

to be straight as we are accepted into straight society. We already know how to act like straight people.

Heritage commodification is less a matter of selling out and more a matter of survival. For all of the problems I discuss throughout this book—sexism, racism, queer repression, that tangled intersectional knot—we should keep this in mind. Gay Disneyland has no malicious intent.

No one is born gay. We must become gay anew with each generation. If we don't learn it in Boystown, through gay cultural outlets, through the Internet, then we don't learn it at all. Gay culture dies.

Who is surviving though, when I say that gay culture dies? Which voices are privileged in the process of survival?

The voices of the young men, women, and trans people that populate the street at night are not present in these new clubs. The voices of queers, of sexy community, and those that are on the outside of the charmed circle are not present in these new clubs.

Full assimilation would be people not acculturating to gay habits. But assimilation can also be piecemeal. Gay habits is not static; it is changing. Moreover, heritage commodification answers some of the questions raised by Ghaziani's *There Goes the Gayborhood* and other scholars about the future viability of gay neighborhoods. In many ways, those that run these spaces—whether explicitly, like the Northalsted Business Alliance, or disembodied in the economist sense of the collective decisions of business owners—saw the pressures of people moving away and they responded. They responded in a way allowing them to remain open. They responded in a way that makes the gayborhood live on, even if it's a rebirth in a different form.

Has or will the gayborhood disappear? Perhaps it depends on our definition. Whom is a gayborhood for? The obvious answer—gay people—might be less relevant in today's context.

Boystown has become a gay Disneyland, a tourist destination for people around the city, and across the country, to consume gay culture. Assimilation changed the profitable bars, the acceptable bars, in ways that may be irreversible. The sexy community that these bars used to contain may not be attainable anymore, without the mediating technologies of augmented reality hookup apps. Gay men's newfound acceptance changed the bars; as new people started to come enjoy them. However, it attracted them for a reason. Who are these new patrons, these social tourists? Why is Boystown so attractive to them?

11

Girlstown

When straight women come to a gay club, they go on safari. When I go to a straight club, like those across the Red Line train tracks in Wrigleyville, it feels like visiting the aquarium.

I'm not the one on display. I don't feel somehow more gay in comparison to the hypermasculine "no homo" antics of the bros around. Sure, I feel my sexuality heightened. I notice the difference in my display of masculinity. I feel tenser. I'm on guard. I can sense the presence of power.

But I'm watching the scene through glass, not fully one of the people that are milling about in the tanks. There is something separating me from the predators inside. My maleness, the privilege of my gender, keeps me safe in these situations. The same is not true for women.

Even in a friendly space, like Holiday Club on the corner of Irving Park Road and Sheridan Avenue, just on the border between Boystown, Wrigleyville, and Uptown, I feel uncomfortable, not at ease. Austin and I stopped in for a bite to eat after a movie one night, desiring some bar food with salt and grease. The Holiday Club is a welcoming, safe space. It hosts open-mic reading nights. It has nerdy trivia nights. I didn't feel out of place as a gay man, but it certainly was not the kind of bar space I usually attended.

Straight spaces have their own sexual fields, their own political economy dictating the rules, their own consumption-creating straight habits. When the sexy waitress sidled up to our table, she leaned toward us slightly, pushing her rack in Austin's direction. She wore a tight, low-cut white T-shirt over blue jeans. She had her own economic incentives. She might make better tips from a table of two men if she gives off the allure of sexuality.

After ordering, while Austin read the show notes from the indie theater, I took my own show notes about the scene of straight spaces, these nightclub places I don't normally go. A few feet away from us a table of three straight guys stood near the center pole holding up the ceiling. While I ate my fries, I watched the hunt.

One of the men approached two women near the bar having a beer. One tall, the other my height. The man, in his business suit pants that said he was stopping in for a beer with friends on the way home from work, likely having gotten off the Sheridan Red Line stop just a half block away, asked them if they wanted to play pool. I watched the five of them walk over to the pool table.

Laughing, joking, a good time. It seemed friendly enough. After all, in the popular imagination, isn't this the heterosexual equivalent of the bar sexual space I've described? Straight men and women—or presumed to be straight—coming together to flirt, share a few drinks, a game of pool, and maybe exchange phone numbers at the end of the night. This is their sexual field. This is where straight people feel the spirit of the night.

I watched from afar, not only distanced physically, but mentally. I don't quite understand their dance, a ritual that to my eyes looks wholly imbalanced.

The women who were asked to play pool could have said no, I suppose. But even that would cut into their night, a reminder they are in a space for male sexual attention. They said yes, though. They looked to be enjoying themselves. Yet I felt uncomfortable because I was watching the predators feed. Sharks circling, separating out some of the fish from the school before diving in to bite.

I can only imagine what it would feel like to be the prey.

Celeste doesn't have to imagine.

"It's funny, because I was talking to a friend about this interview," Celeste, a white straight woman in her late twenties, told me a table at Caribou Coffee in Boystown, only a few blocks from her apartment.

"I was, like, 'We're going to be talking about Boystown,'" she said. "She was, like, 'Are you going to bring up the fact that it's one street away from the bro-y-est frat street in the city? How juxtaposed those attitudes can sometimes be? How close they are?' Things like that? A lot of people want to live in Wrigleyville because they graduate from college, they are young, they are white, they are professionals, they want to be in a fun area so they can get hammered every weekend and spend all their money. It's just funny how literally you feel it crossing over the street [to Wrigleyville]."

Wrigleyville is straight Boystown. The area around Wrigley Field, the baseball stadium where the Chicago Cubs play and often lose, is a playground for the largely white, young professionals that hit the many bars that line Clark Street. Wrigleyville is an entertainment district bringing in young straight people to drink, flirt, occasionally hook up. It also entertains hordes of older Cubs fans from the suburbs, who take the train or drive down and fill the neighborhood on game days, which being baseball, seems like every damn day in the spring and summer.

Boystown is not drawing people "Straight to Halsted" from just anywhere. Straight women come as an alternative to Wrigleyville. And Wrigleyville pushes them out as well.

"Yeah, tell me, how does it feel to be out in Wrigleyville. If you were going to go have a drink over there with your friends?" I asked.

"It feels loud," she laughed. "It feels loud. It feels like—if you're a single person in Wrigleyville, you're out to find people to hook up with. That's what I feel. You're out with your group of friends, you're out with that college group of friends that maybe you met when you were all twenty-two because when you're younger that's where you hung out. I think there's a college mentality here. But coming to Boystown? Here, I just think that, for a straight woman like myself, it doesn't feel as pretentious as Wrigleyville. It feels more relaxed, accepting. No one is putting on a front about how big a bro they are."

She deepened her voice, caricaturing a bro, much in the same way that Sam, the gay man mentioned in chapter 2, "On Safari," had caricatured women like her with a high-pitched squeal. "Like they are some big bro," she growled.

For Celeste, Boystown draws her in, not just for the fun novelty of a place like Kit Kat, but also because it is so opposite the straight male space of Wrigleyville. Her sexual field is across the tracks in the most "frat street in the city." That's the place she goes out if she wants to have a night as a single woman looking to enjoy the hunt, the sexual game of hooking up.

Boystown, however, is more relaxed. Without bros around, she can be more at ease. Boystown isn't just a space selling her a fun gay night out, it's also a space that by virtue of its gayness lets her have that kind of night. She can experience a night without men, at least ones hitting on her.

"So I know what you mean when you say bro-y, but explain it to people that may not know, to those eventually listening to this stuff on the recorder. How would you explain it to someone who wouldn't be in that culture, what is bro-y like?" I said.

"OK, OK, so I would describe it as, um," she tried to pick her words carefully. Too carefully.

I laughed. "Yeah it would be like describing red without the word."

"It's like describing water," she said.

"Yeah, it's, well, we? I mean, they play Xbox?" I said with a twinkle.

"They drink Bud Light?" she laughed. "Like *all the time*."

Her voice turned more somber. "I would describe it like a selfish—irresponsible sort of outlook, very all about me. OK, maybe not selfish, but just more focused on yourself, egocentric. A disregard for human connection. Almost robotic, a sort of template response to things."

"OK," I said. She evidently had some strong negative reactions to the bros she'd had to deal with in the past.

"You know, everything is a joke," she continued. "I mean there are some good qualities to this attitude because for some it builds confidence. If they can perform certain activities—" She gave the words a tone that said sex, but also inappropriate behavior.

"And build up their self-esteem to a level where they feel comfortable being themselves. Women can find that confidence sexy. I guess it, um, god, it's really hard to describe!" she said.

"So what's it like—you've talked about this a bit. What is it like being out with your girlfriends? What it's like having bros around?"

I laughed despite myself because she wrinkled her face in disgust.

"Oh, I think you just sort of have to manage your reactions a little bit. You have to be more mindful. Are you playing into it? Are you giving them that inch that they will take a mile with? You have to be really mindful about what you say. I think it's a bit challenging to feel totally comfortable."

How is Celeste supposed to have a fun night out on the town when she has to deal with this? How is she supposed to enjoy herself when she has to constantly be on guard?

Instead of being swept up by the spirit of the night, feeling a moment of collective effervescence on the dance floor or in flirtation with a man over drinks, she brings protection in the form of the other women of her group. She puts her guard up, watching her words to make sure she doesn't imply sexual attention that might put her safety at risk.

Straight women are inundated with stories from all parts of our society about the sexual violence that awaits them if they let their guards down. In many ways, the erotic sexuality of queer male spaces like the Hole or Hydrate's dance floor can happen only because the threat of sexual violence doesn't linger over the space. As men, they feel invulnerable to sexual assault, feeling as though they can protect themselves or say no should it happen, although gay men do rape and get raped.

For straight women, Boystown can be a refuge from Wrigleyville. As NBC-News Chicago reported in the summer of 2014, "Police are searching for an attacker after a woman reported being sexually assaulted inside Wrigleyville's The Irish Oak bar over the weekend. The 27-year-old woman told police she was pushed into a bathroom stall and assaulted in the lower level of the bar, located in the 3500 block of North Clark Street, just before 12:30 a.m. Sunday."¹

According to the same new report, "Kevin Feldman, who manages a nearby bar on Clark Street said such crimes affect all the local bars. 'I think all the bars work as a team together, and pass the word along to each other. We try to make it a safe, fun environment,' and we also we work hands-on with the police department," Feldman said."

However, the sentiment that Wrigleyville bars are spaces where women must be on guard was shared by the women residents quoted in the article: "Neighborhood residents said they weren't surprised to hear of the news of the crime, though. 'It can happen anywhere, unfortunately, but especially here, because there's a lot of drinking involved,' Kara Johnson said. 'These incidents are increasing, so whenever I hear something, especially close to home, of course I'm going to be looking out around to see what's going on around me.'"

Similarly, "Resident Jaime Gandolini pointed to the rowdy reputation the neighborhood has earned. 'It's obnoxious, but I mean that's part of the lure of it, what people want it to be,' Jaime Gandolini said."

However, it's more than just these bouts of extreme violence, which are easy to overlook as aberrations—to say, "Well, I wouldn't do that" or "That wouldn't happen to me." Rather, we should look at the situations straight women are regularly in within these spaces: the collective rituals of objectification, sexism, heterosexuality, the policing and production of gender roles that sociologist David Grazian calls, "the girl hunt."

In his book, *On the Make*, Grazian examines the production of straight nightclub spaces, and the people who go to them, through the essays and observations of his undergraduate students at the University of Pennsylvania.² These young adults are younger, somewhat, than the men and women who frequent Wrigleyville, but the atmosphere of these clubs is similar.

The "girl hunt" refers to the collective game that men play when out in groups to "score" with anonymous women and thereby prove their masculinity. It is a scene so stereotypically played out in mass media, I barely need to describe it. A group of men spies a group of women across the dance floor. They discuss the women's attributes and beauty, divvying them up. One man approaches his target with a pick-up line or some other "in" to start conversation. They talk, dance, flirt, and attempt to hook up. If he's following the tactics of so-called pickup artists, then he'll subtly insult her a little, a practice called "negging."

However, as Grazian points out, the girl hunt might be more myth than reality, at least in terms of its success. Research points out that, despite cultural images to the contrary, one-night stands are not incredibly common among straight men and women. Although their numbers differ—men reporting more and women reporting fewer because of social desirability bias—the percentage of people having one-night stands is likely lower than 20 percent.

Furthermore, Grazian documents the resistance women have to being hunted. Rather than submissive acquiescence to the hunt, women put off unwanted advances, resulting in the push-and-pull game of straight men advancing, and straight women rebuffing their advances.

I did not do significant fieldwork in Wrigleyville. Documenting the sexism of these straight spaces was not a goal of my fieldwork, as it would have diverted attention away from the queer spaces I mean to argue are important, directing attention, instead, to heterosexual spaces. In the same way, researchers whose primary focus is women or racial minorities, for example, are often obliged to evaluate their findings in relation to comparable work regarding men or white communities, respectively.

What I want to do, though, is argue that the dynamic of the girl hunt—that sharky feeling of being hunted I've observed and that the straight and queer women I've talked with have experienced within straight spaces—divide the experience of women in these spaces. It isn't possible to just go out for fun. It isn't possible to find a place to "just dance" like Celeste wants to. A woman is always going to feel on guard in these spaces, unable to experience a moment of collective effervescence because she is worried about the violence, or even rebuffing a come-on.

To find places less fraught with sexual anxiety, straight women go to Boystown. In Boystown, they can find the good time that eludes them in the company of straight men. While Boystown's heritage commodification provides the structural context allowing tourists, Boystown pulls and Wrigleyville pushes in more ways than one.

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What do women get out of it? Why come to Boystown? What is bringing them straight to Halsted?

There are three reasons behind coming to Boystown. The first of which, as already discussed, is that hetero spaces can be sites of sexual violence, fear, and, at the very least, a constant on-guard feeling that prevents fun. The gay men within Boystown are seen as safe.

The latter view, while aligning with offensive heterosexist ideas of gay men as less violent because they aren't "real men," is still frankly true. Straight women are not going to experience the same kind of harassment in Boystown they would elsewhere.

Second, gay habitus—what it has become and represents—is desirable. Heritage commodification shapes the neighborhood to become what is economically desirable, such that it becomes a gay Disneyland. It is this gayness that certain straight women want to learn, to be a part of, because it represents fun, fashion, and an aspirational lifestyle.

Let's revisit the concept of habitus, which I will now argue does not adequately consider our agency and our ability, our desire, for change. Habitus, as Bourdieu considered it, is our social psychological structure that reflects

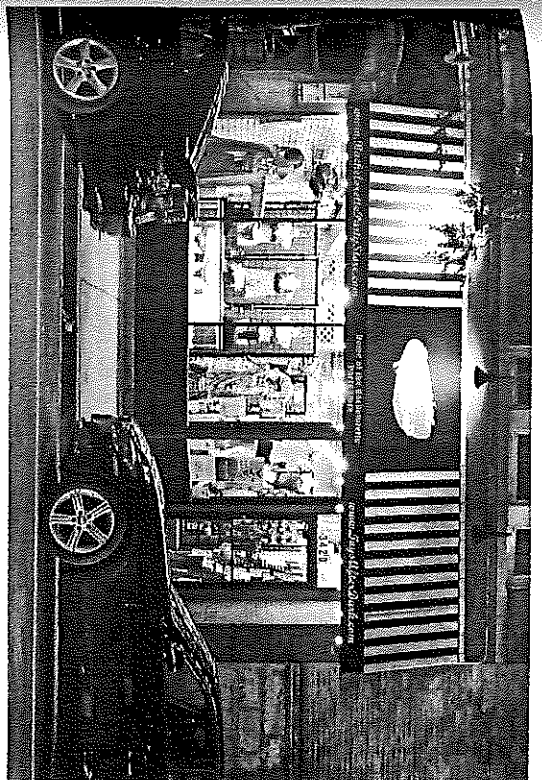


Figure 11.1. The bachelorette party store, Batteries Not Included

the outer structure of society. Wacquant argues habitus is learned and taught through physical action. I argue we should go further: people seek out a habitus through changing their habits of consumption.

Bourdieu says of the relationship between habitus and lifestyles: "Through taste, an agent has what he likes because he likes what he has, that is, the properties actually given to him in the distributions and legitimately assigned to him in the classifications."³⁸

In a footnote, he then elaborates: "An ethic, which seeks to impose the principles of an ethos (i.e., the forced choices of a social condition) as a universal norm, is another, more subtle way of succumbing to *amor fati*, of being content with what one is and has."

Bourdieu theorized within a European class condition that perhaps is not easily translated into the American context. While we may not have the kind of class mobility we think we have, we consume as though we do. As Tocqueville documented early in our history, Americans have an optimism that we can become better-positioned people.

We consume and we make choices to become those better people. We know that some tastes are better than others. Habitus isn't simply an invisible set of rules we unconsciously absorb—we also attempt to shape our own. We try to become different kinds of people, with a different, better set of tastes, through conscious choices of consumption.

In Boystown, bars sell an experience, a chance to get a better set of tastes by consuming appropriately. Boystown gives women a *Sex and the City* experience on *Girls* prices. *Sex and the City* shows four fabulous white women living a totalizing lifestyle of brunches, late-night martinis, and beautiful houses. Three of the four are rich, whether from family money, their careers, or divorce. The main character though, Carrie Bradshaw, is portrayed as a sex columnist and, in the style of television of those years, somehow “middle class,” struggling yet living in her own Manhattan apartment.

As Emily Nussbaum, wrote in her *New Yorker* essay, “Difficult Women: How ‘Sex and the City’ Lost Its Good Name”:

“Sex and the City” . . . was pigeonholed as a sitcom. In fact, it was a bold riff on the romantic comedy: the show wrestled with the limits of that pink-tinted genre for almost its entire run. In the end, it gave in. Yet until that last-minute stumble it was sharp, iconoclastic television. High-feminine instead of fetishistically masculine, glittery rather than gritty and daring in its conception of character, “Sex and the City” was a brilliant and, in certain ways, radical show.

[...]

So why is the show so often portrayed as a set of empty, static cartoons, an embarrassment to womankind? It’s a classic misunderstanding. I think, stemming from an unexamined hierarchy: the assumption that anything stylized (or formulaic, or pleasurable, or funny, or feminine, or explicit about sex rather than about violence, or made collaboratively) must be inferior.⁴

The women on *Sex and the City* navigate a glittering, stylish Manhattan, one that Nussbaum reminds us is “not even especially dated: though the show has gained a reputation for over-the-top absurdity, I can tell you that these night clubs and fashion shows do exist—maybe even more so now that Manhattan has become a gated island for the wealthy.”

Carrie Bradshaw and her cohorts, despite their flaws, are to be admired: “I’m a Carrie!” “I’m a Charlotte!”

Compare that to *Girls*, *Sex and the City* for millennials. These women struggle to get by, sometimes barely working, mostly living off their parents, always only one step from moving back home to Michigan.

I’m not a media analyst, but the economic insecurity portrayed by the *Girls*’ girls is the reality today, even as they aspire to a *Sex and the City* fabulousness. Consuming geyness allows straight women to cheaply partake in particular kind of lifestyle even as the rest of their lives are plagued by douche-bag guys and limited job prospects.

Because, for all of the ways in which Boystown has become an expensive

gay Disneyland, it is still cheaper than Lincoln Park or the Loop. For many of the women who come to Boystown, it’s about a one-off night, not being a regular. Straight women splurge on a night out at Kit Kat for a special event or a brunch. Martinis at Kit Kat are still cheaper than those downtown. Boystown is expensive compared with what it was historically. For those traveling to consume it, it’s much cheaper than what they’ll find elsewhere. Third, Boystown’s changes may represent a lessening of queer sexuality within them for the gay men who attend, but they are still vastly more queer, sexual, and erotic than straight clubs for straight people attending them. These spaces allow straight women to display kinds of sexuality, and take pleasure in sexuality, that would otherwise be denied them in straight spaces. They want to learn a mode of perception allowing them to seize a sexuality denied to them.

Celeste told me that’s one of the main reasons bachelorette parties come to Boystown.

“One thing that I’ve—a topic for me has been these bachelorette parties. Why Boystown for a bachelorette party over someplace else?” I asked her.

“Here’s what I think! I think that there’s—especially for people in their twenties—there’s going to be a mix of girls in the group that’s going to be married, single, divorced. I think that an environment where no one has to worry about getting hit on or calling attention away from the bride or getting separated because people are talking to whatever. The potential to stick together is greater,” she said.

Boystown is a morally safe space for women in relationships. Their boyfriends and husbands are still watching over them even when they are not nearby. To go to Wrigleyville, where straight people hook up, would be to invite accusations of allowing men to hit on them. For women in straight relationships—which are presumed to be monogamous because of the charmed circle—going to a straight club is wrong. A gay club is a place where she can have fun, be safe, and have a sexual atmosphere without accusation of immorality.

Furthermore, she can—like the straight women who come into gay male strip clubs like Lucky Horseshoe or give money to go-go boys at Cocktail—express her desire for men, sexualize their bodies alongside the gay men, without being “sluts.”

In this sense, while heritage commodification changes Boystown to be less queerly sexual and thus more respectable for gay men, it is still more sexual than straight spaces for straight women. Boystown can sell not only a gay night of fashion but also the sexuality of queerness.

If it seems as though I want to push the buck onto someone like straight guys making straight bars uninhabitable for straight women, as though they are ruining queer spaces for queer men, then that is a misread.

The reasons I've given for heterosexual women coming to Boystown are meant to be explanatory, but not exonerating. Straight women, perhaps because of limited social power and lack of money, would rather flee to gay clubs to have a "novelty" time than to create their own spaces. Straight women don't actually have the social power though to transform their own spaces, to rid them of sexism. As a consequence, they go to another space, a gay space, that doesn't, won't, or can't keep them out.

Sexism feeds heterosexism.

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Heterosexism feeds sexism.

Cyon Flare looked fabulous on the stage, a makeshift raised platform that Northstar Healthcare Medical Center brought into Jackhammer for the annual CD4 event. The night was to celebrate the poz community, people living with HIV/AIDS, and their allies.

It should be no surprise the event was at Jackhammer, a space of sexy community that has both more HIV-positive people and more people of color, who more often contract HIV. The event was also diverse in another way.

"We're so glad to have women here tonight," Cyon said in the middle of the speech welcoming people to the event, praising everyone for coming out to "not only be positive, but to be *positive!*"

"We're so glad to have women here tonight," Cyon repeated. "Because those are the girls that were taking care of our asses when we were down."

Many in the crowded bar nodded, some men standing next to the lesbian, queer, bi, and straight women that were their sisters, supporters, or best friends.

Women were taking care of gay, bi, and queer men when we were dying of AIDS. Queer women and straight women, whose communities were less devastated by the illness, came through for us when we needed them.

That's not the only time we needed them, though. We still need them, and when we do, they take us to our first gay bar, support us through our break-ups, and drink and dance with us when we are celebrating.

Women are an important part of queer male life.

Yet, when women come to Boystown, they are often met with derision and sneers. Bartenders ignore them. Some people tell them to leave.

Queer men brought women out to bars first, often as a way to get into those bars, as a safety net when we didn't know any gay men.

Moreover, most of the time, when I hang out in a queer space, I want to bring my friends with me. Some of those friends, some of my very best friends, are straight women. Why shouldn't they get to come along? Why should I have to abandon queer space to hang out with straight women?

In June 2014, a few weeks before my wedding, I had a bachelor party. One of my best friends, Elizabeth, arranged it as my best lady, in consultation with my friend Eric, who acted as gay consultant on the places in Boystown that we should go. Elizabeth had been out with me in Boystown several times before but didn't know the best places or the best times to go to each.

I sat down a few months later and talked with Elizabeth about that night to get her sense of what it was like moving through these spaces as a straight woman not on safari.

"It started out as—the group dynamic was me, Margaret, and Alex [her husband], and then all your gay friends that I had never met before were coming in. There was this sense that—moving around in the space is precarious sometimes for me, because there is a sense of friendship and love and ownership of our friends, and it is hard sometimes to navigate that with your gay friends because I don't want to come across as presumptuous with your affection or something. I don't know how to describe it. There is this sense of like—they know you in a way that I will never know you. They have shared connections with you in a way that I never want to infringe on," she said.

"Right," I said.

"So I'm always nervous that they aren't going to like me or hate me and just be like, go away," she said. "Or! They will perceive me as being a fag hag and that I only want to hang out with you because you are gay."

The specter of the "fag hag" hangs over the interactions between straight women and gay men. We have an easy script to fall into, but the cultural trope of the fag hag—an ugly woman that falls in love with her gay best friend because she can't get a boyfriend—can be insidious, damaging the relationship. Similarly, there is a suspicion that a gay man may be friends with a woman merely to use her as a beard—a disguise to throw people off about his sexuality—or as a substitute for the boyfriend he doesn't have in his life. The fag hag trope implies that they are using each other as a crutch and not enjoying real friendship.

The fag hag hangs over the interactions of queer men's female friends when they are brought to queer spaces, putting them on guard that they will be perceived as being on safari.

"So the first place we went to was the Horseshoe," Elizabeth said, referring to the Lucky Horseshoe gay male strip club at the corner of Belmont and Halsted. "I remember when we walked in, we had some bachelor party gear, and I had the notepads for people to write on, and the glow sticks."

"And I had my whistle," I said.

As best lady, Elizabeth organized the party as she understood the trope of pre-wedding parties to be fun, with games to play that would make it a bachelor party, and not just a regular night of drinking. She wanted to give it that something extra Celeste discussed earlier, by using the template of

a bachelorette party. In this case, we played a couple of games for points. Working in groups that combined my straight friends with gay friends, my friends got people to buy me shots, give me advice on my upcoming nuptials, well wishes, and phone numbers. For my part, I had a whistle I was supposed to blow whenever I saw someone on safari, her having read that chapter before. The first person to point out who it was would get points.

I blew that whistle a lot, even in the Lucky Horseshoe.

Elizabeth continued, "And I remember feeling nervous about the fact that we tricked out people. Because the game involved us walking separately and talking to people in teams, but I never wanted to be unaccompanied by one of you guys because I didn't want people to think that I was there as part of a bachelorette party."

She said, "But there were two other bachelorette parties there that night. There was a group of middle-aged Black women that were in the main-stage bar area. There was actually this weird moment where there were two lap dances going on both for two different female bachelorette parties. The other group were these white girls, younger, and clearly very wealthy, and they were both getting lap dances. And I remember as part of the game. There was a point in the game I could have gotten from them, but they wouldn't give me the time of day or look me in the eyes, which was interesting because I tried."

Frankly, there were probably more straight women getting lap dances than there were gay men getting them that night. That economic reality did not go unnoticed by the bar owners and staff, because now there were straight men working as go-go boys dancing and mingling through the crowd. A gay bar, but only a few steps away from a straight strip club.

"There was this one part, where you and me and Eric were standing there admiring the guys and I pointed to the one that I liked, you told me of course, you picked the straight guy out there," she said.

"Yes, I do remember that. Yes, I do remember that!" I laughed.

"And I thought that was pretty funny," she said. "And then he came over and we got you a lap dance from him. The one that was kind of bro-y?"

"Yeah and while he was cute, it was the most uncomfortable lap dance ever because he was gay for pay," I said.

"Yeah."

"And he had such a better time getting money off of the women coming through," I said.

"Yeah, and I took a picture with him for the game, and we went to take a picture with him and he put his hands around both of us, and he put his hand under my dress into my thong," she shuddered at the memory of it.

"I did not know that," I gasped a little.

Elizabeth laughed. "You were drunk," she said. "I told you at that time, and I was not happy with that."

Even in Boystown, she can't escape the sexual objectification and inappropriate, unrequested touching that she would find in a straight club. Eventually though, we left to wander farther up the street. We danced for a while at Chloë's, where other queer men, queer women, and straight women all mingled on the dance floor, feeling a bit of the spirit of the night settle into us as we gyrated, light-headed from drink.

"And then we went to Jackhammer and then, OK, so here's the interaction. So all week long we had been talking and we knew we wanted to end the night at Jackhammer because it was your special day and that would be fun. We got all dressed up so you could go down in the basement and I wasn't planning on going down there, but I wanted to at least, like, come down and say good-bye because the rest of us were going to be leaving," she said.

"Yeah, and it's not uncommon for women to come down there," I said.

"Yeah, and I wanted to see what was down there because you write about it a lot."

"I feel like people might feel it's more of a constant circus orgy than it really was."

"Yeah, I was surprised at how small it was! But yeah, I wanted to know what was down there, and so, god, I can't remember all of what happened," she said.

"First, you went down there, and the doorman was like, you can't take your top off, and I was like, *What?* that is not true," I said.

"Yeah! You said I couldn't get down there unless I took my top off, and then when I got down there he said I had to put my bra back on but not my shirt."

"Yeah, and that didn't seem true."

"Right, but I didn't want to make waves, but I was drunk so we hung out for like two or three minutes."

"Yeah we were already drunk and Margaret and Bruce were left upstairs," I said.

"Yeah, I was like 'I'm gonna go back up' and as I left, the guy working the door was like, 'Did you see what you wanted to see sweetie?' in this very condescending way. I was like, 'I wanted to say good-bye and end the night with my friend because it's his bachelor party and I'm the best lady.' And he was like, 'uh huh.' I went upstairs and remember feeling bad. I really did want to see what was in there, I'm not gonna lie, but I also felt like, I just wanted to hang out with you and this guy made me feel like a creeper and I kind of felt like a creeper because of it," she said.

"Even though you were doing all of the things that—if I could create a list of how not to be on safari, like you were doing all of them. You were with someone. You knew the space. You weren't giggling and pointing at people. You were just enjoying being there and you were following all of the same rules."

She said, "He wasn't mean. He just had a knowing judgment. 'Alright princess: back up the stairs.' So then I went back upstairs, and there were two women there who were with their guy friend who was gay. They came over as I was finishing my drink. I wasn't the only other woman in the room. There was that woman . . ."

"Yes, Charlotte."

"And she was really nice to me. But then these two women came over to talk to me and they were like 'you can go down there if you want, you know. You just have to take off your shirt.' And then they started telling me—they were white women, midtwenties, suburban middle class, they kind of had that look you have when you just get out of college and are just figuring out your style, and they were telling me how they were from the suburbs and were visiting their gay best friend from high school. He was hanging back and looking mortified that he was being seen with them. I was just like, 'Oh my god.' I felt bad for these girls because they looked like they didn't belong. They looked like tourists. They were elated to be here. This was the most exciting thing that's happened for them."

I said, "Yeah, they are getting to have a new—"

Elizabeth jumped in: "A new adventure."

"That's what's great about being a tourist on safari. It's really fun."

"But he [their gay friend] was really like—" she struggled to find words.

"Sure we're putting things on them, but this is where he wanted to go. That's where they ended up at least," I said.

"Yeah, I don't know. Yeah." Elizabeth struggled to explain her feelings in that moment. "I felt simultaneously bad for these girls, but then really hoping that I wasn't being taken for being like these girls as this completely unknowledgeable person moving around this social space. They were like, 'You need to go down there. Take your shirt off and go down there.' Asserting that I had a right to go down there, and I was just like, 'Ok, did you go down there?' They were like, 'Yeah we went down there and took off our shirts and went down there.'"

She paused, building up to the revelation. "So that guy that was working the door. He had that experience."

I broke in, "Yeah, he had had that experience ten minutes before. Those experiences drive him to be rude to you and continue the cycle of sexism and heterosexism feeding each other. Because then he's rude to you as some-

one who's trying not to be rude to this space when you want to be with your friend."

"There was this time when we were down there and I was reeling on my heels, but I was acutely conscious of time. Like if I go up right now I'm just going to seem like I came down here to see what it's like. There was conscious intentional impression management to look like I was not on safari and it did not work."

Elizabeth, like Celeste in the straight clubs being hit on by men, was made hyperaware of her presence, making sure that she was not fulfilling stereotypes of tourists on safari. She wasn't able to have any of the experiences of raked intimacy that make that space great. She didn't get any of the benefits.

After describing that theory to Elizabeth, she responded, "Right, not in that space. I did have that experience when we were dancing at Chloe's because there was also more women there and it was a less—" She trailed off. "But," I said, "that was also a space purposefully built for those kinds of interactions. That ties in, there are reasons why women come. You don't feel naked intimacy in queer spaces, in the spaces the queer men feel it because you're so worried about being on safari and people are pushing back saying you're not supposed to be there. But you do feel it in places of heritage commodification that are purposefully for women to go and dance there."

Heritage commodification is successful at saving Boystown, keeping it alive, because it creates these kinds of middle-ground spaces. Just queer enough. Just sexy enough.

As the neighborhood becomes assimilated, there is also backlash to women being in these spaces by gay and queer men looking for the kind of space that they feel that they have lost. The "get off me bitch I'm trying to suck this guy's dick" attitude of men like Sam reflects this sentiment. Women are the good consumers, the good friends, but ambivalently so, because they are survival consumers. They are accepted because they have to be, not necessarily because they are wanted.

One of the concerns of intersectionality has been how forms of oppression are mutually reinforcing.⁵ In the gay bar, it's possible to see the intersectional knot: the sexism on the part of straight men pushes straight women to go to gay bars because, due to their heterosexism, they assume these spaces are safer and they are going to be more fun. In turn, their heterosexism reinforces the sexism of gay men who respond to this with being sexist.

That sexism is perhaps most evident in the experience of queer women and trans people of all genders.

Queer women and trans people have long been a part of queer male spaces. Moore discusses that some integrated spaces began during the seventies before AIDS.

Charlotte is one of these queer women, a bisexual woman involved in the leather community who frequents queer male spaces like the Hole. Kade is one of these trans people, a queer person who is sometimes feminine-presenting, sometimes masculine-presenting.

Most men that I talked to would say that it was only the straight women that they had problem with in the space. However, when asked about it, queer women and trans women reported they had experienced problems too. For instance, Kade told me during our interview, "You know, we used to go to Boystown. I thought it was the place to be."

I laughed. "Does that imply it's no longer the place to be?"

"It's the place to be for some people."

"So what type of people, then?"

"I don't know. People who like to party? People who get drunk? The thing about Boystown was always, from my experience—Boystown is mostly gay male owned. The clubs, the bars. I just remember when I used to go out in Boystown, it would be hard to get a drink. As someone who people read as female," she said.

"Is there a particular story about that? That you have, like, at a particular bar?" I asked.

"I don't think so. It was just something we used to complain about. All my friends used to complain about or you would go to—I remember a lot of times my friends were getting frustrated. They would go to Spin or Sidetrack and they would be like, 'we are going to meet girls.' And then they be like, 'All the girls there are straight and are with their gay male friends.' So overwhelmingly the women in those clubs are straight women who come with gay friends. I used to be really frustrated by Boystown in that sense, cause all the straight people."

Unlike with sexual racism, this situation doesn't change in the sexy communities of places like Jackhammer. I specifically interviewed women involved in those spaces—as rare as they were—to get their perspectives on being involved with spaces that still remained largely hostile to women's involvement. Because even while men insisted they only rejected women's involvement when they were on safari, queer women would report hostility as well.

Charlotte, a queer leather woman and a member of Marcus's leather family involved in the sexy community spaces of Jackhammer and Touché, spent much of her interview discussing the difficulty of swimming upstream. Charlotte has a dominant personality—in more ways than one—and isn't someone who is going to let others dictate her involvement.

"So, that's my question. I've been to these things before. It hasn't changed. Women being there hasn't changed anything. They are *leather* women after all," I asked.



Figure 11.2. A bachelorette and her bride outside Kit Kat Lounge and Supper Club

Charlotte clinked her glass of red wine with her nails.

"Changing these events and bitching about IML. It is not us," she sounded exasperated. "The leather women at IML are not weakening IML. The circuit boys are weakening IML. IML is not as much a leather event as it used to be not because of people like me and [other women]. We are not the ones that are making that shit less leather. It's the boys showing up in their flip-flops and cocktails that think it's soooooo interesting."

Her tone reminded me of Sam's caricature of women on safari.

"They are making it less leather, so why are they turning the ugly on us? Ugh. Back in the sixties? No, there weren't any women around. But there were women in the catacombs in San Francisco in the seventies. [Name] was elbow deep in someone in the seventies. If seventies San Francisco fisting boys can deal with women in their space, what is your problem?"

She took a sip of red wine, finishing, "You know what, when men started fisting women that they dealt with were the only ones that kept that knowledge and passed it on."

Maybe we have girls to thank for having a Boystown at all.