

**READING GAM IN CRAIGSLIST PERSONAL ADS:  
CONSTRUCTING GAY ASIAN MALES DURING THE  
NEGOTIATION OF ANAL INTERCOURSE**

*-AND-*

**REMEMBERING SPATIALLY: REFOCUSING THE  
HISTORY OF VANCOUVER'S GAY COMMUNITY**

by

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Bachelor of Arts, Simon Fraser University, 2004

EXTENDED ESSAYS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF  
THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF

MASTER OF ARTS

In the  
Department of Women's Studies

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SIMON FRASER UNIVERSITY

2007

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Constructing Gay Asian Males During the  
Negotiation of Anal Intercourse  
-and-  
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## **Abstract**

Essay 1: The identity “gay Asian male” (GAM) is proposed and contested in online personal ads, where ethnicity and other visible traits are used to describe individuals as attractive suitors and request or refuse potential partners. This paper explores the relationship between identity and desire, focusing on representations of GAM in craigslist ads, a site where men seek men for sexual encounters. In particular, it considers GAM as constructed by cultural meanings derived from characteristics set by HIV/AIDS prevention literature.

**Keywords: Gay men; Asian Identity; Personal Ads; Cybercommunity**

Essay 2: Existing historical geographies of gay communities in North America, including local media representations of Vancouver’s gay community, follow an identity politics metanarrative of gay liberation and subculture formation. This paper challenges this metanarrative, reframing Vancouver’s gay community’s formation by considering real estate events, key community relationships—highlighted in 1981, and nostalgic memory. The interaction of these components contributes to the maintenance of the community’s political visibility and concentration along Vancouver’s Davie Street.

**Keywords: Gay Community; Gay History; Vancouver**

In Memory of Leah Georgia and Laurine Harrison:

You both told me that I could and should do this.

I miss you.

## Acknowledgements

I must first thank my family, Amy Lee, Laurens Lee, Belinda Lee Yip, Cheung Fung Ning, and Gabriel Leung, for their continued love and support.

My intellect would be very undeveloped without the support of many faculty members. I am indebted to my supervisors, both of whom pushed me in academic directions that I previously found uncomfortable, and who I wholly trust and consider as friends: Dr. Cindy Patton, an unfailing source of wisdom, imagination, and inspiration; and Dr. Helen Leung, whose patience, encouragement, and insights are invaluable. For their thoughtful comments and provoking conversations, I thank Dr. Lara Campbell, Dr. Thomas Kemple, Dr. Marilyn MacDonald, and Dr. Mary Lynn Stewart. I am also grateful to Dr. Ann Travers, whose mentorship and friendship are challenging, constant, and cherished.

For helping make archival research a positive experience, I thank Eric Swanick (SFU), Katherine Kalsbeek and George Brandak (UBC), the staff at the Vancouver Archives, Dr. Michael Brown of the University of Washington, and Ron Dutton.

The people at Cindy Patton's HeRMeT Lab, particularly Helen Kang, John Liesch, Dr. Mary Petty, Marguerite Pigeon, and Wallace Robinson, made working a joyful experience. I actually want to continue doing research.

Without my peers, I would still be writing nonsense and crying. I am thankful for the thoughtful encouragements and friendships of Sonja Boon, Caelie Frampton, and Mary Shearman. I am also thankful to Wendy Luong and David Knowles for reminding me to get out of my head and to eat, drink, and be happy.

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## Author's Note

There are two versions of the essay “Reading GAM in craigslist Personal Ads: Constructing Gay Asian Males During the Negotiation of Anal Intercourse.” Because of the accessibility of my essays online through the SFU Library, I agreed to censor some of the nudity from the photos found within the text for the online version. This decision was made under the advisement of both the SFU Library and the Dean of Graduate Studies. Online, the *men seeking men* section of craigslist is preceded with an advisory that there is mature content inside the ads and that the webpages are intended for individuals 18 years of age and older. The SFU Library, the Dean of Graduate Studies, and I agree that by censoring the online version of this essay, we are doing due diligence to prevent the exploitation of images that may be interpreted as overly erotic or pornographic, should this essay be accessed by anyone one under the age of 18.

The uncensored version of these essays can be obtained through the SFU Library or by special request to the author.

**Reading GAM in craigslist Personal Ads:  
Constructing Gay Asian Males  
during the Negotiation of Anal Intercourse**

## **GAM, am I?**

Finding myself single in Vancouver, I did as many gay men do: I turned to the Internet, where I found hundreds of men looking relationships of some sort. Being nervous about participating in the online dating world, I spent some time looking over several different websites, looking at the existing ads—also known as my potential “dating” pool.

### **slide it in my hole - 27**

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Reply to: pers-32954xxxx@craigslist.org

Date: 2007-05-12, 10:43AM PDT

27 years old 5'7 140 smooth boyish tight body 6 inch cock nice round tight ass love sucking getting fuck boyish looks blond hair blue eye really horny looking to host or travel love haveing my hole rimmed and a nice cock slid up my ass please no asians

- Location: west end
- it's NOT ok to contact this poster with services or other commercial interests

Coming across this ad<sup>1</sup> in the *men seeking men* section of craigslist, I could not help but wonder: in Canada, in a time when racial exclusion is generally frowned upon and labelled as “racist,” how does this individual unabashedly exclude Asians? Who does he consider to be Asian? Was I upset because this ad excluded me because I identify as Asian and would be labelled as such by any member of Canadian society? What does “slide it in my hole” know about me as a gay Asian man (GAM) seeking some sort of relationship with another man? Who and what is a GAM, and did I fit that description? How do I read this text that contains no punctuation?

---

<sup>1</sup> All ads in this paper maintain their formatting and appear as they would on screen. Each ad was copied on the date that it was posted. All ads are anonymous and I have further anonymized them by omitting the last four digits of the post number. Photos featuring faces are also altered to protect the anonymity of the posters. The ads used in this essay are now out-of-date and contact with posters cannot be made through the publication of this work.

## Marking Identity, Making GAM

This project examines the construction of identity based on identity categories and labels, by exploring representations of the label of “gay Asian male” (GAM) in craigslist online personal ads. My reading of personal ads demonstrates that identity labels do not describe states of *being*, but states of *becoming*—where identity categories are known by individuals and enacted during interpersonal interactions. Therefore, identity labels mark cultural categories of meaning, informing individuals of societal norms and codes of conduct when interacting with one another. GAM’s identity then is not an issue of character or expected characteristics, but one of anticipated meanings that govern reactions and roles during interpersonal exchanges. The introduction of GAM in North America, however, established GAM as a distinct category, functioning to define GAM in relation/contrast to white men in North America.

GAM is commonly understood as an identity category in North America, representing individuals who identify, or who are identified, as “gay” and “Asian.” As an identity category, GAM is constructed in two ways: first, with the labelling of homoerotic behaviours, particularly penile-anal intercourse, as “gay” and deviant; and second, the conflation of all cultures in Asia and the individuals in its diaspora into the single category of Asian. Both of these moves emerged in discussions of the impact of the HIV/AIDS epidemic. First, Leo Bersani’s “Is the Rectum a Grave?” (1987) questioned the label of deviance applied to the gay male rectum as a result of public understandings of the HIV/AIDS epidemic. Second, J.P. Rushton and A.F. Bogaert’s paper in 1989 characterized Asians (or Mongoloid individuals) as less likely to contract HIV/AIDS because as a race, they were less sexually promiscuous and/or active.

Pushing the idea of GAM as a category of identity, public health scholars introduced GAM in HIV/AIDS prevention literature in the late 1990s and early 2000s as a potential vector for disease and a threat to the public (Chng et al., 2003; Choi et al., 2002; Lam et al., 2004; Mao et al., 2004; Nemoto et al., 1998; Nemoto et al., 2003; Poon et al., 2005; Ratti et al., 2000; Van de Ven et al., 2004; Yoshikawa et al., 2004). By highlighting cultural difference, this body of literature identified the GAM body as one at odds with North American norms. While it did address the specific needs of a particular segment of the population previously ignored in research, HIV/AIDS prevention literature focussing on GAM only further essentialised men who identified as Asian. Public health scholars identified GAM as being unable to make safe choices during sexual encounters because of the tensions between his gay identity, assumed to be part of a North American/white identity, and his Asian identity. Further marking the category “gay” as an ethnically sensitive one, public health scholars coined the acronym MSM, or Men who have Sex with Men, suggesting that doing research on “gay” individuals left out the populations of most concern because these men did not self-identify as gay and would exclude themselves from research studies. In this essay, I choose to use the term “gay” to include these men, because all MSM, regardless of whether they self-identify as “gay” or as “straight,” must contend—positively or negatively—with the position “gay,” a position that I suggest is still considered deviant in contrast to “straight” in North American society.

I contend that GAM is not simply a category of identity: GAM is not defined by particular characteristics. Instead, GAM represents a set of cultural parameters that govern interpersonal interactions. These parameters are, however, influenced by the methods of introducing GAM to the North American public, namely through HIV/AIDS prevention literature. Therefore, the naming of an individual as GAM invokes the images and issues

previously introduced: GAM as an individual contending with cultural difference and a colonial history that favours white/European individuals over Asian individuals.

## Vancouver's GAMs

In Vancouver, discussions of GAM's identity place him in Vancouver's gay community as either an ethnic component of the community that could be the object of affection, eroticisation, and oppression, or as an individual of concern for public health with respect to fighting the AIDS epidemic. For the first category, Vancouver's local gay media highlighted GAM's presence in the city through theme nights at bars and clubs, or community organizations targeting a gay Asian population. Another means of making GAM visible were articles examining cultural issues involving inter-ethnic relations involving GAM. Here, I will present three articles: one (Cho, 1994), exploring issues faced by gay Asians and inspired by David Henry Hwang's *M. Butterfly* (1986); and two articles (Harris, 2005; Quan, 2006) in response to Vancouver author David Gawthrop's book, *The Rice Queen Diaries* (2005). In the second category of literature discussing GAM are reports put out by AIDS Vancouver, where the Asian Support – AIDS Project (AS-AP) group published three reports on HIV/AIDS prevention and the gay Asian community (with more emphasis on men).

Inspired by a line from David Henry Hwang's *M. Butterfly* (play on Broadway in 1988, film in 1993)<sup>2</sup>, and fuelled by Richard Fung's now iconic essay, "Looking for My Penis, The Eroticized Asian in Gay Video Porn" (1991), Sung Cho (1994) navigates the field of identity politics with the gay Asian male as his subject. Cho describes GAM as a subject of conflicted desire, where relationships with other men are completely framed in post-colonial

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<sup>2</sup> Song, the Chinese spy and "butterfly," states, "I am an Oriental. And being an Oriental, I could never be completely a man." (Hwang, 1986, p. 83)

relations and the desire within these relationships define how GAM is understood in society (p 14). GAM is therefore an “othered” being in North America and all sexual relationships reflect this position. In addition to being “othered” based on ethnic identity, GAM is feminised based on gender and age, where references to Asian men as “boys” excludes GAMs from fully being “men,” who are masculine and adult (p. 14). The over-representation of older white men with younger Asian men (a trend also seen in inter-ethnic heterosexual relationships) also contributes to the image of GAM being subservient to white men (p. 14). Cho also questions the notion of a single category of “Asian,” but also continues promoting a notion of a relatively singular gay “Asian” community.

Although he does not wish to centre his argument on the white male, Cho cannot seem to advocate for a community that is not based on a definition around the white male (p. 15). While the goal is to support GAM by encouraging a gay Asian community, the end image for GAM is one that cannot exist in any comfort with white men. Even when describing a film by Vancouver artist Wayne Yung, where an Asian man and a white man engage in a flip-flop, where both individuals take turns being both insertive and receptive partners, Cho faults its overall effect by pointing out that the film still represents a younger Asian man with a much older white man (p. 15). Even in reality, the image of GAM with a white man suggests the stereotypes of the feminine and subservient GAM, negating any possibility for a positive or happy inter-ethnic relationship (p. 15). Therefore, GAM is still left unsettled in his post-colonial power struggle, and representations of inter-racial relationships in film and reality cannot escape criticism and question. Any individual GAM cannot represent a gay Asian community, nor signify the characteristics of a GAM identity. Instead GAM remains marginalized for he is not understood as part of the gay community’s norm. Cho’s suggests that stereotypical images or interpretations of GAM’s identity can only

lose their meaning if a larger and diverse population of men who are gay and Asian is publicly represented (p.15).

In 2005, Vancouver writer Daniel Gawthrop, a gay white man, published *The Rice Queen Diaries*, a memoir of his travels and sexual encounters with Asian men. In an interview promoting his book, Gawthrop states that “[t]o really understand [the effects of cultural imperialism and inter-cultural relationships], you’ve got to go in there and be with those people, and talk to those people, and fuck those people” (Harris, 2005, para. 18) While Harris, the author of the review/book promotion, remains unconvinced of Gawthrop’s convictions, the result is that GAM again remains the object and not actually of any interest except as the sometimes unwilling object of affection for white men. Although the article is about Gawthrop (the book *is* his memoir), it only questions his position, allowing GAM to slip into a position of helplessness and uselessness. The article concedes to unequal relationships as “not always a bad thing,” but fails to suggest how it could be good outside of a stereotypical context: it leaves the reader assuming that GAMs predominantly benefit from inter-ethnic relationships by being younger, exotic, and in need of financial support (Harris, 2005, para. 14).

The following year, writer Andy Quan also wrote a review of Gawthrop’s book for *fridae.com*, a website dedicated to gay Asian men and women around the world. While Quan’s article also critiques Gawthrop’s brazen and insistent identification as a rice queen, he problematizes the work by thinking about the position in which Gawthrop places Asian men (Quan, 2006, para. 7). Without the use of academic post-colonialist jargon, Quan diversifies the Asian community, reminding the reader that Gawthrop’s book is to be questioned not only because of the power difference in the images presented in the book, but also because the category of “Asian” involves diverse attributes (Quan, 2006, para. 12).

Therefore, Quan's problem with Gawthrop's gaze is that it still generalizes Asian identity to particular essences. Quan also ponders the notion of "unequal" relationships as being consensual; he understands Gawthrop's cultural position of being at an advantage in the sexual relationship, where foreign Asian men in an economy where sex is a resource to be exploited seemingly give white men power, but asserts that desire is not a force to be used recklessly and as a means to take advantage of a situation without accountability (Quan, 2006, para. 21).

Again, the authors of these articles think about the identity of GAM, but only in relation to white men and more specifically, sex with white men. None of these articles address the issues of sexual health, but Cho's piece is supplemented by a callout from the newspaper: "For further information on gay Asians, call GAVA [Gay Asians of Vancouver Area] ... For more information on Asians and HIV/AIDS issues, call ASAP [Asian Support – AIDS Project]" (Cho, 1994, p.15) While this could reflect an association between a public visibility of GAM and AIDS anxiety, it most likely more reflective of the kind of work that was being done in Vancouver at the time – Cho's article was written in 1994, right at the time that AS-AP was launching itself as a service group (as opposed to a social/community organization) in Vancouver.

The formation of Asian Support – AIDS Project (AS-AP) in 1994 mirrors the efforts of the public health scholars writing about GAM. Acknowledging the cultural diversity of its city, and a gap in its literature and services, AIDS Vancouver, one of Vancouver's major AIDS service organizations, sponsored AS-AP, which produced three reports. These reports served to identify a health-conscious Asian community in Vancouver, and implicate them in the need for attention and sensitivity around HIV/AIDS prevention. Two of the reports are

promotional materials/community reports for AS-AP (AS-AP, 1994a; 1994b), while the third document is a survey of Asian-identified MSM in Vancouver (Bhat, Yee, & Koo, 1994).

The two reports outline AS-AP's goals as an organization (Asian Support-AIDS Project, 1994a; 1994b). Using the premise that gay Asians are structurally disadvantaged in Canada and at higher risk of HIV/AIDS, AS-AP strove to create a culturally sensitive approach to risk reduction promotion (1994a, p. 2). In these materials, "Asian" is defined as East and South East Asians (predominantly Chinese, Japanese, Vietnamese, and Filipino) and excluding South Asians (predominantly Indian) (1994a, p. 2). Constructing a need for their services is done through assertions that Asians similarly face "Denial, Discrimination, and Disempowerment" in a similar manner in Vancouver, and are therefore less able to negotiate safer sex (1994b, p. 3). In "Behind the Asian Mask: A survey of Asian MSMs and HIV Awareness" (Bhat et al., 1994), the results of MSG – Men's Survey for Gay Asians – commissioned by AS-AP, the definition of "Asian" is the same (p. ix), along with the assumption that in general, "Asian" cultures consider sexual content taboo (p. vii). While the survey results showed that participants were well aware and educated about condom use and HIV/AIDS issues (p. 14), the researchers point out that the survey caught a well educated set of individuals, and therefore, more surveying would be required to better understand the needs of this specific community (p. 23).

What these reports together accomplish is create a new notion of an Asian community. What unifies the community is a common disadvantage through identity. GAM's position is maintained as a culturally different being in a Euro-centric North America, regardless of the amount of time spent in Canada, or, level of socialization (AS-AP, 1994a; 1994b; Bhat et al. 1994). Although place of birth and years spent in Canada were both included in the MSG, "Behind the Asian Mask" did not include these demographics as

statistics or discussion (Bhat et al., 1994). Therefore, the notions of culture and ethnicity represent factors, or categories for social scientists to contend with in their models of predicted behaviours. Even in the Vancouver context, GAM's Asian-ness defines his identity, making him predictable and objectified.

## **Getting Online and Getting Personal**

The Internet has inspired many questions for researchers around the issue of HIV/AIDS prevention. Primarily, the Internet is understood as a tool for researchers to either gain information from subjects and advertise their messages to at risk communities (Bowen, 2005; Gullette & Turner, 2003), or it is a space that may have particular meaning for gay men and thus a potential site for HIV/AIDS transmission if these men were to network and physically meet (Benotsch, Kalichman & Cage, 2002; Davis et al., 2004; Davis et al., 2006; Dawson Jr. et al., 2005). For this second group, the Internet is not only a space where men seek one another out for sex, but also an extension of the community, a virtual space where community can form by virtue of a population being present. Davis et al. (2006) attempts to begin a conversation about identity when looking for sexual partners online, but this discussion is cut short by what is perceived to be more important: whether or not safer sex measures are being expressed out loud.

One of the most prevalent methods of finding sexual partners online is through online personal ads. Here, individuals write descriptions of themselves in hopes of locating a potential partner for friendship, a relationship, or sex. While scholarship explaining how the Internet functions as a separate community from reality, or the offline world, exists (Campbell, 2004; O'Brien, 1999), the online personal ad provides a space that somewhat bridges the virtual to the real. Exploring issues of embodiment in cyberspace, Hardey (2002)

identifies the Internet as a text-based space for identity formation. Here, individuals display their identities in written form, a process that demands self-awareness of how they wish to be presented and perceived (Hardey, 2002, p. 572). Hardey also notes that while it is possible to form relationships that exist only in the virtual world, online personal ads represent a space that is *between* both worlds (Hardey, 2002, p. 582). An individual using an online personal ad begins in cyberspace, but the ad is written with the intention of extending that relationship into the real world.

Mention of GAM in online personal ads is limited. Again, literature that highlights questions about ethnicity often attempts to identify methods of addressing HIV/AIDS prevention (Poon, et al., 2005; Ross, Tikkanen, & Mansson, 2000). This work, however, ultimately serves to essentialize ethnic identities, both that of GAM and Western gay men. Supporting GAM's awareness of his status as not the norm, Phua & Kaufman (2003) found that GAMs were most likely of men sampled (of multiple sexual identities including heterosexuals) to mention a preference for a particular ethnicity (Phua & Kaufman, 2003, p. 990). Bartholome, Tewksbury, & Bruzzone (2000) found that a minority of ads specified a desired ethnicity: some ads would generally list acceptable/desirable ethnicities and only 4 of 167 ads requested only one specific ethnicity—two specifically requesting Asian men (Bartholome, Tewksbury, & Bruzzone, 2000, p. 318). While this is a small number, it is interesting that the two statements the authors chose to highlight featured Asian men, the only mention of Asian men in the entire paper.

The relationship of the offline and online worlds with regards to online personal ads is one that is not clearly understood. Gibbs, Ellison, & Heino (2006) discuss the levels of self-disclosure, or honesty, in online personal ads. Recognizing a discrepancy between what one may write and how one might actually present oneself, these authors contend that

because online personal ads exist in the offline world as well, individuals seeking successful offline encounters would more likely be honest in their self-descriptions (p.153). The authors, however, were looking at heterosexuals seeking “long-term” relationships, and their measure of success was the production of heteronormative couples in dating relationships (p. 164). The history of personal ad use by the gay community, however, does not correspond to this measure of success; gay men may be honest/dishonest depending on the activity sought out, for dating online is not restricted to the model of long-term relationships provided by heteronormative society (Harris, 2001). Therefore, an important consideration is the relationship between gay men and personal ads. In addition to the unique form of communication in personal ads, the space of the online personal ad world becomes one that constructs particular norms, especially around issues of self-presentation.

Two key essays have documented how the language used in personal ads for men seeking men has shifted over the years. The first, by Alan G. Davidson (1991), marks the changes to language in personal ads of gay men due to social phenomena, in this case, the popular understanding of the AIDS epidemic. Looking at personal ads from 1978-1988, Davidson notes that there is an increase in mention of health status and relationship status over time (e.g. using terms such as “monogamy”, “1-to-1”, “non-promiscuous”, “clean”, or “health conscious”) (p. 131). He also observes a rejection of gay identity as well as gay-identified gender qualities (i.e. a rejection of bar culture/gay scene, desire for straight-acting partners, and rejection of effeminate individuals) (p. 132). Davidson demonstrates that through language, gay men describe a relationship between their bodies, their sexual behaviours, and their sexual identities, a relationship that is structured hierarchically, with preferences for non-stereotypically “gay” traits (p. 135).

More recently, Daniel Harris (2001) looks at the language and topics of discussion in relation to era-based cultural climates in North America, specifically, the acceptability of queer relationships and the predominantly accepted family structures of the time period in which the ads are placed. Looking at gay personal ads from 1946 to the 1990s, Harris locates the styles of language used in gay personal ads within the context of gay liberation throughout a specific time period - from early ads disguised as searching for individuals with common interests such as needlework, bottle collecting, or nude sunbathing, to the much more sexually explicit ads in the 1980s and 1990s (p. 285, 298). Harris suggests that with the broader acceptance of homosexuality and queerness in society, the personal ad addresses psychological barriers to queer relationships rather than the physical ones from the past. This, he proposes, is marked by the self-identification not found in identifying language, but rather by the “self-righteous denigrations” of potential partners through requirements such as “no fats,” “no fems,” “no queens,” or “no swish-types” – socially accepted markers of homosexuality (p. 301). Because of this, Harris views personal ads specifically as an entry point into understanding how gay men view themselves in relation to the acceptance of homosexuality in society (p. 290).

For the ads that I examine in this essay, success is measured by the likelihood that the individuals will engage in anal intercourse. Although both Davidson and Harris discuss how language and cultural contexts are related in finding other men through personal ads, neither piece really contends with what defines a successful ad. Harris is interested in a general notion of homosexual identity through examining discourse, while Davidson contemplates homosexual identity through the lens of the experience of liberation and the AIDS epidemic. The personal ad space itself, however, is not examined. Here, I contend that the online personal ad space has its own boundaries, distinct norms, and definitions for

success. craigslist personal ads where men seek men for sexual encounters are therefore part of a particular field, and my reading of these personal ads assumes that craigslist users engage with the structures, norms, and rules of the space. I also acknowledge that some users may not be as familiar with craigslist's structures, rules, and norms, but because their ads are part of craigslist space, their ads are under the same scrutiny as ads from users who are more experienced and who purposefully use the craigslist space to their advantage.

Much of the current research on sexual encounters that involve more than one penis in the room (read: potential same-sex sexual encounter) contends with the question of how HIV/AIDS prevention can be inserted into the activity. This is no different when searching for works on gay men, or men who have sex with men, and the Internet; the only justification for linking to the two is that it can be utilitarian in the field of public health. The automatic assumption is often that the importance of a sexual space for researchers is either that of creating "safer" encounters, or for defining the identities involved. While I am interested in the identities found through craigslist personal ads, I am less invested in what these identities are offline. My reading assumes that while the negotiation of an offline anal intercourse encounter begins as early as in the personal ad, the process that occurs online is distinct from the negotiation that occurs offline. This reading permits the ads to exist as a space that exists in both online and offline worlds, rather than as a space that serves as a bridge, or mediator between the two worlds.

Davidson and Harris' studies differ from most other scholarship because they feature the personal ads themselves as the subject of study, rather than use the personal ads to understand a category of identity or relationship. Both works, however, only address newspaper personal ads. In a broad database search, only one article treats gay online personal ads as a field to study. As mentioned, many articles again use personal ads as a

method of accessing information on gay men, or as a site of concern for public health, where online personal ads become a communicative space ideal for safer sex information. David Gudelunas, however, studies personal ads from PlanetOut as a field (2005).

Gudelunas' study (2005) attempts to further understand the use of personal ads as a means of communication for gay men and lesbians, but also to characterize the personal ads as a field site where queer identities may openly exist. His analysis differs from earlier work on cyber-identities as he is interested in how cyber-identities are tied to offline realities, meaning that the Internet is not simply a free expanse, but one where the limits of identity exploration can involve the creation of offline communities through online communications (p. 5). Gudelunas' analysis, which involves reading a sample of ads in addition to surveys sent out to the authors of some of the ads, establishes that the geography of the gay community can be understood as physical space that is navigated through Internet communications, where the face-to-face connections and expansion of physical visibility is through the meso-geographical space of the Internet (p. 4).

What is interesting about Gudelunas' work (2005) is that while he works to identify and characterize individuals and communities that use online personal ads, he does not fall into the trap of identifying the spaces as potential pathways of unsafe sex or safer sex messages. What he does not achieve is thinking about online personal ad space as an *independent* space; Gudelunas maintains that online personal ads are linked to the expression of user identities in particular geographical locations, namely rural versus urban users (p. 20). His analysis is shaped by an assumption that the anonymity of the Internet is related to fear of coming out for queer men and women (p. 21). Because of his focus on individuals and communities in the offline world, Gudelunas leaves his description of the field site of the online personal ad incomplete: he contrasts the PlanetOut sites from "free-form Web

personals site that essentially mocks the newspaper format” without exploring the potential impacts of the “more interactive questionnaires and other dynamic features” found in his samples (p. 14-15). His work introduces the structure of the online personal ad space, but stops short of presenting an ethnographic look at a field site – we are unable to think about how this form of online space contributes to the encounters that occur in it. Therefore, the online personal ads remain as a space that bridges two “purer” fields (the real offline world and the fantasy online world).

Gudelunas (2005) also does not contest the idea that individuals using online personal ads are incapable of making interpersonal connections in the real world due to isolation rooted in homophobia, loneliness, and oppression (p. 4). I am not suggesting that these are not possible reasons for the use of online personal ads, but I am trying to break away from the assumption that these are the predominant reasons for the gay community’s close relationship to the Internet. The underlying assumption that Internet use is derived out of *need* as opposed to *accessibility* maintains the normal status of the methods for forming heterosexual relationships. Instead, I am asserting that the online personal ad space is one that is harnessed by individuals who self-identify as gay (or at least not as strictly heterosexual), and the Internet is a component of the modern gay community.

Giving context to my readings of craigslist ads, I intend to consider the genre of online personal ads as a field, one that demands consideration of its structure, of its rules, of its boundaries, and of its presence as an independent space. Use of online personal ads by gay men is not simply utilitarian for meeting face-to-face, leading to gay community and interpersonal encounters, but it is a field site occupied by gay men in a particular manner. Because of the emphasis, and assumption in scholarly work, of online personal ads as either a public health concern, or a defining component of gay and gay community identity, I will

take careful attention in thinking about craigslist as a field site and not as a location in which to access individuals. In a similar spirit to Richard Tewksbury's ethnography of gay bathhouses (2000)<sup>3</sup>, my reading of craigslist ads will attempt to reconsider the field of the personal ads, and rethink how identities are constructed in the space and how different identities interact with one another (Tewksbury, 2000). Therefore, I consider the identities in craigslist ads as particular to their online location. Again, without resorting to a fantastical and idealistic view of online spaces, these identities are still bounded by how online personal ads exist almost seamlessly between the on- and offline worlds.

## So What *is* craigslist?

Online personal ads have increased in prevalence and provide one main resource that was not available in newspapers – space. Online advertisements allow the writer more freedom with regards to quantity of text and how the text can be formatted (e.g. there is no restriction on the number of letters per line). I have selected craigslist<sup>4</sup> as my text because of its structure. Unlike profile-based sites, such as Yahoo personals, Gay.com, Gaydar.co.uk, fridae.com, etc., craigslist closely mimics newspaper ads<sup>5</sup>. There is no predetermined structure or questions that individuals will know about. The only structure is that there is a

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<sup>3</sup> Richard Tewksbury's piece, "Bathhouse intercourse: structural and behavioral aspects of an erotic oasis" (Tewksbury, 2002), conducts an ethnography of modern day bathhouses. It recognizes that there was a gap in descriptive research about the site, and that with the scholarly recognition of the AIDS epidemic, the nature of the bathhouse has escaped scholarly attention. Tewksbury's ethnography allows the bathhouse to be more than just a space where sex occurs between men. Using his ethnography, the bathhouse can be read as a particular community space, one that is rooted in homoerotic activities and then labelled as a gay identity space. Thinking about the bathhouse in this manner questions public health's entrance into bathhouses searching for categories of "at risk" individuals to be made safe. With my suggestion that Tewksbury treats the bathhouse as an erotic space defined with its own set of norms, methods of communication, and rules, it is ironic that it was published in the interdisciplinary journal, *Deviant Behavior* (*italics mine*).

<sup>4</sup> craigslist (www.craigslist.org) was founded in 1995 by Craig Newmark in San Francisco. Newmark wanted to create a listserv that was free to use and did not contain commercial advertisements (banner ads) (Torres, 2002, p. 52).

<sup>5</sup> craigslist ads are also completely public. There is no membership – free or paid – required to access the ads.

title, the body of the text, and if included, photographs. The pages of posts are set up where the browser views a list of the titles, and then clicks on those of interest for the rest of the ads. Although Gudelunas (2005) criticizes such sites for not taking advantage of the lack of space limitations and availability for new formats to enhance the online experience (p. 14-15), he neglects to consider the impact of adding new structural components to the environment where interactions take place.

Individuals using the other profile services are all aware of the structure inherent in the ads, so if an individual were to choose to omit certain information, other service users would be aware of the omissions. Therefore, in craigslist, the decision about what information is important to the author is solely his. With profile sites, the main structured set of information is demographic information, or “stats,” such as age, ethnicity/race, height, weight, smoking/drug-use status, etc. They may also structure how individuals are to list their interests: Plenty of Fish, for example, has a space for individuals to describe their ideal first date or whether or not an individual would like to have children, while Gaydar.co.uk organizes a person’s interests, hobbies, and lists of favourite things (e.g. movies, books, food, etc.). Even with a blank format, however, craigslist users continue to follow a script of online personals, listing their stats and particular interests, despite not being required to do so. In the arena of sexual encounters, particular stats could be found important to enhance desirability, and their inclusion in ads only reinforces ideas of what factors drive desire, or what factors are understood as desirable, and therefore included in hopes of attracting more partners. This convention is not exclusive to personal ads: Campbell (2004) also found that men in online chat rooms use stats early on to determine whether or not someone is worth chatting with (p. 121-126). Therefore, stats are important not only for a potential encounter, but also for gaining enough initial interest to establish contact. The “script” of a personals

ad, derived from newspaper ads, continues to provide a framework from which individuals can understand how to organize their desires in a discursive literary format. If men use stats in personal ads, it may not be a simple mimicking of newspaper ads or profile-styled ads; the use of stats could reflect a conventionally understood method of systematically organizing desires. Individuals produce it, but also expect it when reading through ads.

The use of photographs is often found on craigslist. The majority of these ads do not display faces, most likely to maintain anonymity, but also to highlight the body parts that could determine the success of the ad itself. Through photographs, men provide a visual demonstration of identity, and usually an attempt to convey a particular masculinity. Photographing musculature prevents the man in the photograph from becoming a passive object for the viewer (Dyer, 2002, p. 132; Kibby & Costello, 1999): his display becomes a performance demonstrating his achievement – his muscular body requires work and is therefore unnatural (Dyer, 2002, p. 139). Therefore, the constructed poses in photographs prevent the men in them from becoming mere objects; instead, the figures become narcissistic gazes of the models themselves – there is pleasure in the display. Photographs contribute to the erotic economy of personal ads, verifying the stats provided textually. They also allow the reader to target particular features that correspond to the roles taken on during sex: tops may display their penises while bottoms display their buttocks and/or anuses.

Another feature of craigslist is that it is not an identity or activity-based site. While there is an understanding of the purpose of online personal ads, or even newspaper personal ads, these are not dictated by the site itself. Although craigslist personal ads in Vancouver are predominantly used for finding sexual encounters, there are still many posts that advertise for relationships, friends, or miscellaneous items, such as research subjects, or goods and

services where sex is offered instead of money. It is therefore important for authors of ads to be clear about what they are looking for, for the site does not provide categories for its users; craigslist personals are not exclusively for sex<sup>6</sup> (Manhunt.net), or for friendships and relationships (Plenty of Fish). Some personal profile sites accommodate multiple motivations, but still divide the site into categories such as “for dating,” “for sex,” or “for relationships” (Gay.com, Gaydar.co.uk, Lavalife). It is also unlike ethnic-based sites such as Fridae.com, which is designed specifically the gay Asian community. craigslist’s categories for their personals also do not assume a sexual identity. While some men would understand their behaviour as “gay” by society’s standards, some may not. Many craigslist users in the *men seeking men* section do not always identify as gay, or even bisexual. By not being a queer site, individuals may have more access to the resources for the barrier of the queer label is not there – there is no need for an individual to identify as queer to use this service. Some sites, such as Gaydar.co.uk, do not give an option of how to identify outside of queer-identified labels. Therefore, someone who is questioning or curious is still required to identify as either gay or bisexual. Another initial screening aspect is that of the name of the site. Campbell (2004) found that in online chat rooms, if a room was named as a gay room, then there was an assumption that the men there would identify as gay in addition to seek men for intimate encounters (p. 73, 74). Therefore, if one is uncomfortable with that assumption, especially in the context of potentially meeting other men in public, then sites that do not permit “closeted” identities or identities that do not fit into North American gay/queer categories, become less attractive. Also, because I am using public health as an informing framework for identity construction, craigslist is also ideal for it follows public health’s category of MSM, where sexual self-identification is secondary to sexual behaviours.

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<sup>6</sup> There is a *casual encounters* section to craigslist personal ads, but a majority of ads in the *men seeking men* section seek sexual encounters.

Another feature of online personal ads that generally distinguishes them from newspaper ads is the ability for instant responses. Contact on craigslist is done through email: individuals post their ads, which are linked anonymously to an email address of their choice. Readers simply email the poster, after which their contact can remain via email, or by online chat, phone, or in person depending on what information is exchanged. Most ads do not post phone numbers. On any given day, the *men seeking men* section of Vancouver craigslist will have around 100 postings, with more postings on the weekends. Unlike profile-based sites, craigslist posters must post each time that they are interested in getting responses. While it is possible to search back a few hundred posts, most postings are time specific – they pertain either to the day of the post, or another time that is often specified in the ad. There are ads that are for general enquiries, but there are many that have an expiry date, or a specific time (e.g. between 4pm and 7pm) when an encounter can occur. Some ads post specifically for anonymous sex, and might name a location and a time for where the poster can be found for particular activities. For people who access craigslist, this is also important to keep in mind, for a post is only be available once (unless the poster reposts), so unlike a profile site, where a profile stays on over time, if there is a missed opportunity, there is no guarantee that the individual will be available again.

Thinking about online spaces and the communities that exist within them, it is necessary to consider the implications of structure and whether or not notions of “community” can even be applied. In public health literature addressing the use of the Internet to promote health strategies, the Internet is thought to be a space where individuals gather, where communities form. Gudelunas (2005) regards the Internet as a tool for face-to-face communities to grow and connect (p. 29). Unlike profile sites, anonymity is a key component to craigslist; once a post is past, or if the poster removes it from craigslist, there

is no way for readers to track down the individual. Even though individuals may use an alias in profile-based sites, there is still the ability for individuals to know one another at least by user names. Individuals who repost their ads may become known to readers, but there is no inter-user communication. If one regularly uses craigslist, but as a respondent only, there is little way for other readers to know about him. Connecting an online community with the offline world, some posters do put up photos that include their faces, revealing their identities a bit more to readers should they be seen in the streets.

The community of craigslist users is one of temporary and anonymous contact. There is no need to register for craigslist, so it is open to everyone. Even though most profile sites have free memberships, there is still a need to properly join the “community” of users, and inappropriate use of the website can result in being removed (e.g. under-aged users). In craigslist, membership is based on unmediated participation. This does not mean that there is no censorship, or sense of responsible use; readers may flag postings that are deemed offensive or clearly fake, and these postings are removed—ads are automatically removed if flagged. If a repeat poster is an individual who has been inappropriate in the past to users (e.g. he has simply collected photographs but never met up, or his posts clearly misrepresent his identity or physical stature), readers who recognize his posts can flag them for removal—posters who are repeatedly flagged may be reviewed by staff and blocked from posting again. As in any community, there is also disagreement regarding when flagging is necessary or when it becomes a form of control that is a hindrance. There are also posts that warn other readers of posters or respondents who behave inappropriately. Some individuals will post a new ad warning other users of a post (often using the same title of the “offensive” post). In other instances, some users will start a dialogue through ads, posts that literally respond directly to the original authors. The question of truthfulness (whether or not

an ad is real/sincere) is also raised, but the element of risk in this respect is part of the territory of any personal ad, online or not. If a dishonest poster is caught repeatedly posting, however, there are methods for regular readers to limit his use of the site.

The community formed by craigslist users is not one of permanent connections. Some posts advertise a desire for ongoing encounters, but many are for single encounters only. Because of this loose network, it could be thought that craigslist is strictly a communication tool for the offline world, no different than a newspaper or a telephone. Because of the structure of the ads and the particular form of accountability found on the website, I argue that craigslist exists beyond the expectations of a communication tool and outside of a notion of community that is based on connectedness between individuals. Instead, it is a space where individuals are loosely connected for brief periods of time. The sense of community can also be read from the anticipation that posters receive, for they anticipate a particular audience for their ads. For those looking for one-night stands, this loose connectedness is ideal, for there might be little desire to maintain contact or lose anonymity. craigslist also becomes ideal for those travelling through a city, for individuals can post or respond to ads without being part of an existing and traceable network that is ongoing.

The speed at which encounters are set up and occur also make craigslist ads a particular space of negotiation, for in a short period of time, the ad must convey how an individual is attractive to a potential partner, and also what kind of partner is being sought after. If, according to public health literature, the issue with GAM is that he is disadvantaged in navigating safer sex, then it is imperative to understand the process of negotiating sexual practices. In both public health literature and literature about the intersection of ethnicity with sexual identity, negotiating a sexual encounter for GAM is intimately connected with his

identity. Therefore, it is important to think about how and when GAM's identity is important to the sexual encounter and how GAMs work their way through these issues.

## Negotiating Anal Intercourse and the Ads

We barely finished the meal before stumbling into bed. ...

I grabbed him roughly, his thick arms and rectangular torso; my teeth went towards his neck, and I pulled at the bottom of his polo shirt so it became free of his jeans. I slid my hand up his shirt, pinched firmly at his chest and nipple, and then pushed him to the bed.

"I want you to fuck me," he said. We hadn't actually fucked before. I was relatively inexperienced sexually and had not discovered anal pleasure. Most of all, I hated the expectation I was usually saddled with as an Asian man: BOTTOM, written across my forehead in big, black brush-strokes and faux-Oriental letters.

As for Rufo, I hadn't known if he liked to be fucked. He'd never offered. I paused for only a second, before saying, "OK. I'll get the condoms and lube." (Another sign of my sexual inactivity, the condoms were in a distant drawer rather than next to my bed.)

But when I returned with them, he said, "Actually, I want to fuck you."

My anger: at his dishonesty, his *sloppy* dishonesty, at my inability to speak, at myself for being so lonely. Instead, I straddled his torso with my knees, quickly came onto his chest, hopped off, and went to take a shower. (Quan, 2005, p. 64, italics and text formatting original)

In this fictitious account, Andy Quan describes the complexity of the intersection of identities during the negotiation of anal intercourse. Although the account does not describe issues of age and gender, it does highlight how the protagonist must contend with at least the label of "bottom" because he is Asian. Even without much experience, he is acutely aware of the stereotype. Also to note is his inexperience: in the story, the protagonist is young, but socialized in a Western country. His inexperience and loneliness has little to do

with being Asian, but rather, has to do with expectations to be in an intimate relationship with another person.

The quote above also involves several stages of the negotiation of anal intercourse: first, there is the request for anal intercourse to occur and the roles expected from the individuals (Rufo's first request); second, the protagonist's interpretation and agreement of the suggestion while asserting his conditions (the condoms and lube); third, Rufo's attempt to change the roles; and fourth, the protagonist's decision not to go through with anal intercourse and his response of masturbating while straddling Rufo's torso.

In this essay, I am considering the craigslist ads as a discursive form of the first step, when Rufo states that he wants the protagonist to top him. In that moment, the protagonist relates this desire with his identity, constructing an assumed identity for himself as a GAM. My reading, unlike most existing scholarly work on online personal ads, will not use a quantitative approach to thinking about GAM identity as expressed through the negotiation of anal intercourse. Instead, I am looking for the uses of language that describe behaviours and suggest how to think about them as related to identity. My reading of craigslist ads will contest the idea of most scholarly understandings of GAM. By understanding ideas *about* GAM, ideas that are introduced into sexual encounters by GAM and suitors that are not Asian, the concepts of culture and ethnicity cease to be categories that contribute to causal relationships, but become part of a framework of social attributes that make up GAM's identity, one that is complicated, contested, accepted, and sometimes contradictory.

## **Selecting the Ads**

The ads represented in this essay were selected from ads gathered during two time periods: March-May of 2006, and March-May of 2007. The second time period was chosen

to examine how GAM exists over time. During these two time periods, I searched through craigslist's *men seeking men* section using "Asian" or "GAM" as search terms. I did not use "gay" as a search term because of my assertion that the category of "gay" is implicit in the *men seeking men* section of craigslist. While the purpose of this essay is not to categorize GAM or even the ads themselves, there were several major themes in the ads (the themes are not discrete): no GAMs wanted (from men of various ethnic backgrounds), white men seeking GAMs that fit stereotypical roles, white men sought by GAMs, GAM for GAM, GAMs as bottoms, and GAMs as tops. The number of ads featuring or seeking GAM bottoms outnumbered those with GAM tops.

Again, the ads selected for analysis were chosen precisely for their ambiguity, representing GAMs in atypical ways, or demanding further investigation, interpretation, and description. I am less interested in the characterization of GAM, but read the ads as a means of negotiating the impacts of existing characterizations of GAM. While the over-representation of particular characteristics could indicate a domination of particular meanings and images, this reading suggests that these do not limit GAMs or men looking for GAMs; the authority and validity of characterizations depend on their use by individuals.

## Asian Boy Ready To Whore Out For Huge White Meat - 26

Reply to: pers-17532xxxx@craigslist.org

Date: 2006-06-25, 1:12PM PDT

Asian/Euro mix, 5ft4,120lbs..Are you exceptionally hung...I need that whitemeat sperming up my boypussy while i hit poppers....but only very hung...not average...send dic pic for consideration...no pic and you are instantly deleted.... cum fuck me.

- this is in or around vancouver
- no -- it's NOT ok to contact this poster with services or other commercial interests



This ad is an example of one of the over-represented GAMs who are sexual bottoms. “Asian Boy’s” ad completely fits into Richard Fung and Sung Cho’s image of the subservient GAM: bottom, wants a white man, sexually available, small in stature, and feminine. Referring to his anus as his “boypussy” and calling himself a “boy,” “Asian Boy” describes himself in a younger position, one that is not fully adult male. Also, his anus is a site of feminine identity, and an object for the male gaze. He describes his partner as the active (“sperming”) top, with him as the passive and relaxed (the result of poppers) recipient. The physical encounter that he seeks is also centred on the phallus; his partner’s masculinity and virility is demonstrated through his penis size. The use of photographs also supports this: “Asian Boy’s” photos are only of his anus and his body from behind – there is no face.

He also expects that his respondents will supply photographs, indicating that for him, body parts, not whole individuals, strictly define the sexual encounter.

Having described him as a stereotypical image of a GAM that could politically set the GAM community back to colonial times, let us reconsider how “Asian Boy” contests this image, and instead uses it to his advantage and desire for a particular sexual activity (anal intercourse). Although sexually he may be passive, the language of his ad hardly is one of a subservient individual. “Asian Boy” is demanding a large penis, stating explicitly that respondents are under consideration, and responses without photographic evidence of physical endowments will not even be acknowledged. Therefore, “Asian Boy” is objectifying his suitors, asserting himself as the subject of his ad. He also does not resort to labelling for sexual behaviour identity. Although it is evident that he is a bottom during anal intercourse, “Asian Boy” continues to define what he is searching for and does not assume that somehow his identity will attract desirable responses. His use of language also seems to recognize the cues for a stereotypical relationship of older white man to younger GAM. Whether “Asian Boy” is conscious of it or not, his ad invokes the image of a submissive, feminine, and “othered” individual as a means of attraction. He eroticises the unequal, and colonial relationship, so while he may not present himself in this manner in everyday life, for the sexual encounter, such an understanding of inter-ethnic sexual interaction becomes a form of role-play, or an understood language to describe the erotics of playing with power differences during sexual intercourse. So while he embodies an Asian body, he is active in its construction and in control of how he chooses to express it. He is an active bottom, to the point of being demanding. He therefore masculinizes his activity by not actually being passive or solely dependent on his partner: he also contributes to the encounter to make it successful; it is also about *his* pleasure. His last statement of “cum fuck me” challenges

suitable respondents, playfully reminding them of the benefits of an encounter with him – the pleasure from both the fucking (anal intercourse) and the cumming (orgasm and ejaculation).

### **dom looking for a sub gam - 30**

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Reply to: pers-29096xxxx@craigslist.org  
Date: 2007-03-09, 2:03AM PST

gwm goodlooking for gam . must be clean and safe .  
I'll share the pix.

- Location: Vancouver
- it's NOT ok to contact this poster with services or other commercial interests

This ad is extremely brief, but exemplifies the form of communication that is found on craigslist. Deviating from the traditional personal ad format, “dom” does not list his stats at all, except that he is gay, white, and male. Instead, what he presents is a sexual scenario that assumes several potential activities, one of which is anal intercourse. Although “dom” could be very interesting and subvert traditional meanings of sexual labels, in anal intercourse, dominants are usually tops and submissives usually bottoms. Although “dom” does not explicitly describe stereotypical colonial imagery, he still participates in its system of desire. His use of this imagery in the subject line is also interesting, for this would be the hook for any readers to select his ad for viewing. There is no need for further description (e.g. stats) if it is the power dynamic coupled with ethnic difference that is most important in the sexual encounter. “dom” also mentions cleanliness and safety, allusions to sexual health as well as physical cleanliness for bottoms. He does not include photographs in his ad, but indicates that he is willing to share, taking his self-representation away from the accessible community of craigslist and moving it to a private setting of emails and/or chat. For those

just browsing and not engaging with him, his identity can remain quite anonymous based on this ad alone.

## **Smooth asian bottom - 26**

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Reply to: pers-29161xxxx@craigslist.org

Date: 2007-03-10, 7:42AM PST

Smooth asian bottom looking for a hot white top. 5'6" smooth body, 150 lbs, nice tight little ass, nice pair of nips... great cocksucker, give great toe-curling blowjob, love being buttfucked, making out, having my nips played with and love being cuddled.

- Location: Yaletown-Vancouver
- it's NOT ok to contact this poster with services or other commercial interests

Unlike "Asian Boy," "Smooth Asian" identifies himself as a bottom, an identity label that indicates the type of respondent that he expects and obviously anticipates: a sexual top.

Although he positions himself as having the agency to want to be an oral and anal bottom, these desires are still placed in relation to his partner – his pleasure is derived from giving pleasure to another person. While pleasure can be derived from these activities (being a receptive partner, having one's nipples played with, etc.), reading "Smooth Asian's" ad indicates that while his pleasure is real, his attractiveness lies in making another individual sexually satisfied. He does not even offer suggestion for what kind of individual he seeks other than being white and a top. He describes his stats, but again, in a manner that constructs a body on display, one that is to be objectified and used for pleasure. This could be indicative of a lack of language/terminology available to bottoms such as "Smooth Asian," who enjoy being the passive partner and find pleasure in that role.

## young asian looking for hot tops - 22

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Reply to: pers-29234xxxx@craigslist.org  
Date: 2007-03-11, 5:38PM PDT

young asian looking to get fucked for the first time by a hot white top  
looking for someone who is patient and will go slow (hopefully you're not TOO big..)  
uncut is a definite turn on as well as chest hair and muscle

please be clean...(and no std, hiv)

send pics and stats if you're interested

me: 22yo, 6'1, 170lbs, slim/toned, 7uc



- Location: UBC
- it's NOT ok to contact this poster with services or other commercial interests

If GAMs occupy a sexual identity that is further feminised by age and identification as “boys,” then “young asian” enforces this image by adding that he wants to be the receptive partner during anal intercourse for the first time. Even though it is unlikely that he is an anal bottom virgin, “young asian” constructs himself as young, innocent, and ready to be ushered into sexual knowledge. He also builds up the gender and age differences through description: he describes himself as slim and he is smooth (shown in his photos), while his ideal partner has a large penis (his reference for “not TOO big” suggests that he does want it to at least be considered big by society’s standards), having chest hair, and muscular. All three of these factors describe someone who is overtly masculine, either by genetics (penis

size and chest hair) or by manly effort (musculature), and sexually fully adult and developed. Even his location, a university, suggests youthfulness. Adding to the image of the older white mentor to the young, virginal Oriental, “young asian” positions himself as a student, someone who is looking to learn and therefore slightly submissive to his partner. And while his location, a major university, could be real and the only way to describe his neighbourhood, it certainly contributes to the image and situation of a sexual student offering himself up to an older and more experienced white man. One thing that is interesting is “young asian’s” use of photographs: although he is interested in being a bottom, both of his photos show him from the front, and one even displays his penis. One interpretation of this could be that “young asian” is indeed new to being a bottom, so new that he does not even have photographs to support his desire yet. Or, he could be displaying photographs that present the male body in a more classic form, one that is more masculine than the photos of the anus that other ads display, which mimic nude pornographic photos of women in a receptive and waiting position.

The two remaining aspects of a potential partner’s identity that are important to “young asian” are his health status and his physical stature. Providing his stats and photographs, “young asian” sets up the expectation that serious responses should at least reciprocate with an equal amount of information. He also expects his partners to be “clean,” externally and internally. “young asian” clarifies his definition of “clean” by specifying that the individual should be STD *and* HIV/AIDS free. His distinction of the two items is interesting, as HIV/AIDS is often considered under the umbrella term of Sexually Transmitted Diseases (STDs). What this can indicate is that to “young asian,” these are in fact two different public health discourses, with HIV/AIDS being so emphasized that it requires separate mention, a move that is definitely pushed by public health’s response to the

epidemic, where much of the material on gay men and/or MSM is primarily on HIV/AIDS prevention, as opposed to overall sexual health.

### **cute asian NSA - m4m - 22**

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Reply to: pers-33314xxxx@craigslist.org  
Date: 2007-05-17, 6:03PM PDT

I'm a top with open mind, if you're under 30, hot bod and face +++ .... can host, send me your pic and you'll get mine

- Location: richmond
- it's NOT ok to contact this poster with services or other commercial interests

### **Muscular Asian Top - 32**

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Reply to: pers-33560xxxx@craigslist.org  
Date: 2007-05-21, 3:54PM PDT

GL muscular asian top looking for hot in shape bottoms. I'm 32, 5'9" 170 30w 7" uncut, tan and smooth, masc, neg. From mild to wild. Married welcome.

If interested, please send pic back and let me know what you get into.



- Location: Vancouver
- it's NOT ok to contact this poster with services or other commercial interests

There is an under-representation of Asian tops on craigslist. Of the few that I read, most are oral tops. "cute asian" does not specify what kind of top he is, but this reads more

similarly to other ads that do not refer to ethnicity, where it is often assumed that the posters are white. He does state that he has an “open mind,” allowing for interpretations of the term “top” to be explored during the encounter. His assertion of being a top then is not demanding of being a top during anal intercourse, but could be indicative of his personality and how he will likely behave in sexual situations. There is no need for him to define what will be the interests of the respondents, Following the craigslist format, he is seeking an encounter that is “NSA” (no strings attached), and therefore temporary, where the individuals are not required or expected to maintain contact afterwards. His emphasis only on physique also supports this, for the partner is only required for the sexual encounter and physical satisfaction. “young asian” also demonstrates knowledge of the personal ads system by requesting a photograph in exchange for his, maintaining a sense of control in his post, where he does not give up his anonymity first. While he provides few stats, aside from being Asian and 22 years old, his only descriptor is “cute,” which is in contrast to the “hot” partner he seeks. The term “cute” often has connotations of youthful attractiveness. He could be using the label of “cute” because it suits the boyish image, but to seek someone who is “hot” opens up the list of potential respondents, many of whom may not fit the slim, youthful image if they are more muscular in stature.

“Muscular Asian” also presents a similar ad, although his is almost even more devoid of ethnic identity than “cute asian’s” ad. “Muscular Asian’s” mention of his ethnicity is presented as simply a factor of identity, similar to his stating that he is a top. His language is gendered in a manner that is more masculine, corresponding to his identification as a top. He seeks a bottom, and although this implies his position during anal intercourse, he still leaves open the possibility for further discussion of how the encounter is to occur. Both “cute asian” and “Muscular Asian’s” willingness to entertain different activities differs from

“dom’s” assertion of what is to be expected during sex. “Muscular Asian” does, however, also use a photograph to demonstrate and prove his masculinity. Thinking about craigslist as a space where individuals are connected only temporarily and anonymously/discretely, “Muscular Asian” also welcomes married men, suggesting his ability to be discrete, and potentially the disconnectedness of the relationship – it can be only sex. Therefore, by posting this, “Muscular Asian” recognizes that the craigslist community is one where membership is based only on the time while in craigslist to the point of contact; once they leave the website, they do not need to think about being a part of the craigslist community if they do not post an ad themselves.

## **I think I am a bottom but actually I tried to be a top & I love it**

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Reply to: pers-30574xxxx@craigslist.org  
Date: 2007-04-03, 8:58PM PDT

Asian here - you must be experienced bottom. So I can work on you. You should love to use your ass muscle to make me feel tight.

I love that feeling!

- it's NOT ok to contact this poster with services or other commercial interests

## **looking for asian top - 40**

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Reply to: pers-33138xxxx@craigslist.org  
Date: 2007-05-15, 10:12AM PDT

i am 40wm in decent shape. 5'8 170lbs, non-hairy and shaved  
looking for a fit/slim non-hairy/shaved top asian man. small dick even better  
looking for someone clean, easy going and discreet.  
bonus if you're into rimming and 3some.  
contact me with some of your infos. your place or mine.  
cheers



- Location: new west
- it's NOT ok to contact this poster with services or other commercial interests

These two ads challenge the image of the submissive bottom image of GAM by describing a GAM top. “I think’s” title is interesting, for it uses the image of a virgin, but in the opposite direction: he is a novice top and would like to continue the experience. His title and his position as a GAM present an individual who contends with the stereotypical image of a gay man. His uncertain identification as a bottom implies that through his sexual encounters so far, he may not have had the choice to be anything but a bottom. Therefore,

having the opportunity to top is a “new” experience for him (we do not actually know his age) and he requires yet another experienced man to “teach” him or help him explore being a top. His description explains and justifies why as an Asian he is not in the stereotypical submissive role. Of course, this could also be simply a description precisely to attract particular men to him; men who would eroticise the situation of helping “I think” break free of the stereotypes. “I think” therefore remains an object of desire, for the authority is still placed on the potential respondent; even as a top, “I think” is unable to be assertive about his identity.

“looking” also continues the objectification of GAM despite flipping the distribution of sexual roles. The GAM that “looking” seeks still embodies a feminised identity: the GAM is to be fit/slim, not hairy, and must ideally have a small penis. These qualities still construct the boyish image of the not yet fully adult or masculine male. “looking’s” desire for what appears to be a stereotypical GAM could be to eroticise the subversion of the stereotype; in a way, “looking” is also responding to “I think’s” ad, where what is erotic and desirable is the reverse role play. Being topped by a GAM enhances the unequal power relationship in anal intercourse, for this action emasculates “looking,” representing the colonized overtaking the colonizer. Here, GAM is attempting to take on a position reserved for white men, but the subject of the act is “looking,” the white man who allows penetration by GAM. A GAM with a smaller penis therefore completes this role-play, for “looking” is not only emasculated, but also done by a penis that is considered less masculine and therefore less powerful.

## Married Asian visiting and looking to meet a Married Caucasian Man - 34

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Reply to: pers-30518xxxx@craigslist.org  
Date: 2007-04-03, 6:34AM PDT

I am 5 ft 9, 140lbs, athletic, smooth, married asian guy  
I am visiting for business and ree in the evenings  
I would like to meet a married Caucasian guy around my age or younger to hang out and maybe explore man-to-man actions. You must be caucasian, married, clean, discreet, in shape.  
I have very limited experience, and I enjoyed body contacts and getting sucked  
Maybe interested in explore man-to-man fucking (but not necessary) but NOT ready to be a bottom. So, I am top only, and safe sex only.

Please tell me a bit about yourself in your reply.



- Location: Vancouver - West
- it's NOT ok to contact this poster with services or other commercial interests

“Married Asian” differs from the previous ads in that he frames his inexperience with the idea of being married, rather than innocent and young. Although gay marriage is legal in Canada, “Married Asian” is most likely referring to being married to a woman, and his expectation from his respondents is the same. What “Married Asian” constructs as his version of GAM is one that is not comfortable with the idea of having sex with other men. His assumption then is that Caucasian men, being of North America, are more sexually open, willing to have multiple sexual partners despite being married, and more likely to enjoy receptive anal intercourse. His use of awkward terminology also contributes to the idea that

GAM is not knowledgeable of same-sex relations because of cultural mores. The scenario in the ad also adds to the need for anonymity and discretion, while reinforcing his status as inexperienced with sex with men; “Married Asian’s” visiting town implies that this is his opportunity to explore something new with someone, his hesitation towards bottoming, and his emphasis on “safe sex” still constructs a GAM who is unworldly and unknowledgeable about sex. Therefore, even though he is only willing to be a top, his lack of know-how lessens his masculinity. By expecting a *married* Caucasian male, “Married Asian” attempts to level this playing field by assuming that a married man will need to be discreet and therefore may also have limited experience.

## **Role-playing, Reality, and Safety**

I suggest in many of the ads that individuals are negotiating anal intercourse in a manner that constructs a sexual encounter where there is an unequal relationship between the individuals. Few works address the North American, gay cultural context that contributes to how gay men think about anal intercourse. In his volume of 23 men describing their thoughts on anal intercourse, Steven Underwood (2003) centres the debate on selecting roles/labels (top, bottom, or versatile) on a notion of trust and the power to possess or take this trust from another person. While his presentation of open-ended interviews challenges the notion that anal intercourse always contains an unequal balance of power between the two individuals and that equality can only be achieved if in a single sexual session both individuals must take turns in each role, necessitating rationalization from those who only partake in one role (top or bottom) for their choice and sexual preferences.

The awareness of HIV/AIDS is also built into Underwood’s interviews. About half of the pieces purposely mention opinions about barebacking, or condomless anal intercourse

(Underwood, 2003, p. 15-16). The issue of trust comes up again, but interestingly, the conversation often focuses on the desirability of such an act. The mention of barebacking provokes questions of political correctness, and the mental link between “rational” public health knowledge and desirable sexual practices (p. 15). What the individuals do not question is the role played by the public health community during barebacking, making the power dynamics more complicated; the individuals having sex are in a relationship not only with one another, but also with the public health community and the knowledge produced by it—this contributes to labelling barebacking as both deviant and erotically desirable.

One glaring omission in Underwood’s book (2003) is the mention of ethnicity. Only two individuals are visibly of colour: Lito from El Salvador (p. 55) and Danny with “chocolate skin” (p. 65). Lito discusses the role of ethnicity, but is the only one to engage in this topic. His discussion is also limited, only stating that Latino men feminize him through language, assuming that all homosexuals are feminine (p. 58). He also invites individuals to think about desire and lust based on ethnicity (p. 60). The lack of discussion about ethnicity in Underwood’s book could loosely support the notion that only those who are marked by ethnicity (assuming that Caucasian/European is the norm) or those who specifically seek out particular ethnic individuals are required to think about the impacts of culture.

Thinking about constructions of GAM as a form of identity category, GAM exists in contrast to a “normal” (read: Caucasian) body. Reading craigslist personal ads that feature GAMs, one wonders if GAM can possibly exist outside of a world of comparison. Of the ads featured, only one (“cute asian”) does not easily fit into a model of a colonial-styled power relationship between GAM and his potential partner. I have also not featured any ads where a GAM seeks another GAM – they are also under-represented ads. If GAMs are considered as “other” in the greater North American public, even intra-ethnic encounters

(GAM with GAM) still engage with comparisons to white men, for the meanings of the GAM label contribute to understanding how one interacts with other people in general first, and then in a sexual encounter. Thus, in a GAM/GAM encounter, the men do not compare themselves with each other, but relate as individuals who share in an “other” category.

Ads seeking inter-ethnic relationships feature authors who are more conscious of the colonial relationship and stereotype. Instead of a simple countering or acceptance of such relationships however, we see the use of such imagery to create a scenario that would be attractive and therefore attract responses. These posts, and the subversion of a colonial-styled power relationship between GAM and the white man, differ from negotiating anal intercourse in the context of a romantic relationship. While it is possible for GAM to play into stereotypes to gain a partner for benefits outside of sex, such as economic security or social status (Ho & Tsang, 2000; Kong, 2002; Kong 2004), craigslist ads can be read outside of the context of heteronormative romantic relationships. Therefore, any subversion that occurs may relate solely to the level of erotic desire derived from the role-play. We must question, however, whether or not these scenarios are role-plays at all. This is not to support the idea that all inter-ethnic relationships are shaped by colonial relationships, but to suggest that they engage with colonial images as a means of understanding the power dynamics in anal intercourse. If thinking about anal intercourse requires that individuals rationalize their actions with a discourse of power, perhaps the use of a colonial-style relationship is similar to a gendered discussion of power (i.e. topping as a form of emasculating the partner). Therefore, by marking himself as ethnically “other,” GAM has access to an additional set of images to create an erotic scenario that plays with the power dynamic. This may not be done consciously; GAMs may understand their own identities in this sexual framework. Even if a GAM does not partake in this style of analysis regarding his identity, it is possible that upon

entering the craigslist world, he understands how GAMs are viewed there and therefore presents himself accordingly as necessary for a successful encounter.

Another consideration of the presented ads is the lack of mention of HIV/AIDS or sexual health. While a few ads do mention this up front, most do not. Authors such as Davidson (1991) mark the mention of safer sex or codes for safer sex as a method of gauging the gay community's engagement with the HIV/AIDS epidemic and whether or not panic and caution become a priority. Davidson's piece, however, was written before 1996, the year of the "Protease Moment," (Rofes, 1998, p. 29) when protease inhibitors were introduced at the AIDS conference in Vancouver. Since that moment, notions of safer sex have changed, and the behaviours along with it. In his book, *Dry Bones Breathe: Gay Men Creating Post-AIDS Identities and Cultures* (1998), Eric Rofes candidly discusses his understandings of anal intercourse, discussing his sexual encounters involving anal intercourse after this moment, not because the act was suddenly completely safe, but because it no longer seemed "reasonable" to avoid anal intercourse (p. 300). Again, thinking of the eroticisation of "deviant" acts and power dynamics, Rofes describes his use of barebacking language during sex, but without actually engaging in anal intercourse: while rubbing his penis between the buttocks of his partner and without penetration, he and his partner use language<sup>7</sup> suggesting penetration and fluid exchange to achieve an erotic climax (p. 302-303). Here we see the merging of two discourses: the deviant and frowned upon barebacking language, and a safer sex practice of non-insertive intercourse. Is this subversive, or a clever

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<sup>7</sup> In the anecdote, Rofes (1998) also notes that he and his partner are sero-discordant, where one partner is HIV-positive and the other is negative (p. 302). During the encounter, Rofes (1998) states (as if he were actually penetrating his partner), "I'm fuckin' you now, boy, fuckin' you hard and dirty... And nothing's gonna make me stop till I shoot my sperm deep into you, right up your tight little butt." His partner, participating in the activity responds, "Yeah, daddy, fuck your boy. Fuck me hard. I want to feel that sperm in me, Sir. Fuck me hard!" (Rofes, 1998, p. 303)

means of creating an erotic scenario that reflect real desires that are rooted in behaviours that enact an unequal and “unsafe” relationship?

The post-AIDS identities and cultures that Rofes describes are, as is Underwood’s book (2003), void of explicit ethnic connotations, except an acknowledgement that different ethnicities require different strategies for HIV/AIDS prevention (read: “other” groups of people) (Rofes, 1998, p. 243-246). Rofes (1998) does mention in passing his sudden attraction to Asian men in 1993, which marked an expansion of categories of men with whom he was willing to have sexual relations (p. 299). His mention of this was to suggest that his desires changed over time and that his sexual practices are linked to them. In eroticising anal intercourse involving GAM, in view of how Rofes manages eroticism, safer practices, and power dynamics, we can think about the ethnic body (the result of an inter-ethnic encounter) as an unsafe body: GAM embodies a dynamic that is philosophically unsafe, where enacting a particular form of relationship invokes what would be considered an offensive act, but the eroticism associated with it is still actively utilized, contested, and defended. While anal intercourse creates a dialogue of safety between men because of the threat of HIV/AIDS, for GAM, especially if his partner is not Asian, it also forces both partners to think about if and how identity is a component of desire.

## **So Who is GAM?**

In reading craigslist ads as I have here, I am not attempting to further force GAM into smaller categories. While it is tempting to imagine a single framework from which to reconsider GAM in literature, such a project would repeat the generalizations that lead to the stereotypes already contended with by GAM. I have also targeted ads that specifically deal with inter-ethnic relationships, where GAM must conceive of himself in relation to a norm,

or another individual's perception of normal identities in North America. Therefore, posting on craigslist cannot be an act that is innocent of engaging with post-colonial power dynamics. What I am presenting here, however, is that scholarly research continues to create models for these interactions, models that cannot address the complexity involved in searching for anal intercourse. It is important to consider GAM as an active agent in his construction; he has the ability to engage with stereotypical imaging intentionally, or perhaps, sometimes unintentionally. For the GAM who falls into expected roles, the question to ask is not whether he is aware of his living up to stereotypes; rather, perhaps the question should be whether or not he has access to a language to describe his desires in a manner that is meaningful to those expected to interpret his ads.

craigslist provides an interesting location for thinking about the relationship between desire and identity. If one reads the ads thinking that they represent their authors, then we can think about doing a quantitative study to interrogate popular understandings of GAM identity during the negotiation of anal intercourse. Another method of reading the ads, however, is to consider the role of fantasy and eroticism as a means of constructing an attractive scenario that will gather responses. This disrupts the notion that culture and its meanings can be predictable in any manner. Instead, we see the role of identity categories that interact with one another *along with* the individuals who use them to navigate through the world. By considering categories such as sexual identity and ethnicity as categories for individuals to engage with, GAM becomes a figure that changes constantly, for individuals actively construct, deconstruct, and utilize different aspects of their identity, depending on the situation. Essential features of GAM brought forth by public health or North American colonial stereotypes can be present, but these are also part of GAM identity, and therefore GAMs may adopt them to live up to their role in a multi-ethnic society. Using craigslist also

supports this notion of a constantly changing and shifting identity of GAM, for its form of community is one that is based on temporary participation and membership. Therefore, the GAM accessing craigslist is one that continually rethinks his identity, either through the option of rewriting his ad each time and changing it, or by reading and interpreting ads seeking GAMs and thinking about whether or not he fits or can make himself fit for that particular encounter. The construction of GAM's identity then is like the craigslist personal ad in which he finds himself: temporary, misunderstood, unapologetic, inconsistent, meaningful, and just a starting point.

## Epilogue: GAM-I-am and Beyond the Ad

### Asian - Caucasian group Thurs [date] DT Hotel 8 PM - m4mm - 45

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Reply to: pers-334122468@craigslist.org

Date: [year]-[month]-[day], 8:58AM PDT

\*\*\*\*CHANGE TO THE ORGY BELOW\*\*\*\* A wrinkle! Here is the problem, between Squirt and Craig's list I have had over 25 hot guys respond that they definitely want in on some hot group Asian/White sex. Outstanding! Problem is I can't get 25 hot naked moaning dudes in my hotel room without getting kicked out. Looking for one of two things. Someone with a central apartment big enough to hold a dozen (gotta allow for no shows) guys to fuck around in. Or, a consensus that we move the orgy to the Sauna just down the street from my hotel M2M 1212 Granville according to the website. I will rent a double room, post a sign on the door and everyone can pile in and get the same group grope thing happening. Let me know what you prefer. Also I am alone on Wed afternoon and evening after checking in, wouldn't mind some one on one that night. Later! [Poster's Name] \*\*\*\*ORIGINAL POST\*\*\*\* Looking for a few good men. Seeking a few hot Asian men to meet up with a small group of appreciative admirers. Have done this twice before with stellar results, have about 4 buddies cumming, mix of tops and bottoms, some versatile like me! And we need a few Asian guys (age, size unimportant) who like the attention of Caucasian (mostly mid thirties to mid forties) men. Top or bottom, you will be satisfied and then some. It is safe and sane, no BB, no hard drugs, though a j and poppers usually make an appearance. Cum and go as you pleez. Email me on here and will reply with details about attendees, location and exact time. Here is a safe and sensible way to try group sex. The 2 times before, everyone has been discreet, encouraging, accepting of limits and all have sworn they had the BEST time! \*\*\*\*PS - need a volunteer to take digital pics of willing participants, be the official photographer of the evening. Pics shared with those who wish, face shots deleted upon request.

- Location: Downtown Vancouver
- it's ok to contact this poster with services or other commercial interests

I responded to this ad, not sure of what to expect and curious to see what would happen. I stated that I am Asian, gave my stats (even though the post stated that they were not important), and also stated that I am versatile, where my sexual role depended on the scenario and partner presented to me. The poster responded to my email, giving me the whereabouts of the orgy, and remaining vague about who would be present, stating that there were several responses, but that there were always people who did not show up. He was also confident that there would be a mix of Asians and white men.

Clearly there was interest in the inter-ethnic factor, if the amendment was true. I assumed that the amendment was true, for the orgy was actually split into two evenings (Wednesday *and* Thursday). I opted for the first night, and on the Wednesday evening, I made my way to the hotel. I was running a bit late and arrived last. There were eight men present, including myself – three of us Asian and the others representing a mixture of white (Caucasian/European). By appearance, I was the youngest in the room, and there was a range of body-types present. The evening began with introductions (I used a pseudonym), and from that point on, the only conversations were either sex related (the occasional dirty talk) or asking for condoms and/or lubricant.

The room was dim, lit only by the bathroom light through the cracked-open door, and although there was little description of expectations in the advertisement, all negotiations seemed to happen bodily: through touch, prodding, and guidance by hands. Being a group sex scenario, there were clusters of men, but these always involved an Asian man, meaning that there were never more than three groups, until later, when one Asian man left and there were consistently two groups. There was no intra-ethnic sex throughout the evening, either white with white or Asian with Asian. Looking around, I also noticed that of the three Asian men, I was the only one who bottomed at any point of the evening, and even then, I spent more time topping than bottoming during anal intercourse.

After two hours, the room cleared and I found myself on the street wondering about what had just happened. Although the images of stereotypes were not at all mentioned in either the ad or during the evening, could it be argued that they were not present? Part of Gawthrop's (2005) argument for innocent desire is that in reality, the moment can be read and felt as simply a series of erotic interactions (p. 13). The orgy also demonstrates that there are multiple interpretations of desire, and that an identity politics model of the subservient

GAM is not the only one available. But could the availability of options be the only reason that any use of colonial imagery was not spoken, supporting the idea that colonialism's power is reduced by the building and recognizing of a large and diverse community?

Although definitely through a bit of confusion, I continue to argue that GAM is a product of colonial relationships and stereotypes. The orgy I attended occurred because there was interest in inter-ethnic sexual relations, where what is desired are the visible difference in bodies and what these differences represented. Therefore, regardless of how the stereotypical identities are placed, be they in conventional fashion or subverted, it means that GAM is constantly constructed with such images. The lack of communicating these images between the participants does not equate a lack of their impacts. The ad negotiates the possibility of understanding how the participants were to imagine one another. Therefore, the ad for the orgy did not need to specify GAM's identity, nor does it free GAM's identity from expectations. Providing the possibility for multiple scenarios only provides freedom for how individuals use GAM's identity in a manner that is erotic, either through expressing stereotypical relations or through subverted ones. The orgy does not take away GAM's colonial history for it still expects inter-ethnic sex, and inter-ethnic relations would be pointless unless there was meaning attached to the different ethnicities, making the encounter desirable.

Finally, I continue to wonder who I was on that day. Did I set out to prove something? I do not believe that desire is innocent—as long as I can be associated with the label of GAM, I am marked. I am free to differ from society's definition of GAM, but even this difference is only important for it is in relation to GAM's identity (e.g. comments like “you're tall for an Asian”). It would also be completely untrue if I suggest that I maintain the integrity of my identity during each encounter. Therefore, for GAMs, or for me, negotiating

anal intercourse is always unsafe: by expressing knowledge of one's identity, one unlocks the legacy of a colonial violence. This colonial violence is a hierarchical power relationship that can be oppressive, but also erotic. Claiming amnesia to the history and only acknowledging the erotic nature continues the violence, silence, and insistence that colonialism and Orientalism have little or no effect on our social organisation. Even if the assertion of power is part of a fantasy, in those moments, I would embody the body of the "other" and acknowledge the challenge of being GAM in North America. Also, in the selection of partners, if a white gay man approaches me, or another GAM, what attributes form his desire? Is our opportunity for sex with white men, particularly a casual encounter advertised through craigslist, limited to those who fetishize Asian men (aka rice queens such as Gawthrop)? If our only option were to engage with a fetish based on a fantasy, then would not all inter-ethnic sexual encounters be a form of fantastical role-play?

If online personal ads exist between the online and offline worlds and reflect both as reality, then identity role-play during sex, particularly anal intercourse, can be thought of in a similar way: such activities can play out fantasies, but these fantasies are rooted in realities, and often the realities of the players involved. As for me, if I feel like playing, I will play knowledgeably. If the roles suggested upset me, then I will simply reach for my clothes, end the negotiations, and leave them for the next GAM.

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**Remembering Spatially:  
Refocussing the History  
of Vancouver's Gay Community**

## Introduction: Thinking about Vancouver's Gay History

Former city planner and Davie Village Business Improvement Association<sup>8</sup> (DVBIA) consultant Alan Herbert once called the Davie Village in Vancouver the “capital” of gay Vancouver<sup>9</sup>; whether they reside there or not, “[e]very single gay individual in the Lower Mainland has a strong stake in the Davie Village” (Perelle, 2004a, para. 6). So what makes “Davie Village” a specific location, a distinct neighbourhood, or a site of importance to this community? Herbert’s comment not only calls for the gay community to care about Davie Village, but also implicitly demands recognition of the historical journey taken by the gay community that gives the neighbourhood status as “capital” of gay Vancouver. This paper will examine the formation of Vancouver’s gay community, noting particularly its visible concentration along and claim to Davie Street in Vancouver’s West End. In particular, this paper challenges the synonymous relationship between gay liberation and local gay community histories in North America, for which the Stonewall Riots in New York symbolically mark the birthplace of a public gay community. Unlike other approaches to gay history, which focus on activists and advocacy organizations, this paper will focus on the spaces and relationships formed by gay men<sup>10</sup> that inadvertently construct or underlie Vancouver’s gay community. Thus, by considering Vancouver’s gay community outside of

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<sup>8</sup> The Davie Village Business Improvement Association was formed in 1999. In 2007, the city of Vancouver approved for the DVBIA to expand its borders. Its area now includes “Davie Village,” the businesses on Denman Street (from Davie Street to Robson Street), and the businesses on Robson Street (from Denman Street to Jervis Street, the border of the Robson Street Business Improvement Association).

<sup>9</sup> Davie Village is a four block area of Davie Street, between Burrard Street and Jervis Street, the name “Davie Village” was developed by the Davie Village Business Improvement Association, representing a cluster of businesses, many of which are either gay-owned or gay-friendly.

<sup>10</sup> This paper will focus on the formation of Vancouver’s gay *male* community, the one associated most closely with Davie Village. Anne-Marie Bouthillette (1995) argues that in Vancouver, the historical trajectories, as well as geographic dispersion, of gay men and lesbians are very different.

the popular discourse of gay liberation, its history, and perhaps its identity, becomes less certain.

Popular understandings of the history of Vancouver's gay community are published in local media almost annually, especially during celebrations marking gay history in general—commemoration of the New York Stonewall Riots of 1969 (June 27 and celebrated during the last week of June), and during Vancouver's Pride Week (the first week of August)<sup>11</sup>. Since 2004, the Vancouver Courier and the Xtra West have published articles about the history of Vancouver's gay community: in 2004, the Xtra West reflected on the importance of Stonewall as a symbol of gay liberation across North America, including Vancouver, in preparation for Vancouver's first Stonewall festival (Tuscano, 2004); and in 2006, each publication produced history articles in preparation of Vancouver's Pride Week (Perelle, 2006; Thomas, 2006).

Hywel Tuscano's 2004 article, "Stonewall festival offers education, celebration and reflection," in Vancouver's Xtra West considers the formation of Vancouver's gay community through human rights milestones. Anticipating Vancouver's first Stonewall festival, Tuscano's article links current and younger activists to those of the past, contemplating "stories often lost to younger generations who are unaware of how people fought for their rights" (para. 5). The article also follows the issue's theme of "Passing the Torch," implying that the gay movement is now being carried by new individuals, and that by remembering Stonewall, a new generation of activists may continue the work stemming

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<sup>11</sup> The Stonewall Riots are commemorated across North America as the defining moment for the gay community. Pride Parades across North America support this: most Pride Parades (e.g. New York, Toronto, Seattle) occur during the week of June 28, the anniversary of the first day of rioting. While Vancouver's Pride celebrations do not occur on this week, there is still notable mention of the Stonewall Riots, and the later-timed Pride Parade functions in a similar commemorative manner (Perelle, 2006; Rothon, 2004; Thomas, 2006). San Francisco's Pride Parade also takes place during the week of June 28, but identified itself as an independent celebration, not mentioning Stonewall in its materials until 20 years later (Stover, 2007)

from the riots. Concluding that the purposes of the Stonewall festivities are for “education, celebration, and reflection,” Tuscano introduces two main points: state freedoms for gay individuals in Vancouver, and the progress of the Pride Parade (para. 38). Through reflections from older individuals who lived through the growth of Vancouver’s gay community and without actually mentioning specific struggles or events, Tuscano (2004) establishes that the community’s formation depended on identity-based activism marked by the visible event of the Stonewall Riots.

Sandra Thomas’ 2006 Pride Parade lead-up article in the Vancouver Courier (not an exclusively gay publication) recounts the establishment of Vancouver’s gay community through the development of its Pride Parade. While the parade is currently a well-supported event, involving politicians and businesses, and drawing thousands of spectators and participants, Thomas characterizes the parade as a “celebration hard won by activists who started fighting for gay rights in Vancouver more than three decades ago” (para. 4). Tracking down early organizers, Thomas uses their voices to link the development of the Pride Parade with the politics of the late 1970s (the first Pride Parade in Vancouver occurred in 1978), or rather, the story of the parade is the story of gay liberation writ small. Her account of the parade’s formation rests on an assumption about gay community formation, e.g. that both the community and the parade emerged in public struggle with the state (gaining rights/working out city policies and permits) which culminated in the birth of formal organizations (gay rights groups/a standing committee to plan and advocate for the event). As in Tuscano’s article, Thomas also constructs an event/movement divided into generations of individuals involved in its planning. With the passing of each generation, the Pride Parade therefore also grows from political struggle to community celebration, as

marked by the themes of each Pride Parade, with 2006's theme being a less formally political theme of "Pride and Joy" (Thomas, 2006, para. 60).

Robin Perelle's "Gay footsteps through time" in the Xtra West (Vancouver's primary exclusively gay newspaper) also considers the Pride Parade as a symbol of Vancouver's own gay liberation (Perelle, 2006). While the other two articles place Vancouver's gay community in relation to a larger movement (human rights and gay liberation), Perelle's presentation of historical gay sites firmly locates the community's history in the downtown area, and eventually towards Davie Street. Embracing historical geography, Perelle creates with Vancouver gay activist Don Hann<sup>12</sup> a walking tour of gay landmarks. Highlighting 24 locations, Perelle and Hann think about history in terms of social hangouts for gay people (and mostly men), each of them as sites that resisted society's police enforced heteronormative state. Of the 24 locations, 20 are businesses – namely bars, clubs, and bathhouses catering to gay men. By calling them the "birthplaces" of Vancouver's gay community (para. 35), Perelle signify locations that identify a gay subculture as sites of struggle for gay rights and visibility, each of which contributes to the gay-friendly Vancouver that younger gay individuals enjoy today. Perelle's article situates the importance the Downtown area for the gay community, and advocates for continued patronage of current gay-affiliated businesses, lest they "disappear" like some of the walking tour sites (para. 36).

While each of these articles portrays the gay community as one developed through human rights struggle, there is an underlying tension in each about what this really means in the greater North American context. It is clear that the authors maintain the importance of the Stonewall Riots as the birthplace of gay liberation and a visible North American gay

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<sup>12</sup> Don Hann was a member of the Gay Alliance Towards Equality (GATE), Vancouver's left-winged gay liberation organization in the 1970s.

community – at least symbolically. In their research, however, and although these points are never raised strongly enough for the authors to actually contest the use of Stonewall, each author finds a member from Vancouver’s gay community that describes their activism as occurring without the influence of Stonewall.

Thinking about landmark moments for gay rights in Vancouver, Tuscano identifies that in Canada, gay sex was decriminalized in May 1969, preceding the Stonewall Riots, and therefore making the “start date” of gay liberation, or the fight for human rights for gay individuals, earlier in Canada (Tuscano, 2004, para. 16-17). These rights won through the courts, however, are not considered as a gay liberation milestone, for they mark a peaceful achievement, rather than one that is obtained through action and confrontation (para. 20). A public act, such as the Stonewall Riots, forces the public to rethink their position on the politics of identity. Tuscano’s support of an affective response is well expressed through a quote by Ron Dutton, a Vancouver gay history enthusiast: “Rights can be taken away. The real challenge is we’ve (the gay community) got to change people’s hearts. That will make [the gay community] safe” (para. 20). In Thomas’ article (2006), Gary Penny refers to Stonewall, but only to reflect that Vancouver’s gay community was independently experiencing similar changes: “We would have marched without Stonewall, ... That first parade [in 1978] was more of a protest” (para. 16). Similarly, Perelle’s (2006) focus on geographical locations also drives back the history of the gay community earlier than 1969, implying that by the 1970s, the unrest and emergence of the gay community in the bars and clubs was out of their own frustrations and not necessarily inspired directly from Stonewall.

Each of these articles contests the use of Stonewall as a milestone for Vancouver’s gay history, but none let go of its legacy. They do, however, publicly establish a form of Vancouver’s gay history. Although two focus on particular events (protests, parades, and

celebrations) and the other on physical landmarks, each article considers gay identities as political and geographical ones; the identities emerging are centred on the political spaces they inhabit rather than the embodied and enacted identities (medical and psychological models) through which homosexuality was formerly understood. The history of homosexuality is read through a notion of community, where the identity is understood in the context of political movements. The selection of the Stonewall Riots and Pride week provide ideal symbolic events through which the gay community can frame its history, providing annual moments in time for reflection on the gay community. These historical narratives present a gay community as one that experienced a form of societal emancipation, a linear process that marked *progress*, implying that the current acts of remembering, reflection, and celebration indicate *success* after times of struggle and resistance. Gay identity then, is marked by marginality, a state that requires overcoming and one that Vancouver's gay community is close to shedding, even though each celebration serves as a reminder for the need of eternal vigilance, as if marginality is a politically slippery slope away. While a historical, and linear, perspective is valuable, can we imagine an expansion of the liberation narrative? Can we think about the history of a gay community starting from a location besides an oppressed or "other" sexual identity? In doing gay history, what are the moments that we need or want to remember?

Trying to fit Vancouver's gay history into a discourse of gay liberation where Stonewall features as a symbolic starting point creates tension, for this action ignores Vancouver's particular location, its physical, political, and social geography. Each of the articles constructs sexual identities that are strongly linked to the geographies in which they are situated. Tuscano, Thomas, and Perelle's informants describe their activism in a manner that Vancouver's gay community fits into a larger gay liberation framework, but they also

suggest that integral to the development of a gay community are region-specific factors. Therefore, it is not enough to think about gay identity and community as constructed through historical events; it is necessary to think about the role of specific geographical locations on the formation/construction of identity and community.

## **Identity, History, and Geography: Intersecting Components**

The role of geographical locations in constructing the history of gay identities provides the cultural contexts for thinking about identity and community formation. Geographical locations and times in history themselves rationalize the public emergence of gay identities over time. The presence of non-heteronormative (e.g. gay) identities is justified by the different cultural values of a particular time and foreign place (e.g. Ancient Greece), or by an association with deviant values (e.g. San Francisco, city of heathens). Tracking the presence of businesses, buildings, and gathering spaces for gay men demonstrates the presence and visibility of gay men in society. Businesses provide particular validation, for they not only serve as social spaces, but are also formal, state-governed commercial spaces recognized by general society. Clusters of such locations can also suggest an attribution by the public of an identity to a neighbourhood based on its inhabitants.

Thinking about cities in terms of specific landmarks also serves to symbolize and identify a social movement. Particular locations may already mark the presence of a gay community, but after they become gay-identified landmarks, these locations serve as loci for the gay community, with gay people visibly gravitating towards them because of their significance. For the gay community in North America, two such examples are the Stonewall Inn and the Castro Street neighbourhood in San Francisco. While both places can be read as

examples of the presence of gay men in public, both the riot at the Stonewall Inn in 1969 and the riots that occurred following the murder of Harvey Milk in 1978 act as footprints of a social movement. They represent not only people, but of a cultural climate and an emotional response to power relations as expressed through oppression, violence, and trauma.

Incorporating geographical locations in the telling of gay histories in these ways provides the cultural contexts necessary to understand the process of community formation. In refocussing the history of Vancouver's gay community such that gay liberation discourse is a component, but not the primary framework, I will treat geographical locations as a material part of the gay community, not just as a symbolic representation of it. Instead of thinking about communities as clusters of individuals in a particular city or neighbourhood of buildings over time, I will start from a different space: the streets. Ideologically universally accessible, the streets physically and philosophically supply public space. Businesses and residences (semi-public or private spaces) connect through the streets, and it is in the streets that individuals may encounter one another, therefore necessitating the acknowledgement and labelling of dissimilar groups. Therefore, geography is not simply the locations where communities may situate themselves – it is not a void to be filled. Instead, it is the active agent in the construction of communities. Public spaces force individuals and groups to interact (even if the interaction is one of avoidance), while private spaces, where individuals are included or excluded, inform society of social membership rules. Cultural meanings imposed onto locations also create the tensions that inspire questioning categories of space (e.g. public versus private) and the conflicts that lead to definitions of normative and marginal groups, and their members.

Thinking about the formation of gay communities as a series of interactions between all individuals in a particular place, rather than a particular community's direct actions within a particular place, allows for a more complicated conception of the gay community – one where political and social alliances are not uniform, consistent, or predictable. With the example of Vancouver's gay community, I will first analyze the methods of configuring the land – changes in the real estate market and building regulations – allowing for human settlement and residence. I supplement this analysis by mapping out how gay men have historically gravitated residentially and commercially to Davie Street, and suggest that the visible concentration of gay men results from interactions between state governance of the West End's geography and gay men. To place the community in a temporal context, where history affects future understandings of what is possible, this paper will examine the year 1981, when a visible gay community formed key relationships with other groups. While the events of this year can be read as forms of activism and follow the political rhetoric of liberation and a public validation of a sexual identity, this examination will focus on how the formation of the relationships were not exclusively acts of liberation or events of a subculture. The events of 1981 provided the frameworks necessary for both aspects of the gay community (liberation activists and de-politicized subculture members) to succeed and establish Vancouver as a gay-friendly city.

## **Doing Gay History – Gay as Identity, as Community, and as Social Movement**

The articles about Vancouver's gay history support the use of Stonewall and Pride as markers of success for the gay community, but also suggest that although these are conventionally accepted symbols, they do not always reflect the experiences of gay Vancouverites. Despite these contestations, Vancouver's gay activists demonstrate an

understanding of an identity politics metanarrative of gay liberation and subculture emergence – the activists remember their community’s history as rooted in struggle, with its current state of freedom in society as an indicator of their success. Because this underlying assumption frames local versions of history, it is important to reflect on previous histories of gay identities and communities. In studies of gay community formation, or making visible what was once marginal and hidden, we can think about historical projects addressing three issues regarding the category of gay: gay as a form of identity, as a community, and as a social movement rooted in activism and political action.

While the Stonewall Riots remain a pivotal moment in gay popular memory and for a “gay” community identity, there is a considerable body of academic work that questions the coherence of the contemporary category of “gay”—both in the present, but especially over time. These critical inquiries do not need to invalidate the importance of the riots as an emotional touchstone; indeed, they may enable us to see Stonewall against a more complex backdrop. What each work presents is an examination of what the category of “gay” signifies over time (i.e. as a form of identity, a particular community, or a social movement).

The argument over whether or not identity categories (and the communities formed around them) are essential or constructed is important politically. What is frustrating is attempting to merge the two notions together – realizing that neither essential categories nor constructed categories can exist without understanding the other (Fuss, 1989, p. 6). Joan Scott (1993) argues that identity-based histories are completely political, with past experiences inseparable from contemporary identity categories. What is visible to the researcher is a sense that difference exists, that individuals can mark themselves as part of a distinct social group (p. 401). These social groups, however, are time specific and do not necessarily share the same characteristics or experiences as their contemporary counterparts

(p. 410). Therefore, acknowledging that *constructed identity categories* do not correspond with one another over time, historical examination illuminates *essential relationships* in society that produce myriad identities, or at least locate individuals bearing aspects of identity categories that are marginalized today.

Thinking about “gay” as homosexuality—a sexual identity, David Halperin (1990) argues that the boundaries used today to define sexual identities cannot be applied to societies in the past, meaning that sexual identities themselves have no history. His reading of Ancient Greek forms of love and sexual expressions call for a different structure of power in relationships, where what is visible and normative are not what we would expect today. Although Halperin resists labelling identities as the same over time, his project is still to concentrate on identifying aspects of identity within their cultural contexts. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick (1990) contests Halperin’s reading, claiming that we cannot simply assume that models are introduced and disappear or at most, leave traces (p. 46). Sedgwick’s project looks to denaturalizing the present, to interrogate the construction of sexual identity and destabilize our contemporary understandings (Sedgwick, 1990). Anne Fausto-Sterling (2000) also takes on this debate, suggesting that individuals with particular behavioural characteristics (namely sexual desire, or gender presentation) were visible in history, individuals who today would be labelled as homosexuals (p. 13). Fausto-Sterling argues that there can be aspects of identity that are essential, or that exist over time, but the visibility of these characteristics depends on the given social and cultural climate (p. 12). The cultural meanings attributed to these characteristics, resulting in the naming of identity categories are therefore what is time specific. What emerges is the cultural visibility of identity traits and not a formerly suppressed identity; society creates new meanings to categories (p. 13).

While Sedgwick acknowledges that identities over time are not congruent, she does suggest that there are means of understanding forces, such as the metaphorical closet, that construct particular identities over time (Sedgwick, 1990). Therefore, there are still projects where historical examination of identity categories furthers not an understanding of the identities themselves, but of the social, physical, and political forces that demand their construction. Transgendered identity in official academic theory is a relatively new space/category of identity. Calling for political recognition of this space, Leslie Feinberg (1992) wrote a pamphlet challenging notions of gender identity as read over time. Invoking figures such as Joan of Arc, Feinberg demonstrates that transgendered individuals, even before the category was given a term, historically have been challenged and pushed into the margins of society (p. 212-215). Her use of history does not construct a linear narrative of a group of individuals, but demonstrates that transgendered identities exist outside of societal norms and that this trend continues today. History, therefore, does not connect similar individuals, but questions the silencing of a new discussion or perspective on gender identity. Historical examination in this mode, while frankly lacking in academic rigour, might seem ideal in its theoretical aspirations and political intentions, but we do have a conventionally accepted gay community today; challenges to gay identity require a more complicated form of analysis.

Contesting that before Stonewall men who were intimate with other men were isolated because North American society was generally anti-gay, George Chauncey's *Gay New York: Gender, Urban Culture, and the Making of the Gay Male World, 1890-1940* (1994), posits that by using a different system of reading identity, it is evident that gay *community* was definitely present and not completely underground. Following a framework established by Jonathan Katz and Joan Nestle, where the organization of sexual identities is based on gendered

identities rather than biological sex, Chauncey considers a gay community not dependent on human rights rhetoric for a public presence in society (p. 9, 15). His celebration of a pre-Stonewall gay community is such that he argues that the use of biological sex to define sexual identities creates a more restrictive culture, one that then necessitates a more confrontational form of resistance (p. 358). Thinking about “gay” as designating a particular community broadens the forms of resistance that can occur to counter what is today heteronormative society. Although Chauncey has been criticized for his application of resistance to the men in his work (Hood, 1998, p. 785), his insistence that gay men formed a community allows identity to be read out of a discourse of identity politics and human rights. Chauncey pushes the gay identity outside of intimate relationships, and into a cohesive group that suddenly occupies space en masse, and in neighbourhood-based concentrations (Chauncey, 1994). Here, I consider Chauncey’s work as establishing a gay subculture, where a community flourishes through resistance that is not readily interpreted as political, or, that exists outside of partisan politics.

Reading the gay community through human rights activism, John D’Emilio’s *Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities: The Making of a Homosexual Minority in the United States, 1940-1970* (1983), is often celebrated as the first historical work on North America’s gay community. D’Emilio repositions activist politics, claiming that the foundations for post-Stonewall activism were laid by homophile movements that were later deemed not radical enough in their politics (p. 240). D’Emilio maintains, however, that the formation of the gay community depends on its efforts to enter a political public space, and that the entrance into public space is a goal that can be attained by following a linear model of progress—from struggle to success (p. 245). To do this, D’Emilio imagines the gay community as collectively marginalized in a similar manner as “other” minorities found in North America. While he

does not speak it explicitly, he makes strong reference to racial minorities, especially when referring to the internalized self-hatred experienced by members of minority communities. This perspective is also drawn largely from his usage of Marxist analysis, understanding the gay community as a “class,” and therefore the cohesiveness and emergence of a gay community is compared to that of class consciousness (p. 33). While there are definitely moments where the gay community is able to embody such a concept, the notion of its emergence as a form of class consciousness-raising requires thinking about “gay” as a social movement. Although D’Emilio argues that a North American gay community began in an era before radical and militant activism (as marked by the Stonewall Riots), he cannot escape from understanding gay community building in North America as a social movement, one read through activism from individuals and advocacy organisations. Therefore, while the Stonewall Riots marked the proliferation of radical gay liberation organizations, D’Emilio extends the movement to include what are considered softer homophile organisations. He is, however, careful to make a distinction between movements and subcultures (p. 176). While he attempts to merge the two concepts, it is clear that for D’Emilio, subculture development is not considered an effective means of advocating for a gay community (D’Emilio, 1983).

A more recent historical project is Marc Stein’s *City of Sisterly and Brotherly Loves: Lesbian and Gay Philadelphia, 1945-1972* (2000). Like D’Emilio and Chauncey before him, Stein also demonstrates a visible group of gay men was building community and advocating for human rights/liberation well before the Stonewall Riots in 1969. His approach combines Chauncey’s interest in communities that emerge from particular cultural geographies, with D’Emilio’s investment in thinking about a gay community as a social movement involving political action. By doing this, Stein considers the effects of subcultures on social movements, paying attention to how relationships, particularly personal relationships, that

occur in social spaces have ramifications on how formal political groups interacted with one another (Stein, 2000). He cannot, however, escape thinking about a model of social and political struggle, marking Philadelphia as an extremely homophobic space. Therefore, his analysis also falls back on thinking about the gay community as one formed through activism and “gay” as the category of a notable social movement (Stein, 2000).

Chauncey (1994) and Stein’s (2000) works think about historical geography as considering the location of the individual with regards to the respective cities in which they live (in this case, New York and Philadelphia). Michael Brown (1997) extends thinking about geography to more than just a place with a name (e.g. a city or a neighbourhood), and examines how understandings of space (e.g. public versus private) contribute to individuals’ notions of citizenship and political involvement. Doing so, he further disrupts the category “gay,” arguing that its meaning as a political identity was not realized socially or politically in Vancouver until the AIDS epidemic. Reflecting that Vancouver does not have a history of violence from the state as in other cities, Brown (1997) suggests that Vancouver’s gay community’s challenge to citizenship occurred in the 1980s and early 1990s. For Brown, the AIDS epidemic unified the gay community and inspired new understandings of citizenship, community, and belonging (p. 33).

While human rights oriented organizations existed in Vancouver (e.g. Association for Social Knowledge (ASK), Gay Alliance Towards Equality (GATE), Society for Education, Action, Research, and Counselling on Homosexuality (SEARCH), Gay Liberation Front (GLF)), Brown’s oral histories reflect a community of individuals uncertainly identified with them. With the epidemic, however, the location of the political centre of debate shifted notions of oppression as compared to other cities (New York, Toronto, San Francisco), and onto a visible marker afflicting many individuals sharing a similar identity category.

Therefore, Brown (1997) argues that “AIDS became the first *material* issue related to identity politics in [Vancouver]” (p. 46, italics mine). His work problematizes gay liberation’s chronological essentialization, demonstrating that gay liberation is not a movement fixed in time, but something that continues through visible manifestations of challenges to ideas of political citizenship. The notion of human rights is also challenged, as Brown calls for new understandings of citizenship and recognizing forms of activism aside from direct action and protests (p. 153).

Another major contribution of Brown’s work is his inclusion of the physical space of the home and family, traditionally placed in the domestic and private sphere, into the public sphere (Brown, 1997, p. 124-125). Because AIDS was politically attached to the gay community, individuals engaging in actions supporting those in need entered a political and public space (p. 126). Buddies, volunteer visitors and caregivers for (predominantly gay) men with AIDS, are therefore considered activists, visibly protesting the oppression of gay identity by keeping gay men alive (p. 126). Although gay men in Vancouver seemed to be socially accepted, the need for care from members outside of one’s biological family demonstrated oppression in the home, a space previously defined as strictly private and outside of public debate (p. 130). Brown’s inclusion of caregivers in radical activism complicates the location of gay liberation, as many saw their involvement outside of state/formal politics (p. 162). Entertaining the possibility that political and community action exists outside of state politics, which govern human rights, Brown makes it conceivable that a visible gay community before the 1970s is possible *and* considered political without the participation of the formal state. Brown also reiterates the relationship between individuals bearing the category “gay” and their environment; the category is only effective in its social

and cultural context, a context that is read by how individuals move physically through society and by identifying their interactions (Brown, 1997).

## **Gay-Okay: Getting into Public Space**

The debate about public space has largely centred on notions of power. Different academic disciplines approach space using different frameworks that arise from their particular interests; however, recently, most disciplines are united by their various challenges to the concept of “public space” offered by Habermas (1974, in Goodsell, 2003, p. 362). Habermas marks public space by its universal accessibility, a philosophical ideal that he later suggests is unrealistic due to modern capitalist structures favouring semi-private spaces (Habermas, 1989, in Goodsell, 2003, p. 362). Relating public space to a physical reality and aspects of citizenship and community building, urban planners conceive public spaces as physical locations where people are free to congregate, providing a material manifestation of politics of inclusion and identity recognition (Goodsell, 2003, p. 364). A “truly” public space would therefore be accessible to everyone, and would not necessarily support a social hierarchical structure within it. Buildings often provide only a semi-public space, where walls and doors can still mark difference between individuals, informing society of rules of inclusion and membership. Government buildings, for example, clearly define where certain people may enter, but spaces such as cafeterias or internal gym locker rooms become spaces where inclusion is permitted because of a common membership in the organization (Goodsell, 2003, p. 365). The streets therefore provide a space that is philosophically public, but also in practice—mostly. It is possible to be physically present in the streets, but inclusion occurs when one is recognized and acknowledged on the street. I am considering this acknowledgement as a moment of entry into public space.

I am using public space not as a concept, but as a starting point from which to explore gay history. If the emergence of a gay identity is demonstrated either by existence or emergence into public space, then perhaps a means of interrogation starts not at the individuals or groups, but rather, from the spaces inhabited by individuals and groups. If we think of a public space as one where individuals are able to not only participate, but also where they can interact, then a historical inquiry into the presence of gay men in Vancouver's West End therefore not only tracks where gay men have been, but also where the relationships with other individuals and groups are formed. While gay liberationists could posit that social activism pushed gay identities into public spaces, I write from the perspective that entry into public space is not an isolated activity; acceptance into the public realm requires an acknowledgement by those who are considered already in the public. Therefore, the relationships formed also become important players in the shaping of the history of the gay community.

## **Vancouver's Gay Community – Geography, Society, and Memory**

Where is the space in question when studying gay history? In a more contemporary context, how do we think about gay individuals and their physical space? Is their public in the political realm? In the business and economic realm? In residential neighbourhoods? If we think about public space as both accessible and where individuals may gather, then do we resort to the streets? Here, I will explore Vancouver's gay community spatially and historically. To do this, I will explore the history of gay men in Vancouver through a study of the streets and the relationships that individuals have with the streets. This will extend to residences and neighbourhoods as defined by streets, to businesses that establish themselves in particular spaces and make themselves present on the streets, and to the interactions

between individuals as permitted by societal norms, or as a result of contesting societal norms, in the streets. Using the street as a centre for study, the emergence of a gay community can be examined outside of a liberation model, and does not presuppose that the current state of the gay community is ideal and therefore all historical examples exist to work towards the present day. While Chauncey (1994) thinks about the streets as an important space for the development of a gay community (p. 179-205), my interest moves beyond gay men finding one another. Instead, what are important are the relationships formed by gay men in their surroundings—relationships with both the physical and social worlds.

This paper responds to the call of the importance of Davie Village to the gay community, but on different terms. While I challenge the use of gay liberation or gay subculture discourses to understand gay history and community formation, I am not denying their presence or importance. Therefore, this paper supports Davie Village's importance to the gay community, but through a slightly different means. Instead of Davie Village being a purposeful home for the gay community, it is a space that has happened upon its role through a collision of three geographically based components that set up the foundations necessary for gay identities and gay politics to become public: real estate events, relationships with other groups, and nostalgic memory.

## **Ga(y)zing across the Land**

In city policy and physical layout, Davie Street can be viewed as a component of the West End area, where it shares a similar history. The West End is technically bounded by Stanley Park to the West, Georgia Street to the North, Burrard Street to the East, and English Bay to the South (Gray, Keddie, & Kwan, 1976, p. 4). In the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, the West End transitioned from being the home to Vancouver's aristocracy to a

neighbourhood of rooming houses and transient workers (Bouthillette, 1995, p. 54). The formation of the Shaughnessy neighbourhood in 1910 encouraged the exodus of the wealthy, and many of the mansions that originally stood in the West End were either torn down or converted (Bouthillette, 1995, p. 54).

The introduction and almost instant boom of apartment buildings in the West End began in the 1950s, when there was an increase in desire to live close to the downtown area for work as well as proximity to amenities such as nightlife, commercial districts, and beaches and parks (Fairclough, 1985, p. 53-54). By 1971, over 100 buildings were built, all of which were designed with single-occupant, self-contained suites, and mostly one-bedroom apartments, eliminating the majority of single family houses as well as many of the rooming houses that were built in the first half of the century (Gray et al., 1976, p. 40-46). While most buildings were three floor low-rises, many high-rises were also constructed, focussing in two areas: West of Denman and South of Davie (Gray et al., 1976, p. 52). The building of towers continued in the 1970s, but this decade was marked by the introduction of condominiums, as opposed to rental apartment units. Some apartment buildings also converted their units to condos – so many, that in 1974, the government stopped allowing apartment owners from converting the status of their suites (Gray et al., 1976, p. 51). After the 1970s, building in the West End slowed down, instead focussing on Coal Harbour and Yaletown, and in the last ten years, the Seymour and Richards Streets corridors.

Living in the West End in the 1900s went from a life of the aristocracy, to single working individuals, to young professionals. The increase in large apartment buildings initially encouraged in the inflow of young, single, professionals who were looking to live outside of the typical nuclear family living styles (Bouthillette, 1995, p. 55). These buildings often meant more distant relationships between landlords and tenants, allowing for more

anonymity and privacy. These factors are suggested as attractive for gay men who were looking for residences where they would receive fewer hassles from landlords, and neighbourhoods where the cultural mores were perceived as more contemporary and progressive (Fairclough, 1985, p. 42). The move into a neighbourhood close to amenities also fuelled public perception that the West End was ideal for gay men, who were often painted as bachelors living a life of leisure (Fairclough, 1985, p. 53; Wiseman, 1983, p. 35). The issue of cost has also always been an issue. With the introduction of condominiums in the 1970s, many individuals were unable to afford staying in the West End. Instead, many lived unofficially by subletting or sharing a suite with someone with a more established income (Gray et al., 1976, p. 60-63) – a trend that can still be seen today. Also because of the constant construction in the downtown area, housing costs have steadily risen over the years. Today, the West End appears to be bowing to the pressure of so-called luxury development, especially felt from the neighbouring areas of Coal Harbour and Yaletown, both of which have established themselves as higher-income neighbourhoods.

The West End also holds significance for the gay community today because of its proximity to different service organisations. While gay activist organisations always located themselves either in the downtown area or the West Side, the congregation of organisations along Seymour Street began in the late 70s (Crane, 1978). In the early 80s, the Society for Education, Action, Research, and Counselling on Homosexuality (SEARCH), the Metropolitan Community Church (MCC), and the Vancouver Gay Community Centre (VGCC) shared an office space leased out by Top Man Leathers, the predecessor of the recently closed Mack's Leathers<sup>13</sup> (VGCC News, 1981a, p. 28; 1983, p. 13). The lower property values along the Seymour Street corridor also allowed for the opening and extended

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<sup>13</sup> Mack's Leathers closed in 2006.

lease of the Pacific AIDS Resource Centre (Bradford et al., 1996). For individuals with HIV/AIDS, the presence of St. Paul's Hospital is also of great importance. Many individuals with HIV visit the hospital on a regular basis, attending appointments, accessing medications, and receiving support (Crane, 1990, July 28). In reaction to the location of HIV/AIDS services, subsidized housing specifically for individuals with HIV/AIDS, such as Bonaventure, Seymour Place, and the Dr. Peter Centre, have also located themselves in the downtown/West End area (Bradford et al., 1996).

### **1981 – a Year of Visibility**

By understanding that gay men were congregating physically in the Davie Village area, I suggest that the concentration of gay men was maintained by the community's relationships with other social groups. Marking Vancouver as a gay-friendly city, some of these relationships saw 1981 as a turning point, with particular events shifting the ability for gay liberation to be permeated into public space. In 1981, GATE had recently dissolved, with SEARCH, MCC, and VGCC emerging as the prominent homophile organisations. Post-secondary schools were also spaces where gay men could find one another for support, including Trinity Western College, Langley's infamous Christian university (Gay Leisure Link, 1980). Gayblevision, Vancouver's local gay television show, first awarded its Horse's Ass award, recognizing homophobes in Canada (VGCC News, 1981b, p. 7), and Mike Harcourt held his first full year of office as Mayor of Vancouver.

In November 1980, independent candidate Harcourt was elected as mayor, after serving for years as a city councillor. In the late 70s, Harcourt formed a relationship with the gay community, attending Coronation and other early gay events (Fairclough, 1985, p. 91). His friendly ties with the gay community continued the work of Rosemary Brown, who,

during the provincial election in 1972, recognized the gay community as a discriminated group deserving of rights (Gay Alliance Towards Equality, 1972). Following this political lead<sup>14</sup>, Harcourt quickly established one of the gay community's more public events – in his first year in office, he legally recognized Gay Unity Week, or what we know today as Pride Week (Thomas, 2006, para. 19). With this recognition, 1981 marked the first year that Gay Unity Week shifted officially from simply a protest to a form of community celebration (Thomas, 2006, para. 19).

Before 1981, Gay Unity week had been organised by community members and groups such as SEARCH, MCC, the Zodiacs, and the Dogwood Monarchist Society (SEARCH News, 1978). Functioning as a method of gathering and forming contacts, the event featured a protest parade, often with police making sure that everyone stayed on the sidewalks, a picnic, a carnival, and a baseball game (SEARCH News, 1978). In 1981, Vancouver's gay baseball team had a new opponent: the Vancouver Porkers. Representing the Vancouver Police department, the Porkers played against the Gay All-Stars for at least two years, where they lost both times (VGCC News, 1981c, p. 8, Crane, 1982).

Vancouver's police department has had an uneven relationship with the gay community. In the 1960s and early 1970s, the VPD was consistently homophobic in its actions (Crane, 1982; Mundie, 1966). Police officers would regularly use entrapment to arrest gay men cruising, and described them in reports as drag queens, or drag queen wannabes, bearers of venereal disease, prostitutes, and paedophiles (Mundie, 1966). Finally fed up with their treatment, the gay community called for a gay community police liaison committee. Formed in 1975, this group was initiated to address complaints about gay men cruising in the

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<sup>14</sup> Rosemary Brown was a member of the New Democratic Party (NDP), a left-leaning political party. Mike Harcourt would later become the provincial leader for the NDP.

“fruit loop,” the area south of Davie Street, near Sunset Beach, and the English Bay bathhouse (Crane, 1982). This work began the slow journey towards a healthier relationship between the two groups, diminishing the overt levels of homophobia from the VPD. Through the liaison committee, both the gay community and the VPD hoped for improved communication. Even though the liaison committee began in the 70s, 1981 marked the beginning of a much friendlier relationship between the two groups. Because the VPD is municipally controlled, all directions and communications come from the mayor’s office, which is much faster and direct than the Attorney General controlled RCMP (Crane, 1990, December 26). Therefore, when Mike Harcourt came into power, a shift occurred in the relationship between the VPD and the gay community. The efforts of the liaison committee, along with structural changes in late 1980 and early 1981, gave the VPD a reputation of having a good relationship with the gay community. This reputation was so well known that in 1981, not only did the VPD play a game of baseball at Gay Unity Week, the Toronto Police Department sent representatives to Vancouver to study the rapport between the VPD and the gay community (VGCC News, 1981c, p. 8).

Another reputation that Vancouver has with regards to the police and the gay community is that its bathhouses do not have a history of being raided. Before the identification of AIDS, many gay communities experienced bouts of venereal disease. During this time, and notably in 1981, bathhouses, such as Garden Baths, often hosted Venereal Disease clinics, which were run by SEARCH volunteers (VGCC News, 1981d). By complying with both the Health Department and SEARCH, which was recognized as doing health prevention work, bathhouses built up an alliance between themselves and gay activist organisations, as well as set the tone for how bathhouse culture in Vancouver could exist (Willoughby, 2006). It was these early-formed relationships that prevented the threat of

bathhouses being shut down once the AIDS epidemic hit, for as long as they provided safer sex materials to clients, and allowed clinics to occur, they would not be closed (Willoughby, 2006). This relationship also contributed to why the police did not raid them, for as long as bathhouses were perceived as being responsible with regards to sexually transmitted infections, they were less likely to be perceived as threats to the general public.

Reflections on gay history often lead to a discussion of the methods gay men utilized to find one another for sex (Chauncey, 1994). In particular, gay men and prostitutes, some of whom are gay men, have shared advocacy issues and political spaces. Much of this shared space emerges from the attempts to identify gay men visually in public spaces. The act of cruising, or seeking sexual partners in public, regardless of whether the sex is to occur in public or not, is a form of soliciting sexual partners that gay community activists, such as Jim Deva, argue is different from other forms of sexual solicitation (Perelle, 2003, para. 16). To the police and many members of the public, however, cruising is often perceived as similar to prostitution, since both are understood as a public nuisance of a sexual nature. In 1972, the vagrancy laws of Vancouver changed, removing the ability for police officers to demand justification for one's presence in public (Forbes, 1977, p. 12). Gay activists saw this as a freeing act, where police could no longer assume that those who were visually and publicly homosexual were more likely to be prostitutes. As for the locations of cruising and prostitution, the "fruit loop", or the streets just South of Davie were regularly popular for both cruising, and male or "transvestite" prostitution (Fairclough, 1985, p. 46; Forbes, 1977, p. 2). Gay men probably frequented that area because of the abundance of either sex workers or other individuals seeking sex, but needed to be cautious of being assumed to be involved in illegal prostitution as opposed to walking down the street hoping to bump into someone. It is also no surprise that in the 1970s, police thought all gay men were potentially

prostitutes. Police defined male prostitutes as men who engaged in sex acts for money, or even material goods, including gifts, or room and board (Forbes, 1977, p. 3). Therefore, almost any sexually intimate homosexual relationship could be defined as an economic exchange for sexual activity.

The importance of discourses on prostitution for gay men extended beyond a confusion in distinguishing cruising from soliciting sex for money. In August 1981, in the lobby of a Pendrell Street apartment building, a small group of condominium owners gathered and officially created the Concerned Residents of the West End (CROWE) (CROWE, 1982, February). Reacting to what they felt was harassment from prostitutes – individuals openly soliciting sex, noise in the streets, and the general sense of hookers loitering in the neighbourhoods, CROWE attacked the prevalence of prostitution in the West End on two fronts: first, through vigilante actions such as the infamous Shame the Johns campaign, and second, through lobbying for the criminalisation and persecution of both prostitutes and their customers (CROWE, 1982, February). CROWE's actions in the 1980s accomplished three major moves: one, it positioned homeowners as oppressed by prostitutes and the inactive judicial system; two, it destabilized the notion of a politically unified gay community; and three, it allied certain members of the gay community with conservative politicians and political parties. The second and third points are highlighted by the involvement of Gordon Price. Price was openly gay, but publicly put that aspect of his identity second to his fight over control of private property and the removal of prostitution (Price, 1992). His dedication to prostitution was so avid that he downplayed in subsequent years his involvement in the formation of AIDS Vancouver (Price, 1992), although he had no problems representing the gay community in local publications when it came time for his

candidacy for city councillor<sup>15</sup> (Price, 1992). When Price served in office, it was with a politically conservative slate, and because of his involvement with CROWE, he was friendly with other major conservative politicians, namely Premier Bill Vander Zalm, and MP Pat Carney (CROWE, 1982, April).

For many members of the gay community, CROWE was harmful to gay men in that the organisation went as far as to ask for a reinstatement of the vagrancy laws eliminated in 1972 (CROWE, 1982). Price has insisted that his work only examines prostitution, but many critics question how this work does not have implications to communities outside of that specific industry (Ballantyne, 1984; Van Loon et al., 1984). Although CROWE is long gone, these issues continue to be raised today. In the last five years, more gay men in Vancouver in politics are declaring alliance to Conservative parties<sup>16</sup> – the parties that historically have called for the castration of gay men (Green, 1972), prevented affordable access to HIV medications (Crane, 1990, July 28), or reconsidered allowing gay marriage to remain in Canada (Kirkby & McCann, 2006). CROWE also raises issues of intersecting identities – finding space to live affordably and safely.

## **Embracing Nostalgia**

The construction of Davie Village is steeped in a nostalgic sense of how history operates. The naming and marking of physical space is determined by fond reference to historical figures and lifestyles. The street itself was named for the Honourable Alexander Edmund Batson Davie, premier of BC from 1887 to 1889. Although married with four children (or seven, depending on the source), Davie was known amongst his friends as

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<sup>15</sup> Price often commented on how many gay men supported his work against prostitution (Price, 1992).

<sup>16</sup> In the 2004 federal election, Gary Mitchell ran in the Vancouver Centre riding for the Conservative Party. In 2007, Liberal MLA Lorne Mayencourt, was considering becoming the next Conservative Party candidate for the same riding (Hainsworth, 2007). Both men are openly gay.

openly homosexual, and it was they who lobbied to have the street where they congregated named after him. The naming of the street is now fondly referred to as the beginning of the gay neighbourhood in Vancouver (Thomas, 2004).

This folkloric tale about the naming of Davie Street after BC's first gay politician was reported by representatives of the Davie Village Business Association in 2004 (Perelle, 2004a; Thomas, 2004). Represented in the media by Alan Herbert and Randy Atkinson, this tale was told at the height of the DVBIA's campaign to have Davie Street, and more specifically, the small area marked as "Davie Village" by the BIA, defined as the home of Vancouver's gay community in city development policies (Perelle, 2004a; Thomas, 2004). Appearing in local media, this marking of Davie Street as gay from its naming contradicts historical reports about Davie's character, as well as the process that led to the naming of the street after him. National archive records all point to Davie as a devout Catholic who was close to his wife and family (Lewis, n.d., para. 9). The street was also named before Davie's death by Lauchlan Hamilton, who only worked for the city of Vancouver in 1886 and 1887 (Walker, 1999, p. XI, XII, 33).

While the DVBIA's assertions about the naming of Davie Street could be uncovering formerly unknown information, one must still question the rationale behind telling such version of events. In reflecting on the activities and goals of the DVBIA at the time, one can see that by claiming a historical permanence on Davie Street, they hoped to create particular senses of connectedness to the street itself. For city officials, it would be used to attest to a form of cultural heritage that supposedly could not be disputed. For the gay community itself, it served to create a sense of nostalgia and solidarity. The image of Davie partying with his friends in the neighbourhood connects the past to the present – gay men can continue this tradition of being gay, being out, and spending time in this particular

neighbourhood. The street supposedly embodies the lived experiences of gay men, and the DVBIA has portrayed this as a heritage moment. Strategically, this situation demonstrates how nostalgia becomes an integral part of contemporary forms of gay advocacy, and how a theme of liberation, be it through activism or social/subculture, not only informs how gay history is told, but now also depends upon it.

The use of nostalgia by the DVBIA also brings into question the role of history for communities and cities. As an organization, the DVBIA is invested in the businesses that inhabit a particular set of streets. While it advocated for inclusion of the gay community, and regularly has high-profile local gay individuals on the board of directors, its intentions cannot be confused with those of queer community organizations whose primary focus is serving individuals who identify as gay. If we think about the DVBIA from a strictly economic perspective, it is not impossible that the construction of a community could be strictly a method for attracting consumers to Davie Street. Former DVBIA chair, Randy Atkinson joked about the happiness for merchants if they could dip into even a couple billion dollars of the multi-billion dollar gay tourist niche market/industry (Perelle, 2004b). Therefore, Davie Village is not a home for the gay community, but rather, the gay community allows Davie Village to have a character that is distinct from the rest of Vancouver, making it a niche market, open for members by identity (gay) and to those who want to immerse themselves amongst gay people.

While this could be interpreted as a cynical look at business practices, it does put into question of how history of the gay community is done. By claiming a geographical history for the gay community, the DVBIA maintains both discourses of gay liberation and gay subculture. Davie Street, if named after Alexander Davie (if he was gay), is considered as a symbol of subculture, for it historically validates the social congregation of gay individuals

(read: *men*) to the street, and it also gives the gay community a context of time for its existence in Vancouver, where the need for a retelling of this tale characterizes the hidden or “closeted” past of the community, one that requires liberating by those in the know, and who want to celebrate the gay community. The promotion of the story of Alexander Davie as an out gay man, also marked a time when the DV BIA saw itself as a component of gay activism, an organization that provided a voice for the gay community. In 2004, its board of directors included community activist and co-owner of Little Sister’s Bookstore, Jim Deva, giving the DV BIA credibility as an organization that was not only interested in building a business alliance, but also one that cared about its constituents, evidenced by the inclusion of a key activist of the community<sup>17</sup>.

Another aspect of this nostalgia is the Xtra West’s use of particular individuals as informants. The 2006 article outlining a walking tour (Perelle, 2006) is largely constructed by Don Hann: although part of GATE, his memory of being introduced to the gay community was through his sexual experiences, especially those coming from the bathhouses, bars, and clubs (Perelle, 2006, para. 6-7). It is therefore no surprise that the walking tour features an over-representation of sites of former bars, clubs, and bathhouses. The affect of nostalgia and melancholy begins early in the article, with Hann commenting on how sad it is that these businesses, or historical sites, are no longer present. Tying in both discourses of liberation and subculture, Hann is described as a formerly isolated and closeted individual, one who is freed (sexually) by the bars and clubs. Therefore, the walking tour is significant to the public only with the understanding that it represents Hann’s personal struggles and his interpretation of successes.

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<sup>17</sup> Jim Deva’s identity as a gay identity activist stems from the historic legal battle of Little Sister’s Bookstore against Canada Customs (Canada Customs and Revenue Agency), where starting in 1986, the bookstore charged Canada Customs with unlawful censorship of materials (namely books and magazines) at the Canadian border resulting in incomplete shipments of goods.

## Conclusions: Questioning Bonds and How We Think About Communities

If nostalgia is a strong force propelling how Vancouver's gay community understands itself, then is the role of history simply that – a method of creating the necessary affective responses from the population to achieve political, social, or economic goals? Also, if the gay community requires the folklore of gay liberation for it to have unity and identity, then does a different historical approach have a purpose? Does it have a goal? Thinking about geography and a gay movement that spans across North America, do we find parallel movements that can be interpreted by the metanarrative of gay liberation, or does gay liberation drive the formation of gay communities in the North American context?

Susan Stryker's 2005 film, *Screaming Queens: the Riot at Compton's Cafeteria*, maintains the discourse of fighting for identity rights, but also introduces challenges to the existing gay liberation timeline and model of analysis. The first challenge is that Stryker discusses a riot started by transgendered individuals, individuals that in the Stonewall Riots contexts would have been remembered as gay men (i.e. drag queens). Therefore, Stryker identifies that the activism for rights was not only about gay identities, but opens the discussion to discuss non-normative identities. Through investigation and analysis of a riot in San Francisco, Stryker demonstrates how the emerging visibility of a transgendered identity does not come from a riot; rather it is shaped by the role of the Tenderloin district, where transgendered individuals were bounded geographically by their relationship with police, and their association with particular trades, namely performance and prostitution. Stryker also introduces the social conditions, including the housing market, that contribute to the congregation of transgendered individuals to that particular location in San Francisco, also suggesting why it was different from the gay-identified Castro neighbourhood. Like

D'Emilio, Chauncey, and Stein, Stryker also structures her analysis such that it is recognized that community formation begins before the moment of rioting.

*Screaming Queens* (2005) playfully threatens the iconic status held by the Stonewall Riots. Here was an event that could be read as a fight for human rights, and borrowing from the gay liberation story, involves a riot, an action that is more complicated than a court decision. The riot's effectiveness as a milestone is not only about the violence involved, but the emotions and passion that drive its activity. The riot's taking place in 1966 also raises the question of what parameters are set such that this riot was near forgotten, while the Stonewall Riots are celebrated across North America. What becomes apparent in the film is that in thinking about identity, the riot at Compton's Cafeteria embodied an identity (transgendered) that was unable to mobilize in the same manner as the gay movement. In fact, it could be argued that the Stonewall Riots succeeded as a gay milestone, but at the cost of the transgendered individuals who were and are counted as gay men.

Thinking about Vancouver's gay community, by reshaping the focus of the narrative of its history, the function of community becomes less certain. The DVBIA drew upon history to advocate for the formation of a state-defined neighbourhood for the gay community. The use of history for advocacy for "gaybourhoods" is occurring in several major North American urban centres, where fear of gentrification is interpreted as the "de-gayng" of neighbourhoods. If the gay community's new threat is the force of capitalist expansion, then it only makes sense that the new voice is from the business improvement associations where gay people are situated, for they would have the tools to think about the economics that affect the community. Action and voices, however, are often not uniform, as evidenced by the role of gay men in CROWE. So the question remains – can there be one history, one version of how the gay community can think about itself?

Another question is raised by this kind of work: why do we want to construct a gaybourhood at all? The DVBIA's desires are clear that although it advocates for a gay community, this is linked to a particular niche economy and potential capital success of business owners, some of whom *happen* to be gay. In exploring the changing landscape of Toronto's gaybourhood, Catherine Jean Nash (2006) argues that arguing for a gay ghetto actually counters the objectives of the gay movement. The collapsing of the gay community into a single residential and commercial site, serves to limit the gay community, preventing individuals from participating more widely in public spaces (Nash, 2006). What lacks clarity is the differentiation between a home for the gay community and a ghetto. By arguing for a gaybourhood, is the gay community setting its own boundaries for allowable presence in the urban landscape? Alan Herbert compares the gay community and Davie Village to the Chinese community and Chinatown (Thomas, 2004), claiming that although many do not live there, most Chinese people enter and engage with Chinatown, and that the gay community operated in a similar manner with Davie Village. What Herbert forgets is that Chinatown's boundaries may not have been set by law, but were definitely set by racism and fear (Anderson, 1991). One must wonder if creating a connection to a particular landscape only serves to construct the divide between identities, normative and non-normative, more visibly and potentially more permanently. Thankfully (perhaps), the nostalgia and parties served up by the DVBIA (now the *West End* BIA) may be the opiates required for ignoring critics of the gay ghetto concept.

What this reorganization of the history of Vancouver's gay history accomplishes is that the result of an attachment by the gay community to Vancouver's West End, and specifically, Davie Village, is the result of actions that may not have always been directed towards this goal. Many of the relationships that created the necessary foundations and

frameworks for Vancouver's gay community to succeed were interested in the formation of a gay community or shaping the definition of a gay identity. While gay liberation activists were very active in working towards their political goals, many of the groups that interacted with the growing gay community grew out of the collision of individuals in the streets. Therefore, the community can be thought of as a collection of relationships that help define the role of those who claim the identity of "gay."

The streets here provide the space necessary for change to occur. While they may not be universally accessible by philosophical standards, they do make visible many of society's individuals and communities, even if there is a lack of contemporary language to label what is being viewed. History also allows for a more insightful examination of the characteristics of gay identity, introducing discrepancies, tensions, solidarity, and camaraderie. If success of the gay community is human rights as recognized by participation in the public sphere, then doing history without the gay liberation story model still leads to a community moving towards success. These different aspects of the community force the formation of relationships that may not always seem utilitarian, but ultimately they support direct action in shaping the community and defining a North American gay identity.

## Archives Visited

- Vancouver City Archives
- University of British Columbia Library, Rare Books and Special Collections
- Simon Fraser University Library, Special Collections
- Pacific AIDS Research Centre (PARC), Vancouver
- Dr. Michael Brown's Collection, Seattle, USA
- Ron Dutton's Collection, Vancouver, Canada
- Vancouver Public Library, Special Collections

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