to participate in or create community. The pay-what-you-can system keeps events and groups sustainable, especially in the context of gentrification and the rising unaffordability of living and organizing within the city. Through experience, queer community organizers have come to trust that each individual will truly pay what they are able, and several of the organizers noted a shift on their perspectives around how their events make money. When some events and groups first made the transition to pay-what-you-can systems a few years ago, four of the organizers were worried in the back of their minds that maybe some community members would take advantage of the system and underpay or pay nothing at all. They found, however, that this was not the case, realizing instead that wealthier queer people did in fact offer to pay more when they realized that paying a higher cost for their own participation helps to keep

admission prices and other costs low for those who cannot afford to pay much at all to participate. The organizers also saw a real willingness in low-income queer people to pay at least even a few dollars, just to express their support of the event. The financial accessibility of these events, coupled with the determination of organizers and community members to keep events accessible and safe for multiple queer demographics, is what keeps the East Vancouver queer community alive and evolving in the face of so much precarity and financial difficulty.

6.2.3 Queering Public Space

Just as the queer community organizers are able to shape their events by meeting financial and physical accessibility needs to the best of their abilities, so too do they shape their community by utilizing spaces which are not otherwise queer specific and turning them into (temporary) queer community hubs of meeting and socializing. The lack of stable queer space creates precarity, which is why organizers must take the spaces they can and make them queer-friendly. By finding venues which are accessible and queer-friendly, organizers are able to bring their community to temporal public and private spaces. They take bars, parks, community centers, art galleries, and homes and make them queer, if only for a few hours each month. This relates to the “right to the city”, which is the right to shape ourselves within the city. The organizers do not simply rent a space and fill it with queer bodies, they make the venue belong to their community for the short time that they gather. They manage everything from accessibility audits to modifying gendered washrooms. They create their own admissions systems and negotiate with venues who otherwise use fixed admission prices. They train venue staff to respect transgender bodies and queer relationships. In this way, the organizers and their attendees take what is not theirs and make it a temporary underground queer venue or space. They queer what they can with their community solidarity and collective morals and action.

If this is what organizers can do with spaces that are not ‘theirs’, spaces that are not made for the queer community to begin with, then imagine the world of possibilities that could present itself to the organizers and queer community if East Vancouver was home to a queer-owned venue space designed with the needs of the queer community in mind. A stable queer community space or venue would create stability and growth and add a more stable geographical dimension to the East Vancouver queer community. It

would create a space that is ‘theirs’, and not leave East Vancouver queers wondering “Where is community? Where is *my* community?” (Interview). A queer owned space is the next step for the East Vancouver queer community, and every single organizer interviewed eagerly discussed their wishes for such a space. It would allow the queer community to come together more regularly, plan events which are safer and more accessible, and would allow the community to pass along resources for years to come. Having such a space—especially when jobs and housing are so precarious—would afford the community a sense of security and stability that the queer community is otherwise not used to having. This would alleviate stress and help the community thrive. In addition, it would greatly reduce organizer burnout. Not only would organizers have a guaranteed space to host events as they please, but also the queer community would be able to come together for dialogues and discussion around intra-community issues and concerns, thus alleviating the pressures of online callout culture which are exacerbated by the lack of physical connectedness of the East Vancouver queer community. A permanent queer space is just one of many hopes for the future held by these organizers, and the other hopes and needs are outlined below.

6.3 Needs and Hopes for the Future

In order to reduce burnout, address the impacts of gentrification on the queer community, and create a thriving queer community, the organizers have indicated several needs and hopes for the future of the City of Vancouver and its relationship to queer community events and groups. While some organizers want very little to do with the City of Vancouver, other organizers see some potential benefits to working with or being supported by the City. These organizers hope for city funding, relaxed licensing, rent caps, and a slowed pace of gentrification in East Vancouver.

6.3.1 City Funding

Half of these organizers believe that if they were to receive formal funding or support as organizers and as a community from the City of Vancouver, they would have a greater financial stability in their personal and organizing lives. City funding would decrease the amount of time and energy spent on financing an event or group with personal money, and would leave more time to address intra-community issues and

politics, provide emotional support, and engage socially or politically with other individuals or groups. This would benefit East Vancouver queer community culture, because there would be significantly fewer financial worries for funding and maintaining events or groups. City funding would help make these important city groups and events more accessible and frequent, and would even help pay organizers for their labour. One organizer suggested that this be done in a similar manner to Vancouver's community grants in which community groups can apply to receive upwards of \$500 to host an event or start a project. A similar program directed specifically towards the queer community would also demonstrate solidarity with the queer community outside of the City of Vancouver's support for Davie Village and the city's Pride Parade. To create a framework for this funding, the City of Vancouver could do potentially do an audit of East Vancouver queer events in order to add to the quantitative and demographic data available on the queer community, which would not only benefit urban professionals who wish to understand and work alongside the queer community, but would also benefit researchers who wish to contribute to body of knowledge between urban studies and queer studies. Formal recognition and funding would be a more inclusive and meaningful demonstration of LGBTQ+ support on behalf of the city, because it would show organizers and their community that their experiences, events, and groups are all valuable pieces of the city's culture and social fabric, regardless of whether or not the queer community is mainstream or underground.

On the other hand, some organizers and community members may prefer not to be formally involved with the City of Vancouver. Organizers would still have the personal choice to apply or not to apply for the queer community grant. Though some organizers may disagree about municipal involvement with leftist queer community, the option to apply for city funding ultimately gives the queer community and its organizers more options and autonomy when deciding how each event or group should be organized and experienced. Those choosing to access the queer community grant would be able to start new projects without spending their own money, which may lead to even more options for participating in and fostering queer community. Meanwhile, those choosing not to access the grant may still benefit from the increased amount of financial and physical resources shared among queer organizers in part due to help from the grants being provided to other organizers and groups within the queer community.

6.3.2 Relaxed Licensing

Related to funding from the City of Vancouver, a relaxed licensing system for large events and alcohol permits would also benefit a handful of the organizers of the East Vancouver queer community. It would be financially easier for new bars to open by decreasing the amount required for a liquor license on premise, meaning that the possibilities for an East Vancouver queer owned and operated bar become much more of a reality. A queer-owned bar would provide a stable venue space by queers, for queers, that would be accessible and ideal for not only the brewery meetup group, but also the drag cabaret event, open mic nights, dance parties, and other future events that could be born from the bar space. Two organizers expressed interest in the dream of opening a queer-owned bar in East Vancouver but were heavily discouraged by the cost of obtaining a liquor license for said bar. Making large event permits and liquor licenses more accessible would directly benefit the East Vancouver queer community, and would also allow new businesses, bars, clubs, and restaurants to flourish even outside of the East Vancouver queer community, because these new locations open up for other communities and demographics as well. As other non-queer specific bars and venues may open up across East Vancouver, some of these venues may turn out to be very accessible and queer friendly, thereby creating more options for the organizers to choose from when planning for events, which would help alleviate some of the precarity and burnout caused by gentrification.

6.3.3 Rent Caps

Moving away from the very direct impacts of city funding and relaxed licensing, all organizers cited the need to address rising rental costs for homes and businesses. Putting an upwards limit on the amount of rent a landlord can charge a tenant was one of the requests of every organizer when asked about which changes they would like to see made to Vancouver in order for their organizing to become less challenging and more fulfilling. This is because of the amount of stress finding and maintaining affordable housing has caused each of the organizers in their personal lives, especially for the queer collective house members, therefore taking away time, energy, and money that could be better spent on organizing community events and helping the queer community come together and grow. Affordable housing and housing security were the biggest concerns of the interviewees when looking towards their future lives and organizing

careers in Vancouver. This is noteworthy because the interview was not a housing-focused interview, so interviewees felt this topic to be important enough to their organizing in the queer community to tell me about it in detail. They claim that if housing continues to be scarce, temporary, and expensive, they do not see a future for themselves in Metro Vancouver, let alone in the increasingly desirable East Vancouver. Only three interviewees responded with certainty that they would be living within the City of Vancouver for as long as possible, while the rest either had no idea where they would be even within a year of the interview, or else had plans to move elsewhere within the next year or next few years. Vancouver risks losing talented, dedicated, hardworking community organizers to the housing crisis. If young people are not provided stable, affordable housing within Vancouver, many of these organizers will take their time and talents elsewhere for the sake of being able to afford rent, food, and transit. By meeting the basic needs of shelter for these young adult queer people, Vancouver could retain its organizers and be shaped by empathetic, endeavoring young adults for years to come. This would not only benefit the queer community within East Vancouver, but could also benefit multiple communities across different demographics and neighborhoods as the queer community comes together with other communities in solidarity, love, and support. Take note of the organizers who organized performances for senior citizen groups in East Vancouver in order to thank the community center for allowing their queer arts group to hold meetings and practices in their space. This is just one example of how the queer community is already coming together with other communities within the city. Also, some organizers who are on the older end of the age scope of my study, (in their early and mid thirties) have plans to eventually move away from nightlife organizing and instead start hosting multigenerational queer groups and workshops, which would again bridge communities in Vancouver. These organizers have a lot of potential to bring accessible events and groups to many Vancouver residents if only they could afford to continue living within the city.

6.3.4 Slowed Pace of Gentrification in East Vancouver Neighborhoods

Given the rapid rates of gentrification occurring in Vancouver, several of the organizers question their ability to stay and continue organizing within the city. They are unable to make any long-term organizing plans due to the financial instability and venue precarity. One organizer in particular has decided to leave Vancouver as soon as

possible, because they cannot foresee any stop to the ongoing gentrification. They vent the following frustrations:

It makes me feel like any of the things I like or want to be here forever have this expiry date that's within like the next 5 years basically. Like what is Vancouver even going to be in the next 5 years? ... More bougie-ass restaurants with cool lightbulbs is really what's in the cards. That's all I see popping up! ... I need less signs of feeling out of place (Interview).

This organizer, like many of those with whom I spoke, feels that gentrification is pushing them out and limiting their future potential. The jab about “bougie-ass (a play on the term ‘bourgeoise’) restaurants with cool lightbulbs” shows that this organizer feels very jaded about the shift towards middle- and upper-class tastes in local venues which makes queer community inaccessible and unstable. They see no future for themselves or their community in the current state of gentrification and they need to see a halt or a slowed paced in gentrification in order to secure stable housing and reliable venues. If gentrification continues as rapidly as it has in recent years, then East Vancouver queer organizers will continue to burn out from all of the changing venues, accessibility audits, and unplanned event or group hiatuses.

Specifically limiting the gentrification in Chinatown, the DTES, and the surrounding neighborhoods in Strathcona, Hastings-Sunrise, and along Main Street, would allow organizers and the queer community to settle in, rather than face continuous displacement. It would allow tight-knit queer neighborhoods, hubs, and networks to form within East Vancouver as more young adults are able to continue to live within the City of Vancouver rather than be pushed out into the surrounding cities and suburbs. Other communities in these neighborhoods, such as the Chinese elders in Chinatown, would also be able to stay in their areas and foster community, which could lead to intercommunity solidarity across East Vancouver because there would be less competition for limited affordable spaces and resources. Given the possibility for increased stability both within and outside of the East Vancouver queer community, every organizer has similarly expressed this need to slow the current pace of gentrification.

6.4 Conclusion

As homes and businesses close or relocate in these neighborhoods, the queer community is disrupted and exists in a state of constant instability. This study has found that gentrification functions as an independent variable, a dependent variable, and as a contextual factor when understanding the obstacles of organizing queer community in an increasingly unaffordable East Vancouver. It exists outside of and impacts queer community organizing efforts, while also coexisting and permeating some East Vancouver queer community events that benefit from gentrification by gaining access to nicer, safer venues. It is also providing a context to queer community organizing in East Vancouver as organizers consider their real or perceived relationships to gentrification in their organizing labor.

Overall, gentrification has become a huge barrier and obstacle to queer community organizers in East Vancouver. These organizers bring their community together through events, workshops, and parties, but cannot plan for any future longevity for their events because of the lack of stable, affordable venue options which meet the needs of the organizers and their attendees. It becomes increasingly difficult for organizers to host their events and meet the needs of their community as venues become scarce and as organizers must take more time away from organizing in order to pay for rent and the overall rising cost of living. The pressures and instability have caused some events to discontinue or go on hiatus as organizers lose resources, burn out, or move away.

Queer organizers and the East Vancouver queer community should not have to give up organizing and participating in their community in order to have a good quality of life. Given the impacts of gentrification—displacement, rising costs of rent, and rising unaffordability—the quality of life and quality of events for the queer community are suffering, thereby limiting the potential of queer organizers to create safe, accessible, and enjoyable spaces. Despite these challenges, queer organizers persist in creating and maintaining queer community in East Vancouver. The stress and pressure surrounding queer organizing in a gentrifying East Vancouver are quite demanding, often unreasonably so. Queer community organizing and participation should be fulfilling rather than draining, especially because the groups and events are meant to offer support, community, and social networking for an already marginalized and oppressed

demographic. Gentrification is exacerbating the demands placed upon organizers and disturbs the balance of personal life and organizing life, which is why organizers have called for rent caps, relaxed licensing, stable communal space, relaxed or halted gentrification, and potential funding from the City of Vancouver. By receiving support through the obstacles of unaffordability and venue instability, the queer community can turn it's focus inwards to foster healing, dialogue, growth, and fun.

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Appendix A.

Sample Interview Questions

The interviews were open ended, allowing discussion to evolve naturally. The following questions served as the foundation of each interview, with additional discussions and questions forming from each unique answer.

What groups/events/workshops do you personally help to organize?

How many other organizers are a part of this group/event/workshop?

What groups/events/workshops do you also participate in, but do not organize?

Where do you typically hold your events/meet ups?

How did you come to start using this space?

What challenges did you face prior to finding this space?

What challenges are you still facing in using this space for organizing?

How do you pay for materials/rent/licenses/food/supplies/entertainment/labour for your event/group/workshop?

How do participants in your event/group/workshop contribute to the cost of organizing?

How do you perceive organizing in Vancouver specifically to impact your event/group/workshop?

Do you feel you can depend on anyone outside of your event/group/workshop for help with organizing?

Do you feel any sense of allyship with other queer events/groups/workshops Vancouver?

Do you frequently organize in Davie Village?

What changes do you feel need to be made to Vancouver, the queer community, society etc., in order for your organizing to become less challenging and more fulfilling?

Do you feel that gentrification is at all impacting your organizing efforts or your event/workshop/party? If so, how?

Do you enjoy organizing your event/group/workshop?