



# Lesbians as Village ‘Queers’: The Transformation of Montréal’s Lesbian Nightlife in the 1990s

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## Abstract:

Gay villages have been developing as a feature of Western cities since the 1980s. By the 1990s, their markets diversified and expanded and they were redefined as ‘queer’ sites. While the incorporation of lesbian nightlife into gay villages played a pivotal role in this diversification, their participation has received limited attention in the urban studies literature. This paper, therefore, uses a case study of Montréal to analyze the relationship between lesbian identities and the production of commodified ‘queer space’ in the city’s Village gai in the 1990s. In contrast with the literature that stresses their exclusions, I argue that this site was productive in terms of reworking lesbian identities. I begin by examining the development of the gay village as a location for lesbian nightlife in the 1990s. Next, I analyze the changing content of lesbian bar advertisements that came with this relocation. Finally, I use in-depth interviews with lesbians regarding their perceptions of the Village, its nightlife spaces and emerging Village lesbian identities. The paper finds that although lesbians often felt marginalized in gay village space, this site was central to the production and expression of new forms of lesbian identity in the 1990s.



## Introduction

In many Western cities, the 1990s was an era of expansion and development in what are often referred to as ‘gay villages’, inner-city areas of post-industrial cities with relatively high concentrations of gay-specific commerce and often a concentration of gay households (Collins, 2004; Ruting, 2008). As inner-city districts, gay villages have also been shaped by ‘gaytrification’, the gay-led integration of older inner-city commercial entertainment districts into the cosmopolitan consumer landscape (Binnie and Skeggs, 2004; Collins, 2004; Rushbrook, 2002). Today, they also include other ‘gay-friendly’ commercial services as well as ‘mixed’ social spaces where LGBTQ and broader populations interact. Despite some ‘degaying’ in recent years, Collins (2004) has noted that they retain something of their origins, a concentration of gay-specific services such as men’s bars and saunas. So, while cosmopolitanization and commodification have given these sites a more ‘open’ status for a wide array of consumers, these processes have also produced an important asymmetry: the sites of specifically gay-male consumption within gay villages have been maintained, but the identity-specific bars and nightclubs of other queer<sup>2</sup> populations have been replaced with mixed spaces. This is especially the case for the lesbian-specific forms of nightlife that were part of the process of ‘queering’ gay villages in the 1990s when the incorporation of lesbian consumers was an important component of the process of gay village expansion and diversification (Podmore, 2006; Pritchard, Morgan and Sedgley, 2002).

The objective of this paper is to provide an alternate interpretation of the development of gay villages by focusing on the incorporation of lesbian nightlife during this diversification process. Specifically, I address the role of gay villages in the reworking of community and identity among lesbians. Using a case study of the development of Montréal’s Village gai [the Village], I examine the integration, commodification and interpretation of lesbian nightlife in gay village space over the course of the ‘queer’ 1990s. As Canada’s second largest city and the metropolitan centre of Québec, Montréal had a well-established gay village at the beginning of this decade, at which point its business owners began to create sites for lesbian nightlife as part of the process of expansion and diversification. I use this case study to demonstrate that while lesbians experienced exclusions in Montréal’s gay village (Ray, 2004; Ray and Rose, 2000), the production of lesbian

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<sup>2</sup> ‘Queer’ epistemologies, identities, spaces and practices have been debated and developed over the past decade in geography (Browne, 2006; Oswin, 2005). In this paper, I retain a more empirical interpretation of ‘queer’ that reflects its meaning in Anglo-America the 1990s. Queer, in this context, referred to the opposite of normative heterosexuality, a political stance adopted by activist groups such as ACT-UP and Queer Nation. I see queer as constructed category of identity, an umbrella group of populations and identities that stood in opposition to these norms, often referred to as the LGBTQ population. Within this framework, I see LGBTQ populations as simultaneously inhabiting more specific identities (such as trans, dyke, etc...) and a queer identity that developed over the course of the 1990s. I interpret the first years of this decade as a period in which lesbian-specific identities in North America were being redefined within a queer framework (see Stein, 1993)

nightlife within this commodified 'queer space' also created 'inclusions'. Moreover, these inclusions made the Village an important site for the reworking of lesbian identity over the course of the 1990s. To explore this process, I begin by situating lesbians within the development of gay villages in Western cities, highlighting the lack of existing literature on their participation in the production and experience of these sites. Next, I outline my methodology. The empirical analysis is divided into three sections. The first section maps the integration of lesbian nightlife into the Village as it expanded in the 1990s. In the second section I use advertisements for Village lesbian bars to analyze its production as a place for lesbians. Finally, I use interviews with Montréal lesbians from the late 1990s to examine their perceptions of the Village, its lesbian nightlife spaces and Village lesbian identities.

### **Villages of 'Difference'? Situating Lesbians in Gay Village Spaces**

The study of gay villages has a long history in geography and urban studies resulting in numerous case studies of their development (Collins, 2004; Deligne, Gabiam, Van Criekingen, and Decroly, 2006; Mort, 1998; Quilley, 1995; Redoutey, 2002; Remiggi, 2000; Sibalís, 2004). The earliest research on gay enclaves focused on their role as protective spaces for gay men in heterosexist urban space (Lauria and Knopp, 1985; Weightman, 1981). Early researchers also examined the links between gay men and gentrification (Knopp, 1990; Lauria and Knopp, 1985), which remains an important area of inquiry (Giraud, 2009; Ruting, 2008). As gay villages became incorporated into the larger consumer and tourism markets of the entrepreneurial city in the 1990s, researchers extended this analysis and began to examine the politics of their production and consumption (Binnie, 1995; Knopp, 1998; Mort, 1998; Quilley, 1995). Using new critical frameworks, geographers have further analyzed how hegemonic forces have shaped social relations of inclusion and exclusion in the production of gay villages (Bell and Binnie, 2004; Binnie and Skeggs, 2004; Nast, 2002; Rushbrook, 2002). Most recently, a number of authors have empirically investigated how these hegemonic forces are experienced through gender, racial and class exclusions (Casey, 2004; 2007; Doan, 2007; Nash, 2011; Ray, 2004; Taylor, 2007; 2008; Tucker, 2009).

This expanding literature on 'difference' in gay village spaces has included a small body of literature that examines the exclusions experienced by lesbians (Binnie and Skeggs, 2004; Casey 2004; 2007; Pritchard *et al.*, 2002; Ray, 2004; Ray and Rose, 2000; Skeggs, 1999; Taylor, 2007; 2008). However, with so much attention to the production of identity and space in gay villages, what is surprising is the lack of research on the inclusions of lesbian identities. In part, this lacuna is related to the way in which lesbian subjects have been conceptualized in the sexuality and space literature. Many of the initial studies of lesbians were part of a long appraisal of Castells' (1983) claims regarding the territorial aspirations of gay men versus the network-based use of space by lesbian women (Adler and Brenner, 1992; Bouthillette 1997; Nash, 2001; Peake, 1993; Podmore, 2001; 2006; Rothenberg, 1995; Valentine, 1995; 2000). The finding that most lesbian

engagements with urban space are non-territorial and non-commercial seems to have reinforced a gender dualism that obscures their involvement in the production of gay village spaces (Podmore, 2006; Remiggi, 2000). Secondly, in this literature, there has been a general tendency to omit women's experiences or subsume them into broader identity categories such as queer or gay. As Browne (2007: 2) has argued, "Women's sexualities, both as 'biological women' and transgendered/transsexual women, are often subsumed in wider discussions of 'gay/queer' commodification, gay/queer commercialization, the 'pink pound/dollar' and 'gay/queer' neighbourhoods". Researchers have often chosen to either focus only on gay men to avoid misrepresenting lesbians or subsumed them into broader categories that rarely represent their experiences (Browne, 2007; 2008).

Another reason for this gap is related to how gay villages are conceptualized in urban studies. Some rare studies, such as Nash's (2005; 2006) research on Toronto, interpret gay village formation as a contested process: Toronto's gay village was formed out of struggles between gay men and lesbians as they strove to redefine community identity and occupy urban space in the 1970s and 1980s. Most research on gay village development, however, uses one of two major analytical frameworks that obscure the role of difference and multiplicity the production process. Neo-classical or ecologically-informed approaches examine their development by analyzing how aggregate patterns shift over time, ultimately rendering difference and multiplicity invisible (Collins, 2004; Deligne *et al.*, 2006; Ruting, 2008). At times, the lesbian half of lesbian and gay is mentioned and discussed, but their relationship to the analysis is additive rather than integrative (Deligne *et al.*, 2006; Sibalis, 2004). Critical geographies, on the other hand, have focused on the hegemonic forces shaping gay villages. In this literature, gay villages have become synonymous with neo-liberal urbanism, homo-patriarchy and homonormativity (Binnie and Bell, 2004; Binnie and Skeggs, 2004; Nast, 2002; Rushbrook, 2002). This analytical focus serves to obscure the various forms of difference involved in their production while reinforcing the centrality of specific forms of gay-male identity (Brown, 2008; 2009). In addition, as the debates within geography regarding the more recent homonormative relations shaping gay village spaces have demonstrated (Elder, 2002; Nast, 2002; Oswin, 2005; Sothern, 2004), this focus can, 1) negate the past and present struggles of queer populations to create safe and meaningful spaces (Elder, 2002), 2) reduce queer identities to commercial representations (Sothern, 2004), and 3) depict hegemonic relations such as homonormativity as complete and totalizing (Oswin, 2005).

Empirical studies of lesbians in gay village or 'scene' spaces have emerged alongside of these two currents (Casey, 2004; 2007; Pritchard *et al.*, 2002; Ray, 2004; Ray and Rose, 2000; Skeggs, 1999; Taylor, 2007; 2008). They are part of a small body of literature that focuses on the exclusions experienced by a diversity of queer identities that are rendered marginal by a homonormative, commodified, gay-lead definition of gay village spaces as 'queer' spaces, described by Casey (2007)

as the 'queer unwanted'. While some of this work, such as Taylor's (2007; 2008) research on working-class lesbians in British 'scene space' and Casey's research on lesbians in Newcastle (2004; 2007), is slightly more recent, the majority is based on interviews conducted with lesbians in British and Canadian cities in the late 1990s (Binnie and Skeggs, 2004; Pritchard *et al.*, 2002; Ray, 2004; Ray and Rose, 2000; Skeggs, 1999). Overall, the findings of these studies are very similar: lesbians experienced a sense of disidentification with gay villages and had difficulty negotiating their presence within queer commercial spaces (Pritchard *et al.*, 2002; Ray, 2004; Ray and Rose, 2000; Skeggs, 1999). However, most of the case studies of British cities suggest that gay village spaces have been meaningful sites of identity and territory for lesbians (Skeggs, 1999; Pritchard *et al.*, 2002; Taylor, 2007; 2008). For example, Pritchard *et al.* (2002) found that although lesbians competed with gay men for limited space in Manchester's gay village, they still valued having lesbian-specific spaces within the site. Importantly, these interviews indicate that lesbians valued this site because it confirmed their place as queer subjects in the gay village and also supported development of lesbian social networks.

This role, gay villages as sites for the production of community and identity for lesbians, has been seriously neglected in the urban studies literature. Historically speaking, the oversight is particularly glaring, especially regarding the 1990s. It has been well established that this was a decade in which gay villages expanded and diversified their clienteles (Collins, 2004; Ruting, 2008). It was also a decade in which a new generation of lesbians increasingly identified with queer culture and politics (Stein, 1993). The early 1990s were also the moment when gays and lesbians were first identified as a consumer market, which brought a number of experiments with 'gay window advertising' and marketing in the gay and lesbian media (Chasin, 2000; Fejes, 2003; Gamson, 2002; Gluckman and Reed, 1997; Hennessy 1994; Sender, 2004). For a population that had never been defined as a distinct consumer group, the emergence of this market created a seductive association between commodification and liberation (Hennessy, 1994; Peñaloza, 1996). In gay and lesbian glossy magazines, these populations were now the targets of advertising for mainstream and niche market products as well as local gay and lesbian businesses (Chasin, 2000; Fejes, 2003; Gamson, 2002). The gay and lesbian media and gay village spaces served as new venues for advertising and creation of markets for this population (Chasin, 2000). In the 1990s, therefore, this confluence between a changing relationship between lesbians and gay men, the emerging gay and lesbian market and its media imagery, and the expanding and diversifying gay village created new conditions for the production of lesbian identities in urban space. While the literature shows that there were significant ways in which lesbians experienced exclusions in material space, the production and advertising of lesbian nightlife in gay villages suggests that these spaces also created opportunities for inclusions.

## Maps, Ads and Interviews

To examine the integration, commodification and interpretation of lesbian identities in Montréal's Village, this paper uses mixed methods. A tripartite form of data analysis was selected that could provide a reconstruction of these past relationships. To set the stage for the commodification and interpretation of lesbian identities in the 1990s, I present an analysis of locational changes in lesbian nightlife during this decade. Drawing on advertisements and listings from lesbian and gay periodicals of the period<sup>3</sup>, I map opening dates for lesbian bars and nightclubs in East Central Montréal in three distinct periods: 1980s (1982-1990) when lesbians built nightlife spaces in the Plateau Mont-Royal District [the Plateau]; the 1990s (1991-1997) when lesbian nightlife developed and expanded in the Village; and the period after 1998 (1998-2007) when lesbian-specific nightlife in the Village began to decline. However, the primary focus of the analysis is the integration of lesbian venues into the Village in the 1990s. I examine when lesbian bars began to develop in the Village, how rapidly this niche market grew as well as providing a qualitative analysis of the location, form and function of Village lesbian bars.

Having outlined the geographies of lesbian nightlife in the period, I turn to the advertising imagery used by bar owners to promote the Village as a place for lesbian nightlife. Studies of sexuality and space have often used media depictions of locations to analyze how urban districts are constructed as 'gay places' (Forest, 1995; Gorman-Murray, 2006; Hunt and Zacharias, 2008; Miller, 2005). For my analysis, I draw upon two publications, *Info Lesbo Info* (1990-1993), a lesbian newsletter, and *Gazelle* (1993-1998), a commercial lesbian glossy. Since both publications had relatively short runs and there were few bars advertised, a formal content analysis was not possible. Instead, I collected a comprehensive sample of all Montréal lesbian bar advertisements appearing in both publications from the date of the first issue of *Info Lesbo Info* in 1990 to the last issue of *Gazelle* in 1998. The advertisements were digitized and then grouped into files by year, publication and geographical location (inside or outside of the Village). This method permitted comparative analysis between the imagery used to advertise bars inside and outside of the Village and shifts in their imagery over time. My analysis is based a small body of literature on the commodification of lesbian imagery in the media (Clark, 1991; Gonsoulin, 2010; Lewis, 1997; Sender, 2004). I compared differences in the graphic style, content and the position of the viewer in advertisements for Village lesbian bars and lesbian bars in other districts. While the section highlights the diversity of the imagery, it also demonstrates an increased commodification through the use of 'window advertising' and relations of objectification (Clark,

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<sup>3</sup> The data and illustrations for this section was drawn from bar and nightlife listings in lesbian and gay periodicals from 1980 to 2007: *Les Sourcières* (1980-1982); *Ça s'attrape!!* (1982-1984); *Treize: revue lesbienne* (1985-2002); *Project Lavender Bulletin/Bulletin du Projet lavande* (1987-1990); *Info Lesbo Info* (1990-1993); *Gazelle* (1993-1998) and *Fugues* (1995-2007).

1991; Gonsoulin, 2010; Lewis, 1997) emerging in Village advertisements over time.

For the final section of the paper, I draw on a bank of in-depth interviews that I conducted with 18 lesbian women in Montréal in 1996 and 1997. During these interviews, participants discussed their perceptions, use and experience of various Montréal spaces. Part of a larger project on lesbians in urban space, some portions of these interviews have already been analyzed and published (Podmore, 2001; Ray, 2004; Ray and Rose, 2000). For this paper, I use excerpts to understand how a specific group of Montréal lesbians interpreted the Village, its lesbian nightlife spaces and associated forms of lesbian identity. The sampling technique and characteristics of this population are detailed previous research (Podmore, 2001). However, the specificity of my sample requires some qualification. The sample was built using snowball sampling through my own personal networks. The resulting sample is representative of what I have elsewhere called 'downtown dykes', young lesbians in their 20s and 30s who were active in social and activist networks and lesbian nightlife in the late 1990s (Podmore, 2001). They by no means represent all lesbians in Montréal during the time period: they were primarily young, white and highly-educated. Furthermore, with 55 percent of the interviews conducted in English and 33 percent of my sample declaring English as their mother tongue, the sample over represents English-speaking lesbians<sup>4</sup>. For the purposes of this study, however, these 'downtown dykes' are important witnesses to the development of lesbian nightlife in the Village: they were part of the first generation of 'Village lesbians', lesbians who identified as both queer and lesbian and who embraced Village lesbian nightlife.

### **To the Village: A New Location for Montréal's Lesbian Nightlife**

Montréal's Village gai is located to the east of the city's downtown core, just beyond the historic red-light district and to the south of the Plateau Mont-Royal District where lesbians created commercial spaces in the 1980s and 1990s (Fig. 1). Following the displacement of gay nightlife from the downtown core in the late 1970s, the Village began to develop as a gay commercial and residential enclave. By the early 1990s, the gay businesses in this area began to expand and multiply (Podmore, 2006; Remiggi, 1998; 2000). Part of the expansion process included the opening of lesbian-specific entertainment venues. This process began in 1990, when two bars for lesbians were opened. One of these, a tavern called Loubar, would become an anchor of lesbian social life in the Village throughout the 1990s.

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<sup>4</sup> According the Canadian Census, the distribution of mother tongue languages in the Montréal Census Metropolitan Area in 1995 was 68.1 percent French, 13.7 percent English and 18.2 percent 'other' (Statistics Canada, 2005). At 22.2 percent, the statistics for my sample regarding mother tongues other than English or French are closer to the Montréal average and the majority of my sample in this category became English speakers.

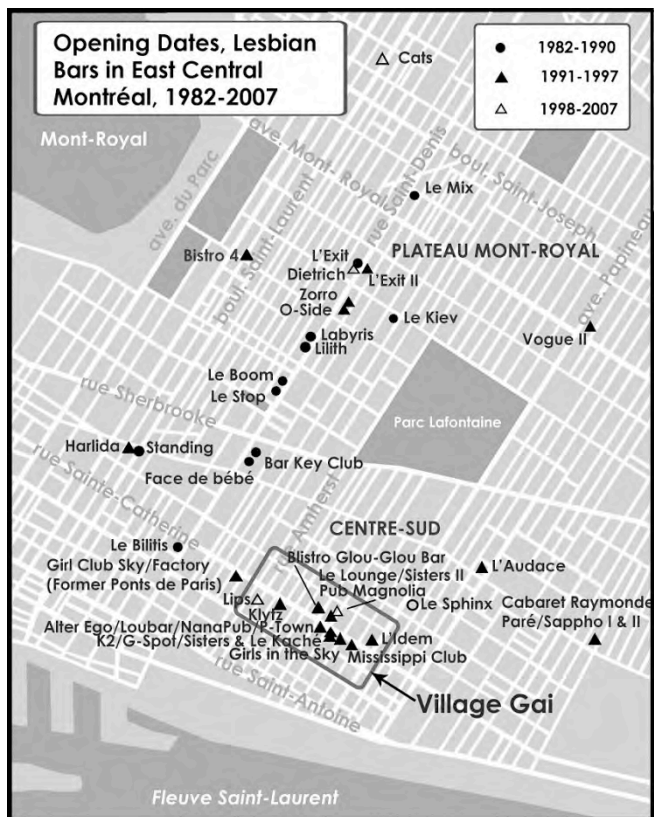


Figure 1. Opening Dates and Location of Lesbian Bars in East Central Montréal, 1982-2007. (Source: J. A. Podmore).

Importantly, Loubar was opened by the owners of a larger complex, Taverne du Village. This was a three-storey complex with gay men occupying the first two floors and lesbian space allocated on the third. Each of these spaces had large outdoor terraces, with the ground floor for men, and the roof-top for women. Gay men and the lesbians were not yet integrated, but business owners were beginning to allocate space for women and experiment with a lesbian clientele.

More bars targeting a lesbian clientele were created between 1991 and 1993. L'Idem opened in 1991, but it quickly became a mixed and then primarily a gay space. In 1992, a large bar complex, the first to really promote the integration of lesbians and gay men, opened in a former postal station under the name Station C. By 1993, Station C represented an important departure from Taverne du Village in that it provided gay, lesbian and mixed spaces in one complex. In the basement was Katakombes, a men-only space. On the ground floor were two mixed spaces, the large club space for KOX, and Kaché, a short-lived mixed piano lounge. Upstairs was K-2 (later called G-Spot and Sister's), a revolutionary nightclub space for women, with DJ and a dance floor.



Sky, another large-scale nightclub on three floors, opened in 1994. While no separate space was created for lesbians within the complex, they began to integrate a lesbian clientele by dedicating Thursday nights as women's nights (Girls in the Sky). Men were allowed to come into the space with their women friends and these nights catered specifically to a queer-identified lesbian clientele. Girls in the Sky featured female go-go dancers, butch and gender-queer bartenders, and renowned lesbian DJs. There were also three different rooms dedicated to different music genres (disco, house and hip-hop). A dramatic departure from lesbian taverns and the smaller space of K-2, it became so popular that Sky experimented with opening a women's space called Girl Club Sky (later Klytz), a nightclub space that would have many different locations over the next four years.

The Village represented an important shift in the location for lesbian nightlife in Montréal in the early 1990s. As Figure 1 shows, in the 1980s, new lesbian bars had primarily opened to the north on the Plateau or on the edges of the Village. By the late 1980s, there was a significant concentration along Saint-Denis Street (Podmore, 2006; Remiggi, 2000). Between 1982 and 1990, the Plateau was the primary site for opening new lesbian venues. The Village became a new site for opening lesbian bars in the early 1990s and it soon compared with the Plateau in terms of concentration and frequency of opening new bars. However, this frequency and concentration is very specific to the period between 1991 and 1997 when the majority of new bar openings were concentrated in the Village. The specificity of this period is also illustrated by contrasting it with the period from 1998 to 2007 when the opening of new bars declines overall and there is little activity in the Village.

This shift in the location of lesbian nightlife was accompanied by other changes. First, the production of lesbian nightlife in the Village multiplied the options for lesbians by adding an additional area to the lesbian map of the city. Secondly, it led to important shifts in the control and format of lesbian nightlife. The bars outside of the Village were smaller-scale lesbian-specific business ventures that were owned or operated by lesbians. Village lesbian bars, however, were part of three pre-existing and expanding gay complexes, Tavern du Village, Station C and Sky. While they were often managed by lesbians, the nightlife spaces here were modelled on the spaces that had been created for gay men. With the exception of Loubar, these spaces were designed to be used by more than one population as they were only lesbian spaces on Friday and Saturday nights. They also featured some mixing with gay men within the complexes and on the dance floor in mixed complexes like Sky and KOX. Therefore, these bars and their location represented an important cultural shift for a new generation of lesbians who were exploring queer identities and, importantly, an increased consumer and political power that seemed to come with queer culture.

## Selling the Lesbian Village

In the early 1990s, Montréal lesbians were producing two publications themselves but, in 1993, Éditions Nitram, publishers of the city's gay-male monthly, *Fugues*, began to publish the first commercial lesbian glossy magazine, *Gazelle*. The businesses that advertised in *Gazelle* were either tailored to lesbian or queer populations or were interested in incorporating this market into their mix. Like *Fugues*, *Gazelle* became the primary place for advertising to these populations and it was overwhelmingly supported by Village businesses (Hunt and Zacharias, 2008). *Gazelle* featured large, full-page pictorial bar advertisements for Village bars that were designed specifically for this publication. As the primary place for marketing Village lesbian bars, *Gazelle*, served as an interface between lesbians and the Village.



Figure 2. Advertisements for Lesbian Bars Located Outside the Village in the 1990s. (Source: *Gazelle*, 1993, 1994 and 1997). Reproduced with permission of Éditions Nitram.

Throughout the first half of the 1990s, advertisements for bars that were located outside of the Village were very basic in their presentation (Fig. 2). This

can be attributed to the lower budgets for advertising, as these establishments were single-owner, small-scale bars. Still, there is a pattern to the imagery: they used very basic graphic design, drew on an established iconography for lesbian bars, and promoted themselves as community spaces for women that were enjoyable and intimate. For example, L'Exit II, an established Plateau bar from the 1980s, repeatedly used a cat and a bottle of wine to market itself, suggesting intimacy and sociability. A Plateau women-only bar from late 1990s, ♀-Side used iconic lesbian pool table imagery to advertise itself. Harlida used a Harley-Davidson theme, selling their image with the slogan "Choose to ride, Love to play". Another distinctive feature of these advertisements is that they generally announced that their bars were specifically for women. ♀-Side, a bar on the Plateau in 1997, was advertised as "a place where women can eat and have fun among themselves". Bistro 4, another temporary Plateau bar from 1994, announced that it was "A Bar for Women". Even Harlida, which was a lesbian-centred queer space, celebrated itself as a "Club de Nanas" or "Chicks Club".

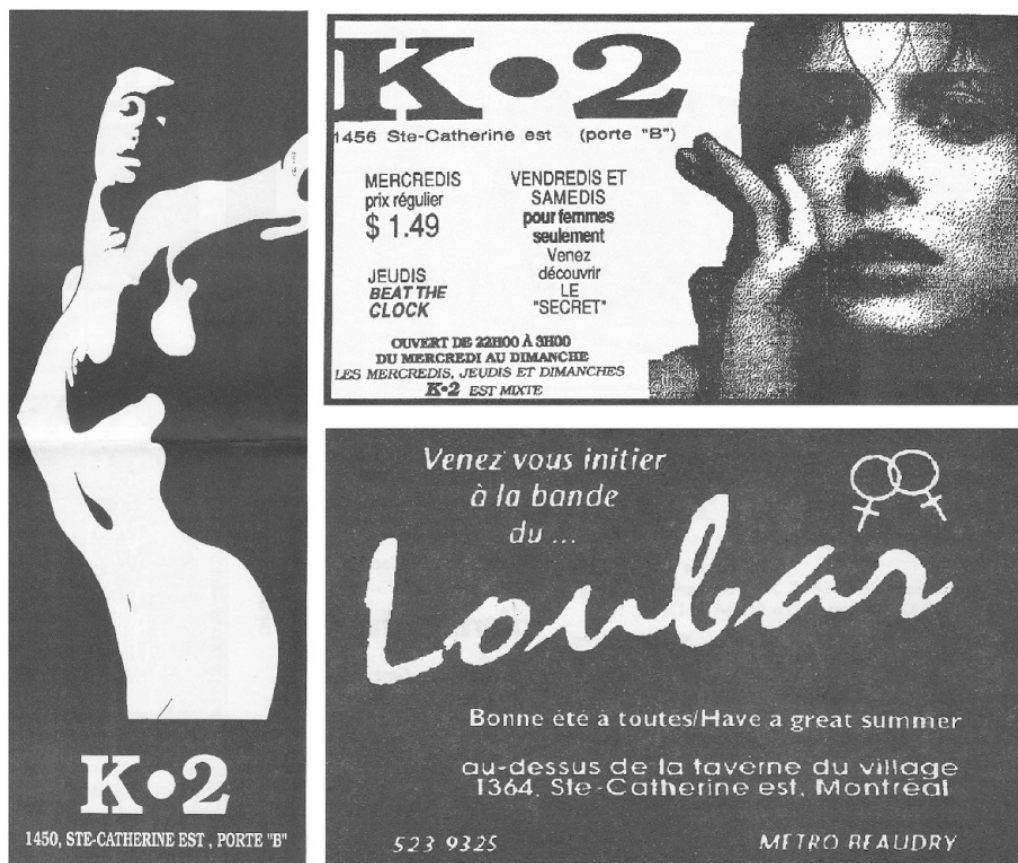


Figure 3. Advertisements for Village Lesbian Bars in the Early 1990s. (Source: *Info Lesbo Info*, 1991, 1992 and 1993). Copyright unknown.



In the first years of the 1990s, Village bars made only slight departures from those located elsewhere. All of the early Village bars, such as K-2 and Loubar, were marketed as women-only spaces (Fig. 3). The first advertisements for these bars were not dissimilar in design and presentation, generally using simple black and white graphics. They also used similar symbols and imagery. For example, early Loubar advertisements indicated the bar's lesbian status by using interlocking women's symbols. They also promoted a sense of a women's community by inviting customers to "...come and join the gang". K-2, however, made some significant departures early on. This bar was the first to advertise itself using a simple full body graphic image of a naked woman. It also made another departure when it used the image of a woman looking directly at the viewer and inviting readers to come and "discover the secret" of K-2. This form of advertisement, one



Figure 4. G-Spot Advertisement. (Source: *Gazelle*, 1993). Reproduced with permission of Éditions Nitram.

that presents a staged image of an active lesbian subject consuming Village nightlife, was another first for lesbian bar advertisements in Montréal.

If there were some departures made in advertising lesbian nightlife spaces in the Village before 1993, the imagery shifted dramatically with the advent of *Gazelle* at the end of that year. *Gazelle's* format made it possible for advertisers to purchase larger advertisement spaces and use staged photographs with sophisticated colour graphics. In *Gazelle*, lesbian bar advertisements filled the back of the cover page, the back cover and usually six to seven of the 30 pages inside of the publication. Advertisers could also be assured of a wide distribution since *Gazelle* had a circulation of 10,000 people across the entire province of Québec. Within this context, the advertisements for Village lesbian bars became increasingly sophisticated. Inter-Village competition also encouraged more elaborate advertisements as businesses began to establish specific lesbian clienteles

and define their product accordingly. Emanating from outside of the city's lesbian communities, Village bar advertisements in *Gazelle* reflected the commodification of lesbian identities in Village spaces.

In 1993, K-2 was renamed G-Spot, a bar that was regularly advertised by purchasing the back cover of *Gazelle*. While G-Spot created advertisements were wide-ranging in imagery and theme, it innovated by being the first bar to use staged photographs with models to sell nightlife to lesbians. Also, G-Spot advertisements always presented images of two women together enjoying some limited sexual

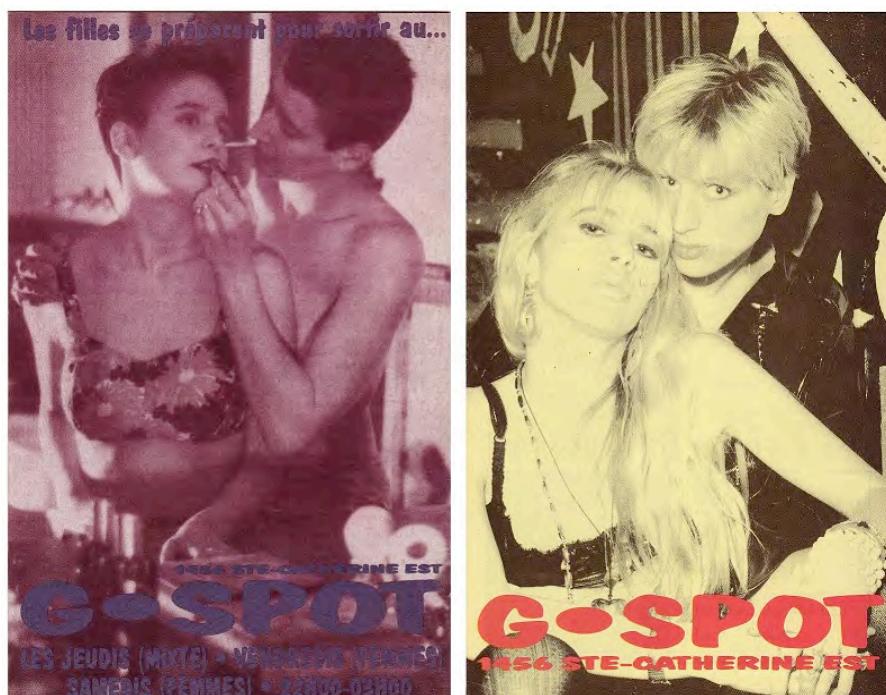


Figure 5. G-Spot Advertisements. (Source: *Gazelle*, 1993 and 1994). Reproduced with permission of Éditions Nitram.

intimacy (Figs. 4 & 5). Like K-2 before it, G-Spot advertisements placed lesbian subjects at the centre of the image and made them active: in these advertisements, lesbians are flirting, dressing up, dancing, kissing and going out in the Village. For example, the images in Figure 5 link lesbian identities to Village bar spaces: one couple is in the bar and the other is preparing for their night out in the Village. The caption reads “The girls are preparing themselves to go out to...G-Spot”. G-Spot advertisements from this period also provided a plethora of lesbian imagery: retro images of feminine women kissing in sailor suits or women wearing dresses and dancing the tango together. These advertisements had not only begun to promote the Village as a place for lesbian nightlife, they were innovative in that they depicted lesbians as agents of the Village and promoted Village lesbian bars as sexual and playful spaces.

By 1993, Loubar had also begun to use a distinctive type of imagery to set itself apart. Although Loubar was a community-oriented tavern, by 1993, its advertising imagery is only suggestively lesbian, resembling the use of ‘window’ advertising in the mainstream media to attract lesbian consumers (Clark, 1991). Two seemingly contradictory types of imagery dominated Loubar advertisements. Text was used to announce the special community events such as parties for Halloween, St. Patrick’s Day or New Year’s Eve (Fig. 6). However, the visual imagery in these advertisements was divorced from the local lesbian context: they usually featured a portrait of an individual woman many of whom were celebrities. In some of these images, the women are simply looking directly at the viewer in ways that are subtly enticing. In others, it is the link between celebrity, female power and lesbian iconography that is central. For example, the Canadian super model Linda Evangelista is featured in an advertisement from 1994. Here, Evangelista’s image is but a suggestive lesbian image as she is posed with a short haircut and is wearing a shirt and tie. A similar imagery is used in the advertisement featuring the actor Linda Hamilton in the Hollywood film *Terminator*. An image of female power, Hamilton’s muscles are taut and she is carrying a machine gun. Loubar advertisements, therefore, had a dual message for Montréal lesbians. First, like the bars of the Plateau, they strove to present



Figure 6. Loubar Advertisements. (Source: *Gazelle*, 1993 and 1994). Reproduced with permission of Éditions Nitram.



themselves as a public space of community for lesbians by hosting events. However, they strongly differentiated themselves from other bars by adopting a suggestive marketing technique used in the mainstream media to communicate with lesbian viewers (Clark, 1991; Lewis, 1997). The appropriation of images of celebrities and models to advertise to lesbians reflected a lesbian gaze on consumer culture in which the viewer could draw on her own subcultural knowledge to create playful and subversive reading.

This gaze on consumer culture and the playful images of the G-Spot advertisements were later abandoned by the advertisers of Village bars. Between 1994 and 1997, their advertisements used new types of imagery that represented a different gaze on the part of the viewer. Advertisements for Sister’s, Factory and Mixte, usually featured single image of a women in more overtly sexually suggestive poses (Fig. 7). They also repeatedly used images of Black women, especially when promoting disco, R&B or soul music themed events. These images are specifically being presented to the viewer for consumption and objectification. Unlike the interacting couples in earlier G-Spot advertisements, they sexually objectify women without necessarily making reference to lesbian sexuality, culture or iconography. They also rely on imagery and themes generally produced for the heterosexual male gaze. While they are pleasurable inversions of this gaze for lesbians (Clark, 1991), the lesbian-specific content is now absent. For example, the advertisement for Factory promotes a “Sweat T-Dance”, an event that is suggestive of a combination of the iconic gay Sunday afternoon tea dance and the heterosexual



Figure 7. Advertisements for Sister’s, Factory 1278 and Mixte. (Source: *Gazelle*, 1994 and 1997). Reproduced with permission of Éditions Nitram.

wet tee-shirt contest. With increased levels of objectification on the part of the viewer came more explicit levels of sexualisation that arguably represent an inversion of this consumer position for lesbians. For example, the same advertisement announces the reprise of an event called “Fuck Me” laid over a woman’s bare midriff. The subheading reads “Succumb to your temptations and fantasies”.

The increased marketing of Village bars and events as sites for the consumption of sexuality became a common theme, but other bars retained the playful imagery and lesbian iconography found in earlier advertisements (Fig. 8). Now much more scantily clad, the imagery used to promote Girls in the Sky and Klytz is reminiscent of the sexually playful and subversive imagery used by G-Spot. In advertisements from mid-1990s, we see groups of naked women looking directly at the viewer inviting lesbians to “Take a walk on the wild side”. There is also an advertisement for an Easter party that uses the image of a woman dressed in



Figure 8. Advertisements for Girls in the Sky and Klytz. (Source: *Gazelle*, 1996 and 1997). Reproduced with permission of Éditions Nitram.

a bunny suit suggestive of a Playboy Bunny. However, the imagery in these advertisements is more mixed and complex and, at times, quite camp and queer. Figure 9, for example, makes the queer orientation of Girls in the Sky even clearer. Promoters chose a scene from the 1965 queer camp film *Faster Pussycat! Kill! Kill!*. All around the imagery are textual clues to the queer identification of this event: there are references to gender-queer drag king performers, sexy cocktail waitresses, x-rated videos, go-go dancers and boot shining.

As lesbian nightlife developed in the Village, the imagery used to promote this location shifted in ways that illustrate a significant change in the relationships between the Village, lesbian identities and consumer culture. Notable shifts occur after the publication of *Gazelle* in 1993. While increased sexualisation and commodification was the common trend, as the market for lesbian nightlife and advertising was established and small submarkets developed, three different types of imagery were employed that were unique to the Village. First, seeking to appeal to the seductive association between commodification and liberation (Fejes, 2003; Hennessy, 1994; Sender, 2004), Loubar used a lesbian gaze on consumer culture to sell the new Village location. Specifically, they appropriated ‘window advertising’



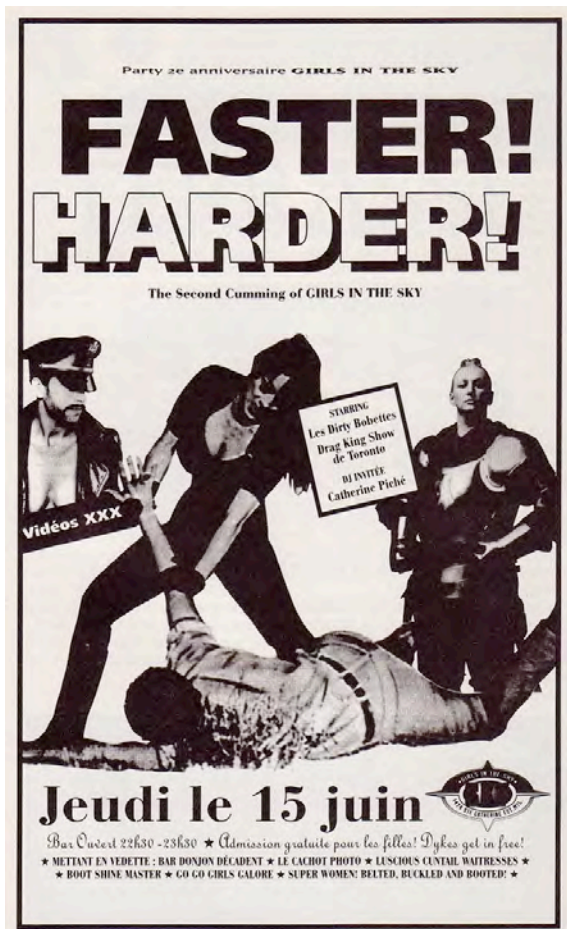


Figure 9. Advertisement for Girls in the Sky. (Source: *Gazelle*, 1995). Reproduced with permission of Éditions Nitram.

from mainstream advertisers, turning the lesbian viewer into a subcultural insider who is empowered by reading the lesbian subtext in Hollywood films and mainstream magazine advertisements (Lewis, 1997). A second form of imagery was used to sell queer alternative spaces for women such as Girls in the Sky and Klytz. The playful and more active images of lesbians found in earlier G-Spot advertisements are echoed after 1993 in the transgressive use of images of groups of naked women enjoying themselves together. Erotic but lesbian-specific, this imagery, combined with queer camp images of drag kings and b-movie stars, was aligned with lesbians who embraced the queer culture in the Village. A third type of imagery was employed by advertisers who were selling Village nightlife to all Montréal lesbians, specifically by Sister's, The Factory and Mixte. These advertisers used explicit relations of objectification, selling Village nightlife through sexualisation and commodification for a lesbian consumer. All three types of imagery represent significant departures from the imagery surrounding bars in other districts even after publication of *Gazelle* in 1993. In contrast with bars in

other areas, the Village was being sold as a place where lesbians were consumers of and participants in a commodified queer culture.

### **Lesbians as Ambivalent Village ‘Queers’**

As advertisements for Village lesbian nightlife demonstrate, very specific identities were associated with the production of lesbian spaces in the Village in the 1990s. On the ground, the experience and interpretation of the Village and its lesbian spaces was more complex. As the research conducted by Pritchard *et al.* (2002) suggests, the lesbian perception and experience of gay village space is often ambivalent, created by a strong tension between their sense of exclusion as lesbians in gay male space and their desire to belong to the queer culture being produced in gay village space. Ray’s (2004) study of Montréal describes how lesbians navigated between a more cosmopolitan ‘queer’ promotion of the Village and identity-specific forms of exclusion and marginalization. For this study, I use a portion of the same bank of interviews. However, since the exclusions described in these interviews are detailed elsewhere (Ray, 2004; Ray and Rose, 2000), I focus here on how, 1) lesbians and saw the Village as a place, 2) the role and meaning of the lesbian nightlife spaces in this site, and 3) the types of lesbian identities produced by the process of integrating lesbians into the commodified queer culture of the Village.

### ***The Gay Village as a Queer Space?***

The women in this study did not strongly identify with the Village as a district. Most reported that they primarily saw it as a gay-male party space. Asha described how she used the Village: “I go to the Village to party. I go there Saturday nights. I go to Sister’s if I go... I go there for Pride, if Pride ends up there, then I’ll go to that area... I go there mostly to go to the bar scene, for the scene” (late 20s, medical professional). Beyond the lesbian bars and women’s nights, they said that the Village did not offer any services that they needed. In addition, they held strong negative views of the district itself, often referring to its poverty and proximity to the city’s historic red-light district. Others were very critical of the commercialism of the Village. Referring to its sex shops, saunas and clothing stores, Andrea said, “...it’s all like this community based on nothing, based on consumerism” (mid-20s, student).

One part of this lesbian ambivalence about the Village was overwhelmingly connected to a sense of exclusion related to gender differences between lesbians and gay men, a common finding in research on lesbians negotiating their presence in gay village spaces (Binnie and Skeggs, 2004; Pritchard *et al.*, 2002; Ray, 2004; Ray and Rose, 2000; Skeggs, 1999). When asked if there was a specific culture in the Village, almost all of the participants described it in as a space dominated by gay men:

Oh yeah...Gay guys. Gay guys who go to the Village all the time. Gay guys who meet at Sky for a drink after work, wearing their suits. Yeah,

that's the Village culture. [It's] guys who go to saunas [and] dykes who go to Sister's' religiously. It's a going out culture. It's a going out and drinking culture (Josée, early 30s, store manager).

As far as I know, it's bars, guys walking around, guys who have their cafés, their shops, like Priape, which is like monument to the penis. It's very sexual, [and the] saunas. It's a market place. And you have a piece of meat for your supper after you've finished. That's how I see the Village (Nicole, early 30s, government employee, my translation).

Although my sample held negative views of the Village and often highlighted the dominance of gay men, they simultaneously depicted it as a place of LGBTQ diversity in which lesbians engaged with queer culture. For example, Irène described it as a space of queer diversity. She stated that, in the Village, we can find:

...all kinds of people, the guys in leather, the transvestites, the women from different milieux also, from the east of the city, the Plateau, all kinds of styles of people, you know, butch, femme, all kinds of fashions. That's the gay world, also, diversity. That's what [the Village] does... All kinds of people, you know? (mid-30s, unemployed, my translation).

Others articulated the 'queerness' of the Village when they described the role that it played in their lives. For example, when asked how she used it, Dana (mid 30s, video artist) said, "I go to participate in the queer bar thing". Dana further stated that it was an important location in the city for identifying as a lesbian who is part of queer culture:

Well, as a lesbian who's part of queer, the Gay Village is important as a place to identify a certain queerness to the mainstream... So, in terms of some tangible, concrete, identifiable gay and lesbian thing it's important that way, but when you get more into the specifics of me being a lesbian as a part of it, it's a bit less significant.

As Dana indicates, identifying with and participating in queer culture in the Village created complicated the relationship between a lesbian-specific and a queer identity. The Village was a place where she went to identify as a lesbian who was part of the queer umbrella. Many of the participants said that it played this role in their lives: lesbian bars and other spaces outside of the Village were seen as lesbian-specific, but Village bars – including Village lesbian bars – were seen as places to engage in queer commercial culture.

### ***Village Lesbian Bars***

Interpretations of lesbian-specific commercial spaces in the Village also demonstrate a tension between exclusion and inclusion, between gender marginalization and queer belonging. On the one hand, most participants felt that lesbian spaces in the Village were physically marginalized. Many interviewees

were also very critical of the location and quality of lesbian bars relative to other spaces in the Village. As most of the lesbian bars were located on the top floors of large complexes, many respondents said they felt that lesbian spaces were invisible. Moreover, these 'attic' spaces were often perceived as being second-rate and small. An example of this sentiment comes from Béatrice:

We are always on the third floor in a non-visible place. We're not visible to passers-by down on the street in the Village. We're up on top at Station C. We're always in lost corners, and always in smaller spaces. It is always the space that is designed with less money (late 20s, student, my translation).

Three themes in the interviews, however, demonstrate that these marginal spaces were important sites for the production of lesbian identity and community in this period. First, most of my respondents frequented these bars on a regular basis, some as often as once a week and others about once a month. Secondly, their descriptions of these bars reveal a rich and detailed knowledge of the geographies of lesbian identity in Village lesbian bars. Andrea, for example, gave a tour of the bar spaces and their respective clienteles:

The sport dyke crowd goes to the Loubar... And Sister's is like the middle-class lesbian scene. They all wear little blazers. They're all real estate agents, airline ticket people or um, bank tellers, or they want to be. I find Sky always had the young school crowd, which is what I'd be into would be going to Sky.

Finally, the interviewees frequently argued that Village nightlife was important because it accommodated a diversity of lesbian identities many of which could only be found in the Village. These identities included middle-class 'gay women', sporty dykes, queer-identified lesbians, Anglophones and lesbians of colour. Not only were these identities more strongly identified with the Village, but they were seen as lesbian subcategories that were not present in bars elsewhere in the city.

Many of these subcategories of lesbian identity were also specifically associated with particular Village bars. For example, Loubar was described as specifically white, Francophone and suburban, a tavern that catered to older women who came to the Village in large groups for happy hour after work or after a softball game. Therefore, many found it unfriendly, especially the Anglophones, women of colour and any who identified as more 'alternative'. Very few of my sample were 'insiders' in this bar and it was usually described as very socially-closed, homogeneous and even intimidating. My respondents characterized this bar in one of two ways. Many questioned the politics of Loubar lesbians, suggesting that they were not feminists nor socially progressive. Others, more likely to frequent this bar on occasion, said that Loubar served older women who went to bars earlier in the evening before returning to the suburbs. For example, Béatrice stated, at Loubar, "...it is perhaps more people who go to a restaurant... It's the happy hour group... After that, they'll finish their evening in a restaurant nearby.

It's gangs of women there... gangs of women who go out together" (my translation).

In contrast with the closed and more specific identity of Loubar, Sister's was described as being more open to everyone. Josée pointed out that "...Sister's is always the bar that has the most women of colour in it that I've noticed. I think that's important to note because it's not something that you see at ♀-Side" (a Plateau bar). Asha made similar observations with regard to her comfort as a South Asian woman in Sister's. She recalled that when she first went to Sister's, "...there weren't a lot of East Indian women there, but there were some Black women and I didn't feel as conspicuous". She described Sister's as a more multicultural space where there are "...a lot of Black, South Asian, East Asian, [and] Greek [women], you know, some difference on a Saturday night". Similar observations were made regarding the linguistic identities of women in Sister's. As Anne noted, "I think that it is younger, more bilingual too. One is easily approached in English there" (early 30s, student, my translation). Sister's was also notable for its diversity of lesbian identities. As the only space that was specifically a women-only nightclub, Sister's was a space for all lesbians, Anglophone and Francophone, young and old, mainstream or alternative.

In contrast, Girls in the Sky was valued for its 'queerness'. Despite the fact that most women frequented this space on women's nights, they valued Sky because it provided an opening to queer culture and a departure from established lesbian space. Béatrice said "Sky on Thursday nights, you go with your gay guy friend or with your girl friends and you cruise" (my translation). Similarly, Martha said,

I really like Sky because it's mixed, and a pretty balanced mix, at least on Thursday night. I like the different rooms and the different DJ options and all those things... I like that it's lots of drag queens. It's a place where everybody's welcome, scruffy, and glamorous, it's really mixed in there. I like that" (late 20s, dancer).

Due to its association with queer culture, Sky was usually described as young and more alternative. Sylvia said, "...Sky dykes are sort of women in their early twenties, I guess between twenty and thirty. Quite a few younger women, club types, [who] like to dance, drink and stay out till three o'clock in the morning" (mid-20s, social worker). Like Sister's, it was seen a space that where lesbian identities were diversifying, but it was not necessarily considered a site of 'lesbian' diversity: it was the place for more alternative lesbian identities, and many of my respondents identified with this space. Nicole described Sky as "...another world...When it started on Thursday nights, it was fun. There were all kinds of new people, interesting women. It is very Anglophone also. It is not the same [as Sister's]" (my translation). Contrasting the queer-identified lesbians of Sky with the women who frequented the more feminist-identified Plateau bars, Dawn (mid 30s, medical professional) said, "I find Sky's a lot more diversified. There's a lot of

bar dyke's, but bar dykes that I find really interesting that have a whole cultural life, a whole political life, but they go to the bar on top of everything else". Associated with young, queer-identified clubbers, Sky was seen as a politicized space where the reworking of lesbian identity was expressed through the sharing of nightlife with a diversity of LGBTQ populations that came together in the Village.

### ***Village Lesbian Identities***

My sample described the clientele of Village lesbian nightlife spaces in ways that strongly parallel their descriptions of Village lesbian identities. However, when asked to describe 'Village lesbians', the rich and detailed descriptions of identity in the lesbian bars were replaced with stereotypes that were strongly aligned with forces shaping Village space. Robyn (late 20s, social worker) described two types of Village lesbians: "...there's the more militant look, shaved heads and piercings, and you see a lot of the fag-hag look, with the cutesy little bags, the make-up and the little boots and the leather coats. They are either incredibly fashionable or militant". Associated with two distinct aspects of Village space in the 1990s – commodification and queerness – these forms of lesbian embodiment are also strongly connected to sharing cultural space with gay men: fashionable lesbian consumers are described as resembling 'fag-hags' and the shaved heads and piercings of the 'militant' lesbians align them with forms of embodiment that they shared with queer-identified gay men.

As in the advertisements for Village lesbian bars, these two identities, the lesbian consumer and the queer-identified lesbian, dominated the descriptions of Village lesbians. The lesbian consumer was repeatedly depicted as apolitical and anti-intellectual, a lesbian who uncritically embraced the commodification of LGBTQ identities in the Village. As Josée argued, Village lesbians were never seen at political or literary events or in the feminist bars of the Plateau. She described them as "...young and white and really superficial. Not politically inclined. The lesbians that you'll see hanging out at Sister's... I suspect that they read *Gazelle* and go out to Sister's". Similarly, Anne said "...nothing against those women, but I wouldn't really find those women in the bars on Saint-Denis... it is a certain category [of lesbians] and I do not find it representative" [of all lesbians] (my translation). Here, the contrast with the feminist politics localized in the bars on the Plateau, is used relationally to construct Village lesbians as apolitical consumers.

Queer-identified lesbians were described as more 'alternative', 'out' and political. For example, Sandra (late 20s, teacher) said, that Village lesbians "...are probably a little more hardcore lesbian. You know, you see more of the shaved head look, unless it's a big hopping night and then you'll see all sorts". Similarly, Asha said, "...who knows what they do by day, but by night it seems like they're very out, they're very relaxed, they're very comfortable with their sexuality". This second category was seen as strongly connected to the interactions between lesbians and gay men in the queer spaces of the Village. Indeed, many of the

respondents said that Village lesbians were, in their dress and behaviour, modelling themselves on gay men. Dana described Village lesbians as appropriating the gay male clone look that was prominent in the late 1980s and early 1990s:

JP: So, is there any lesbian aspect to that culture [in the Village]?

Dana: I think that there must be. Well, there's kind of an almost gay boy look for young lesbians.

JP: What does that look like?

Dana: Like a little gay boy.

JP: White tee-shirt, jeans...

Dana: ...and cute little shorts...and a tee-shirt, and even a leather thing.

In addition to the appropriation of a gay male aesthetic, many respondents said that Village lesbians were adopting gay male cultural practices. For example, Dawn argued that Village lesbians were women who "...have kind of idealized and romanticized gay male culture and who have appropriated that culture in ways that isn't very nuanced. It's like a straight translation, the only difference is they don't have a dick". Lola, however, described them in more complex terms. She links Village lesbians to avant-garde, American English-language queer cultural movements led by gay men:

In essence, in the bars in the Village, there are more lesbians who are more identified with the leather movement, or S/M, girls who dress in police uniforms, or completely in black or leather... and it is very Anglophone. It is more the Anglophones or the Francophones that we see in the Anglophone world. It is really Anglophone women who...are...very up on cultural movements that are more avant-garde [and] American and they are really close to gay guys... they have the same aesthetic, that same way of moving.... (early 30s, researcher, my translation).

Lola's description of Village lesbians implicates language, cultural movements, the diversification of lesbian sexualities and aesthetics in ways that are clearly aligned with the impact of queer culture on lesbian identity in urban space.

In summary, lesbians unevenly, partially, and quite ambivalently adopted the Village as a site for the production of lesbian identities and communities. While they were critical of the commercialism, the dominance of gay men, and the invisibility of lesbians in the Village, its venues created the opportunity to explore new forms of nightlife, new relationships with gay men and to rework lesbian identities in relation to queer culture and queer commodification. What were seen as more apolitical lesbian identities associated with the commodification of the Village were expressed in Loubar and Sister's. While Loubar provided a space for a specific group, Sister's created a diverse and inclusive space for multiple groups, many of whom were rarely seen in other spaces. Girls in the Sky provided a space

for lesbians who increasingly identified with North American, English-language queer movements and who embraced the Village as the site of 'queer' culture. These reconfigurations of space and identity led to the articulation of two primary identities that had been promoted in bar advertisements and were now associated with Village lesbians in the 1990s: lesbians who embraced the possibilities created by commodification and lesbians who saw themselves as queer.

## Conclusion

The objective of this paper has been to provide an alternative reading of Montréal's Village gai by examining the integration, commodification and interpretation of lesbian identities and nightlife spaces in the 'queer' 1990s. In contrast with the existing literatures that focus on the lesbian exclusions in gay village spaces, I have argued that the confluence of an emerging queer culture, the advent of gay and lesbian marketing, and the expansion and diversification of gay villages during in the 1990s, also created opportunities for the inclusion of lesbians and the reworking of their identities. I began by demonstrating that the Village became a distinct location for a variety of forms of lesbian nightlife in the period between 1991 and 1997. This development involved their integration into the market for large-scale complexes that had initially been created to serve gay men. As the lesbian market for nightlife developed, competition between bar owners combined with the advertising opportunities provided by the glossy lesbian magazine *Gazelle*, led to the production of new sets of imagery that linked lesbian identities to Village spaces in distinctive ways. At first, these images celebrated lesbian culture and identity in the Village, but with time, the images were reformulated in ways that either embraced the commodification and objectification of women or celebrated a more resistant queer lesbian identity. A similar complexity was observed in the ways in which lesbians during this period saw the Village, its lesbian spaces and associated lesbian identities. While lesbians were generally ambivalent about the Village and its lesbian nightlife spaces, they clearly describe important departures in lesbian identities developing in this site in the late 1990s. Village club and bar spaces were created for a range of lesbian identities that had not necessarily been integrated into the market for bars elsewhere. In the 1990s, the Village was particularly important for lesbians who identified with queer culture and politics and for those who embraced the commodification of LGBTQ identities in gay village space.

This study can be instructive for the study of the development of gay villages in at least three ways. First, the 1990s needs to be seen as more than just one stage in the development of gay village spaces, especially with regard to lesbians. As this case study demonstrates, lesbians were important participants in the expansion and diversification of Montréal's Village gai in this decade. While attempts diversify the Village would ultimately create important asymmetries between gay men and queer 'others', in the 1990s the production lesbian nightlife brought opportunities to experiment with the commodification and queering of lesbian identity. With this in mind, a second contribution of this case study is to demonstrate that the



relationships between lesbians, commercial culture and urban space have yet to be fully explored. By the early 1990s, Montréal lesbians were one of the target markets for Village business owners who sold their nightlife spaces by advertising in an emerging gay and lesbian commercial press. Despite the fact that most existing research on lesbians in urban space was conducted in the 1990s, lesbians have been located outside of commercial culture and depicted as excluded subjects of the gay village in this literature. This is clearly a partial portrait of lesbians in a decade that brought both the expansion of the gay and lesbian market and the integration of lesbians into commodified gay village space. This concern with addressing the complexity of lesbian identities in the 1990s brings me to my final point: this case study suggests that it is important to examine both inclusions and exclusions in the production of gay village spaces. While there has been a significant amount of research that highlights the exclusions created by the production of homonormative relations of power in gay villages, for lesbians these relations were perhaps less certain in the early 1990s when commodification seemed to increase queer visibility and political power. In the case of lesbians in Montréal's Village gai in the 1990s, the diversification of its nightlife was certainly formed through the commodification of a gay-led queer culture. However, the spaces that were created were meaningful in the lives of some lesbians. While commodified and perhaps normative in representation, on the ground these nightlife spaces brought lesbians new opportunities to socialize with each other, a new location in which they could build communities, and a new place for the expression of lesbian identities that were only 'included' within the production of queer commercial space in the gay village.

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