


QUEER FAMILIES AND RELATIONSHIPS AFTER MARRIAGE EQUALITY

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QUEER STREET FAMILIES

Place-making and community among
LGBT youth of color in iconic gay
neighborhoods

Theodore Greene

Editors' introduction:

In this chapter, sociologist Theodore Greene presents the last of the volume's four examples of queer families beyond same-sex marriage, drawing on his ethnographic research on conflicts around queer and trans youth of color who hang out in Chicago's iconic LGBTQ neighborhood, Boystown. The youths come to Boystown seeking spaces where they can freely express their gendered and sexual selves, but the overwhelmingly commercial focus of most of the neighborhood's institutions renders much of the neighborhood inaccessible to them. They respond by forming what Greene calls "queer street families" in which they hang out and care for each other in public spaces along the neighborhood's main streets.

Greene argues that queer street families are adapted from models of street-corner socializing familiar to the youths from the neighborhoods where they live. At the same time, family norms for the predominantly white, middle-class gays who live in Boystown are moving in the opposite direction, increasingly privatized behind the closed doors of their homonormative homes. Greene thus suggests that the racialized and classed conflict over the youths' presence in Boystown also reflects a conflict between different ways of understanding family and kinship, which manifest in different ways of using the neighborhood's spaces. By bridging the sociology of urban space and the sociology of family, Greene's argument pushes us to think more broadly about how same-sex marriage can shape the space, both metaphorical and literal, available for different forms of queer caring.

At 11:30 p.m. on Saturday, July 2, 2011, fifty local residents, mostly gay white men, convened at a 7-Eleven parking lot for a "positive loitering walk" through the streets of Boystown, Chicago's iconic gay neighborhood on the city's north side. Residents intended to raise awareness about the recent wave of violent crimes in the area, which had culminated in several violent fights during Chicago's Pride festivities the preceding weekend. However, as they began dividing into groups, a group

of thirty protesters confronted the "positive loiterers." Composed largely of queer youth of color representing the local organization GenderJUST, the group shouted at the positive loiterers through megaphones, accusing local residents of policing queer youth out of the neighborhood by making their presence the scapegoat for the upsurge in crime. Despite the walk organizers' efforts to respond peacefully to these allegations, the counter-protesters overwhelmed the positive loiterers with chants such as "We're gonna beat back police attack." Eventually losing their cool, the positive loiterers began yelling back at the counter-protesters: "Get the fuck out of my neighborhood," one gay white man yelled back at the queer youth.

The standoff eventually attracted a crowd of partygoers spilling out from the local gay bars. Whenever the positive loiterers attempted to create distance from the queer youth, the counter-protesters followed, provoking the loiterers into confrontation. Following a few minutes of cat-and-mouse, the positive loiterers managed to evade the counter-protesters long enough to organize themselves into groups and begin their walk. However, as the positive loiterers moved through the neighborhood, groups of black and brown youth followed, jeering at the walkers through megaphones. By the end of the night, organizers of the walk had come to believe that the queer youth had coopted and derailed their peaceful protest. Expressing their frustration to the *Windy City Times*, walk organizer Robert Sall accused the protesters of drawing unwanted, negative attention to the positive loiterers. "This clearly goes against everything we do on our walk," Sall explained, "because we move through the neighborhood quietly and peacefully" (Soin, 2011b).

The counter-protesters understood the evening differently. To them, Boystown provided a safe haven for LGBT youth of color, who sometimes traveled for hours to escape the homophobia, transphobia, and violence experienced at the hands of family and peers in their local communities. However, as broader trends in greater acceptance for LGBT citizens attract queer youth to gay neighborhoods like Boystown, they often encounter hostility from local residents. Many endure racial profiling and criminalization (Rios, 2011) by business owners and the local police; others face sexual objectification and exploitation at the hands of local residents, many of whom publicly lash out against their presence in the neighborhood as a threat to community safety. Protesting provided queer youth an opportunity not only to defend their presence in the gaybohood, but also to demand recognition from local residents as legitimate stakeholders within the community. Janel Bailey, one of the representatives of GenderJUST, explained to the *Windy City Times* the youths' shared investment in community safety. "We are the queer youth of color and allies and sex workers," she stated. "We are also concerned with . . . safety and want to be included in this conversation and not necessarily made targets" (Soin, 2011b).

The stakes that mobilize LGBT youth to defend their presence in gay neighborhoods such as Boystown motivate this chapter. Even as recent scholarship on gay neighborhoods highlights their decline and disappearance in the "post-gay" era (Ghaziani, 2014), iconic gay neighborhoods have attracted queer youth of color seeking communities in which their sexual and gender identities are affirmed and supported. However, as queer youth of color are excluded from the sociocultural,

political, and economic life of the gay/neighborhood, many reproduce the street-corner culture traditionally associated with black and Latinx urban spaces to create queer versions of "street families," that is, affective communities forged around "mutual support for and encouragement for an alternative lifestyle that appears highly attractive to many adolescents, regardless of family background" (Anderson, 1991, p. 375). Similar to the "chosen families" that LGBT adults have historically created in queer commercial cultural, and political institutions (Weston, 1991), queer street families rely on their spatial practices in gay neighborhoods to create bonds of kinship, grounded in mutual support and obligation. Creating alternative safe spaces in and around key institutional anchors in gay neighborhoods, queer street families foster supportive environments of gender and sexual expression, protect each other from outside threats, manage internal conflicts, and defend their legitimate rights to participate as full members of the local community. More importantly, through their unique participation, queer street families affirm the symbolic value of gay neighborhoods in an era in which greater social, political, and legal recognition of same-sex marriage and "LGBT families" has called the salience of gay neighborhoods into question.

"Families we choose" in iconic gay neighborhoods¹

Popular and academic scholars associate increasing social, political, and cultural acceptance of LGBT citizens, accelerated by the 2015 Supreme Court decision legalizing same-sex marriage in the United States, with a concurrent decreasing need for iconic gay neighborhoods as anchors of safety and community (Brown, 2007; Collins & Drinkwater, 2017; Ghaziani, 2014; Jackson & Nargis, 2017; Kumerth, 2007; Lef, 2007; Spero, 2016). Arguments supporting the decline of iconic gay neighborhoods privilege the shifting residential, political, and sociocultural priorities of LGBT nuclear families, now legitimated through the successes of the contemporary LGBT rights movement. Evidence supporting both the residential "de-gayng" of iconic gay neighborhoods and the residential diffusion of LGBT residents throughout the United States is based only on counts of same-sex of LGBT residents throughout the United States is based only on counts of same-sex partners, rendering uncoupled LGBT residents invisible (Anacker & Morrow-Jones, 2005; Gates & Ost, 2004; Ghaziani 2014; Spring, 2013). Scholars attribute the dwindling cultural institutions in gay neighborhoods (such as gay bars, bathhouses, bookstores) not only to the convenience and ubiquity of online dating apps such as Grindr (Kumerth, 2007; Smith, 2008; Sullivan, 2007; Usher & Morrison, 2010; Williams, 2007), but also to the growing desire for child-specific amenities in gay neighborhoods (such as good schools and safe parks), which aligns homonormative residents with their heterosexual counterparts in sanitizing the flamboyant, sexualized culture historically associated with iconic gay neighborhoods (Kyles, 2007; Orne, 2017). Taking these together, scholars center the lives of homonormative LGBT families to emphasize the successful integration of LGBT residents into mainstream communities, including small towns and suburban areas (Brekhus, 2003; Brown-Saracino, 2011).

However, these studies divert attention from the diverse people and practices that work to protect queer spaces and places in cities, from single LGBT residents creating "chosen families" among friends (Weston, 1991) to economically displaced or priced-out populations with longstanding ties to community in gay neighborhoods. Many who participate in preserving gay neighborhoods are not necessarily residents of the community; rather they couple a sense of shared identity with their participation in the cultural, social, and political life of a local area to legitimate themselves as community members, who act against perceived threats to their visions of authentic community. I refer to this form of non-residential community participation as *vicarious citizenship* (Greene, 2014). Vicarious citizens use a variety of spatial practices to situate themselves as legitimate stakeholders within gay neighborhoods, from openly displaying affection in public spaces to economically participating in gay bars, gay-identified restaurants, and bathhouses. Generally, vicarious citizens conform their cultural and spatial practices with those most associated with a local area's "authentic" community.

Queer youth of color constitute a unique class of vicarious citizens, however. Many of those who seek gay neighborhoods for community cannot easily access the institutions traditionally associated with community because much of what anchors the material culture in gay neighborhoods is age-restrictive and economically dependent on paying patrons. As a result, many queer youths create their own communities, combining street-corner practices from their own local communities with local LGBT cultural symbols and institutions to claim space within gay neighborhoods. Being on sidewalks and in public spaces in the gay neighborhood exposes youth to the area's cultural and socio-political community through casual and peripheral contact with other LGBT-identified individuals, and this visibility attracts the participation of other queer youth of color in search of community and resources to support their sexual and gender identities.

Through their spatial practices, queer youth of color produce a partially oppositional culture in gay neighborhoods that mirrors the "codes of the street" governing street families in inner cities (Anderson, 1994, 1999). Like "street families," queer street families organize around "informal rules governing interpersonal behavior," including by using violence to mediate internal conflicts and external threats. Consequently, queer street families mistrust police and institutional authority figures, who represent the interests of the dominant white society and demonstrate little concern for protecting the lives of people of color. Because their spatial practices can sometimes resemble the violent, illicit activities often associated with the iconic ghetto (Anderson, 2012), the presence of black and brown queer youth on street corners is often misrecognized by local residents as a threat to public safety, even as gay men sexually exploit and harass queer youth who participate in the area's underground sexual economy.

However, in contrast to the scholarly literature that relegates their presence in gay neighborhoods simply to "bearing witness" as "inheritors" of queer culture and community (Ghaziani, 2014, p. 178), queer street families also function as a creative force within iconic gay neighborhoods. As gay neighborhoods "de-gay" in the

wake of broader social acceptance for (mostly white, middle-class, cisgender) gay people, queer youth of color reproduce a vibrant public culture that supports and facilitates their unique communities. Their visible street-corner culture in a traditionally "white space" (Anderson, 2015) not only produces conflict between local residents and the youths along racial and class lines, but also creates competing relational orders arising out of distinct spatial practices. While local residents create a relational order that plays out in private homes and quasi-public spaces (such as bars and gay institutions), queer youth of color perform collective, familial intimacy in public spaces, refashioning key institutional anchors and cultural codes to fight isolation, protect one another, and legitimate their presence and families in Boystown to those who dismiss them as interlopers.

Methods and site selection

Despite its reputation as "the most studied city in the world" (Lloyd, 2010, p. 14), Chicago provides a valuable site for studying processes of queer youth place-making and community in iconic gay neighborhoods. Located in Chicago's Lakeview neighborhood, Boystown bears the distinction as the first municipally recognized gay neighborhood in the United States, commemorated in 1998 by the installation of twenty-two 23-foot-high, illuminated, rainbow-ringed pylons along Halsted Street, Boystown's main street. Even as experts provide evidence of the decreasing LGBT population in Boystown and the diffusion of LGBT-headed households into neighborhoods throughout the city, including neighboring Andersonville and Rogers Park (Ghaziani, 2014; Perry & Vite, 2017), Boystown still remains the cultural, commercial, and political heart of the LGBT community. Many bars and services are still located in Boystown, and it still hosts the annual Chicago Pride Parade, which in recent years has welcomed in excess of a million spectators (Bain, 2014; Miller, 2014; Orne, 2017).

Between 2011 and 2016, I collected ethnographic and archival data in Boystown's neighborhood. I recorded field notes from my daily and nightly rounds (Hunter, 2010; Logan & Molotch, 2007), as well as at local festivals, church services, and zoning board and community town meetings. I also spent considerable time observing interactions in gay institutions, such as bars, restaurants, community centers, and bookstores. Additionally, through a multipoint snowball sample, I interviewed a further twenty-five Chicago residents who represented a variety of gay and straight community actors living, working, and socializing in the Boystown area. Interviews focused on subjects' gender racial, and sexual identities, residential histories, and recreational and political involvement in the community; the qualities of places they most and least valued; and changes they had witnessed in iconic gay neighborhoods. Interviews varied in duration from thirty minutes to two hours, with most lasting at least an hour.

Drawing on these data, I now turn to my results, beginning with the various socio-spatial practices in which queer youth engage not only to escape the persecution and homophobia they encounter in their own neighborhoods, but also to mitigate the exclusion they encounter by local residents in iconic gay neighborhoods.

Making the strange familiar

Many of the queer youth who seek refuge in Boystown are too young or lack the financial resources to gain access to gay commercial establishments. During the day, many queer youths take advantage of the free services and programming offered by either the Center on Halsted (the LGBT Community Center) or the Broadway Youth Center (a drop-in center run by the Howard Brown Health Center). However, once these establishments close for the evening (usually around 10 p.m.), most are left with few safe spaces in which to congregate. On Saturday nights, one can find a group of eight to ten youths hanging on a given street corner, laughing and gossiping loudly with one another. Many are homeless, turned out by their families because of their gender and sexual identities and, as a result, resorting to sex work as a means of survival. Those who wander the streets alone at night are often perceived as sex workers operating in the neighborhood's underground sexual economy, and become vulnerable to sexual exploitation and physical violence—often at the hands of local residents in search of discreet sexual encounters.

Those who travel to Boystown in groups tend to cluster on street corners around their hangout spots (such as outside the Center on Halsted) and along Halsted, Belmont, or Broadway Streets, where most of the gay institutions and markers are located. During the day they walk down the street in pairs or small groups, making occasional stops at convenience stores or one of the neighborhood coffee shops. In appearance, they dress in the fashion of any typical teenager you might find hanging out on the south side of the city. Young men and masculine-presenting women wear white t-shirts with chains around their necks, baggy jeans exposing colorful boxer shorts, and backward baseball caps representing their favorite sports teams. The women typically wear midriff tops that often expose pierced navels, as well as tight cropped jeans and a variety of accessories, from large hoop earrings to colorful bracelets that jangle as they move.

Some are out as early as 7:00 a.m., using particular street corners and parking lots as makeshift beauty shops, with trans women in groups of two and three using storefront windows to apply each other's makeup. Throughout the day, queer youth often take advantage of bathrooms in coffee shops to clean up and fix their presentation for the streets. Destiny (nineteen, black, trans woman) lives as D'Andre on the south side of Chicago with her mother and two younger brothers. Fearful of the violence she might encounter if she revealed herself as Destiny in her neighborhood, she travels for an hour on public transportation to "run with her girls in Boystown." As she transfers to the train toward the Addison stop, she slowly transforms into Destiny, using empty conductor's booths on the train to change her clothes. Once she disembarks from the train in Boystown, she searches for the nearest bathroom to complete her transformation. "The first thing I do when I get into Boystown," she explained, "is put my hair and makeup on." For trans women like Destiny, Boystown provides an important physical boundary for safe experimentation with and expression of burgeoning sexual and gender identities.

While indeed conspicuous, many of the cliques found along Halsted Street and Broadway tend to socialize among themselves, rarely interacting directly with other denizens conducting their daily or nightly rounds (Hunter, 2010; Logan & Molotch, 2007). Sometimes, groups interrupt their play in order to share the sidewalks with passersby. Once during my observation, a group of black teenagers were hanging out on the corner across from the Center on Halsted when two of the members—a tall, slender, effete black man and a short, heavy-set woman giving off a masculine presentation—started sparring in the street, to the cheers and laughter of their friends. As their “play-fighting” continued, a middle-aged, straight couple turned the corner. “Hey, hey,” one of the members signaled. The two fighters immediately halted and the group lined themselves along the side of the building to allow the couple and several other pedestrians to pass through. When the area was finally clear, the group resumed their play and within seconds the woman had the man in a full-nelson hold. “I’m just playing! I’m just playing!” the young man shouted in submission, breathless from the combination of the hold and his incessant laughter. At times, these spatial practices can also prove disruptive to the more traditional production of daytime and nighttime space. Ken (thirty-four, Latino, gay) and Gabriel (thirty, Latino, gay) recalled a time when a group of black teens appropriated the street outside of Sidetrack, a popular gay bar on the Halsted Street strip, to play double-dutch, a very popular jump-rope game played in urban black neighborhoods. “We were hanging out near the windows overlooking the street,” Ken explained, “when, like out of nowhere, these kids were outside the entrance [of the bar] on the street double-dutching.” “They were double-dutching in the street,” Gabriel interrupted. “Oh yeah,” Ken responded. “They were in the street, because people were getting pissed that they couldn’t park there.”

It was crazy! They were taking up two parking spaces, and then there were cars that were trying to park there, and people were screaming at them. And they kept on double-dutching, and all these people [on the street] stopped and were staring at them . . . and the cars were slowing down. I mean, it was like an incident, as it were.

This reconstruction of public space is not unlike the use of street corners, sidewalks, and other public space by youth in predominantly black and Latino neighborhoods (Gotham & Brunley, 2002; Jacobs, 1961; Venkatesh, 2000). Double-dutching in the street is likely common for the youths in the above example, yet because gay neighborhoods are typically imagined as adult spaces, this activity seemed incongruent with the expected cultural production of space on Halsted.

Queer youth of color also take to the streets to protect the culture they have produced within the neighborhood. As in the example that introduced this chapter, queer youth sometimes draw from the code of the street in order to intimidate challengers. They may also mobilize in formal protest. Organizations such as GenderJUST, a multiracial, inter-generational grassroots organization based on Chicago’s south side, provide a formal forum for queer youth to defend their interests against

local residents who unfairly scapegoat their presence in the neighborhood as a threat to local safety. In the fall of 2010, the organization protested against the Northalsted Business Alliance’s support for the profiling of young people of color in local-area businesses (Daniel-McCarter, 2012; Nair, 2010). When the tensions arising out of the “positive loitering” walk spilled over to a local community policing meeting, the youths held a press conference outside the building to express their concerns about being unfairly policed by the local community. Several youth, representing the organization in bright yellow shirts emblazoned with its name, shared experiences of racial profiling and harassment by local residents and the police. Describing his experience of being called the “n-word” by local residents, twenty-one-year-old Southside resident Joshua McCool explained the difficulties that he and many like him faced in Boystown. “We have issues already on the south and west sides that we are dealing with as queer youth,” McCool told the crowd, encouraged by his friends.

But when you go to this place that is supposed to be this gay-friendly place, you realize “Oh, I forgot I’m of color. Now where do I go to?” Boystown is supposed to be the gay place for Chicago, but I always say that it seems to be more like white Boystown.

Their visibility in the neighborhood also attracts queer youths who may participate in protests without affiliating themselves to GenderJUST.

Although many of these practices seem inconsistent with more traditional forms of community place-making, queer youth of color make gay neighborhoods culturally and socio-politically meaningful to them, not only as forms of resistance (Shepard & Smithson, 2011), but as vital to the production and maintenance of community. As I highlight in the following section, public spaces also operate as sites where intimate relations among queer youth unfold. Queer street families not only mobilize to protect their stake in the local community, but also rely on one another to compensate for the sense of recognition and community that local LGBT residents and institutions have largely denied them.

The public nature of familial intimacies

Like many of the queer youths I interviewed, Brooklyn (twenty-two, black, trans woman) met her crew quite by accident. One Saturday evening, Brooklyn was standing along Belmont when a man in a sports car drove up and propositioned her for sex. “Before I could even make up my mind about [going with] him,” she explained, “these girls just came up to the car and pulled me away.” After a heated exchange between the trans woman and the man in the car, he drove away. “They warned me to stay away from him ‘cause he was . . . the kind who would take advantage of a girl and not give them what he promised.” In hanging out with these women, Brooklyn learned of the safe corners and the right times for meeting “clients,” how to look out for the police who patrol the streets at night, and what to do if

she saw one of the girls being harassed by local residents or the police. "When we are on these streets," Brooklyn explained, "we got nobody but us. They may get on my nerves at times, but we always look out for our own."

Brooklyn's story illuminates how the bonds of kinship between queer youth of color arise out of their spatial practices in Bostown. Given their experiences of hostility from local residents, business owners, and the police, queer youth of color express solidarity toward one another, especially when they are exposed to an external threat. Brooklyn had never met the women before their intervention; however, she quickly trusted their knowledge of navigating the street life in Bostown. Conversely, the trans women who came to her rescue had no investment in the outcome of Brooklyn's interaction with the John; in a different context, if these women also participated in the sexual economy, they might have viewed Brooklyn as competition. Nevertheless, they felt a sense of obligation to use their knowledge of the street to protect one of their own from a potentially dangerous situation. "There are times when I just want to kill [my crew]," Javier (twenty-one, Latino, gay) explained. "However, when the chips are down, and my boys are in trouble, I got their back, and I know they got mine. We're family, and family will go down for one another."

Because of the dearth of private spaces available to them, queer youths often perform intimate moments in public spaces. These activities range from expressing affection to one another to performing personal functions that usually take place within the private domain (such as trans women helping each other with their hair and makeup along storefronts). Even conflicts arising between them are mediated in public view regardless of the time of day. One afternoon while sitting along the bar in a coffee shop in Bostown, I witnessed a young, slender Latino male approaching a tall, sinewy black man leaning up against the café window and playing with his cell phone. Snatching the phone out of the black man's hands, the young Latino, who stood about a head shorter than his opponent stood on his tiptoes and got in the black man's face. "You got my man locked up?" the Latino accused. "What?" the black man asked back. "What the fuck you talking about?" "You got my man locked up!" the Latino reiterated before sucker-punching the black man in the face. The two men began fighting on the street corner, exchanging wild blows with each other as pedestrians stepped into the street to avoid them. A group of peers quickly rushed to the fighters and separated them, pulling the combatants in opposite directions along Belmont Street. Walking home a few hours later, I saw the group walking together along Halsted Street, laughing and speaking over each other loudly. The two fighters, their faces slightly bruised and bandaged, walked along the street with their arms around each other's shoulders.

The fact that the fight occurred during rush hour in plain sight of bystanders and without regard to their safety seemed of little consequence. For the youths in the neighborhood, such altercations provide one of a variety of ways in which these groups resolve conflicts among themselves. Similar to inner-city street families, even the most violent altercations have an organization among queer street families, as the rules under which queer street families operate are established and enforced internally.

Like many families, queer street families can prove dysfunctional and combative; however, the fact that their issues play out in public magnifies the concerns of local residents and many adult participants within Bostown, who believe such fights confirm their worst fears about safety in neighborhoods. Many local residents have expressed concern over the youths' use of space in the area, arguing that their presence in large numbers constitutes a potential threat to neighborhood safety (Barlow, 2011; Sosin, 2011a). While many local residents and business owners attempt to deflect accusations of racial profiling when articulating their concerns, others recognize how these concerns grow out of the persistent perception of iconic gay neighborhoods as middle-class, cisgender, male-dominated "white spaces" (Anderson, 2015).

Local responses to queer youth of color

While I was working on my dissertation in a Bostown café one summer afternoon, a slender young black man in a t-shirt and cutoff jeans sauntered through the open doors. Surveying the nearly empty café for a second, he looked over at me and moved to my table at the corner of the shop. I had never met him before that moment; however, he approached and greeted me as if we had known each other for years. "Hey baby," he said to me, kissing me on both cheeks. "Sorry I'm late, but you would not believe the crazy shit I just witnessed on that train. Total shitshow!" As I tried to understand what was happening, he gestured with his eyes toward the barista working at the register and mouthed, "Keep cool." I glanced over to the barista, who glared at him while adding foam to a cappuccino for a customer standing at the bar. Realizing quickly that he might be kicked out of the coffee shop, I smiled and gestured with a thumbs-up that nothing was wrong, and he nodded and returned to his task. "Thanks," the young man said in rather hushed tones. He removed his messenger bag, opened it and began rifling through it, eventually pulling out a cell phone and charger. He connected the phone to the cord, reached under the table, unplugged my computer and plugged in his cell phone. "I won't be in your hair for too long," he explained, snickering.

The young man and I chatted for over an hour. Sammy was a twenty-four-year-old gay male from the south side of Chicago who had lived on and off the streets of Bostown since his father kicked him out of his home six years ago for being gay. When he was not hanging out with his friends on Halsted, he sometimes liked to sit in neighborhood cafés and "chill," playing on his cell phone or reading a magazine or book while his phone charged. Because he rarely purchased anything, he often tried not to draw attention to himself, which was why he had approached my table. "With you and your coffee," he said, "I could sit here for hours and nobody will bother me. But if I sat at one of the tables over there, they would kick me out in a minute. Even if I buy a coffee here, I can't stay too long 'cause they'll think I'm like doing shit and gettin' into trouble."

Even when Sammy acts in accordance with the culture of the coffee shop (that is, buying a coffee and drinking it at a table), his youth and appearance often seem to

signal to workers and other customers that he is causing trouble. The youths' loitering on street corners—especially at night—has made them easy targets for the community's ire when the neighborhood experiences spikes in crime. Many local residents have voiced concern over the youths' use of space in the area, arguing that their presence in large numbers constitutes a potential threat to neighborhood safety (Barlow, 2011; Sosin, 2011a). "Sometimes there are 50 kids," a Boystown bar owner declared in a 2009 interview with the *Chicago Tribune*. "But it's only a handful that doesn't have the social skills regarding sidewalk etiquette, so [their presence] intimidates customers and residents" (Trice, 2009). In the summer of 2011, a wave of violent attacks in Boystown prompted the creation of a Facebook page dedicated to "Tak[ing] Back Boystown," aimed at drawing attention to community concerns about crime and providing a venue for brainstorming "ideas and thoughts on how we can preserve what we have and go back to the safe fun neighborhood Boystown is known for" (Take Back Boystown, 2011).

However, the page quickly devolved into a forum for local residents to vent their frustration over the presence of the queer youth of color. "Mobs of delinquent teens are destroying an area that many hardworking citizens have created," one Facebook commenter observed (Demarest, 2011). Many attributed the blame to institutional anchors such as the Broadway Youth Center and the Center on Halsted, whose services attracted these populations to the area in the first place. "We need to take back Boystown," wrote one poster. "The Center on Halsted and the Howard Brown Youth Center . . . both cater to the people who commit these crimes. Get rid of them and watch the crime go down and the property values go up." Others took a more explicitly racial tone. "Boystown was built and created by gay whites with hard earned money years back to make Boystown the great neighborhood that it is today," a responder posted. "Boystown was meant to be a happy place with arms full of hugs and love for all us gays who wanted a place to feel safe and have fun without the bullshit and crime. It's sad that Boystown has been taken advantage of by these savage monkeys" (Take Back Boystown, 2011).

For many local residents of Boystown, the street-corner practices of black and Latinx queer youth are not only disruptive to residents' accomplishment of their daily and nightly rounds; in addition, their presence on the street and within neighborhood institutions such as the coffee shop does not comport with cultural practices commonly associated with everyday life and culture in gay neighborhoods. Warner (thirty-six, white, gay), a local Boystown resident, echoes the befuddlement of many local residents at the presence of the queer youth on street corners. "I can't understand why these kids would want to spend their time standing around on corners, especially if they know that they are just in everybody's way," he explained. "You would think that they would and could find something better to do."

Conclusion

Few groups who converge in Boystown experience as many barriers to community integration as queer youth of color. Not only are they unable to claim membership

in gay neighborhoods through traditional residential ties, but also, unlike many vicarious citizens who claim community in Boystown, often queer youths cannot access the economic and cultural anchors associated with the area's gay community. Moreover, implicit images of iconic gay spaces such as Boystown as white spaces in the public imagination mark these youths as targets for hypercriminalization (Rios, 2011), as local residents dismiss the conspicuous presence of black and brown bodies on neighborhood street corners late at night as "deviant, risky, threatening, and criminal" (Rios, 2011, p. xv).

Despite the hostile reception they receive from local residents, many black and Latinx LGBT youth endure racial violence and potential violence in Boystown in order to live their lives out of the closet (Ghaziani, 2014; Greene, 2014). Queer youth of color appropriate and refashion gay/boho neighborhood street corners and institutional anchors into sites that support and foster bonds of kinship between them. Queer street families represent a variation on the "chosen families" that have become less prominent in the wake of legal recognition of same-sex marriage, which privileges more homonormative models of family. These youths maintain a right to community in Boystown based on its reputation as a gay area, drawing on spatial practices familiar to them to foster community and make the area culturally resonant as a queer space. Ironically, the very factors that many local residents have associated with Boystown's decline may actually contribute to its continued political and socio-cultural relevance. While political gains and increasing social acceptance have expanded the residential imagination of gays and lesbians beyond traditional gay neighborhoods, the participation of queer youth of color in gay neighborhoods reaffirms the enduring utility of iconic gay neighborhoods as cultural and political spaces that foster the safe exploration of queer gender and sexual expression.

Note

- 1 The section title plays on the title of Weston's (1991) book *Families We Choose: Lesbians, Gays, Kinship*. In titling this section, I hope to consider how homonormative families represent new forms of "chosen families" that have gained legitimacy at the expense of either the "chosen families" highlighted in Weston's study or the queer street families introduced in this chapter.

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