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# Regulating the Regulators: How the Normalization of Gays and Lesbians in Dutch Society Impacts LGBTQ Nightlife

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**Regulating the Regulators: How the Normalization of Gays and Lesbians in Dutch Society  
Impacts LGBTQ Nightlife**

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### **Working Definitions and Acronyms**

*Queer*: There are many different definitions of the word queer. For some, it is still a slur used to deride gays and lesbians, for others it is an umbrella term used to describe anyone who is non-straight or non-cis (or both). For others still, queer describes a subcommunity of LGBTQ people who tend to be more alternative, activist, and underground than the mainstream LGBTQ community. This population tends to be concerned about a broad range of intersecting issues such as racism, sexism, transphobia, veganism, anarchism, squatting, socialism, etc. For the purposes of this research, I will be using ‘queer’ as an umbrella term when describing populations but I will use the later definition when describing spaces.

*LGBTQ*: Lesbian gay bisexual transgender queer. Umbrella term for non-straight, non-cis individuals.

*(LGBTQ) Nightlife*: Various spaces including pubs, bars, clubs, parties, and festivals where people drink, dance, socialize, enjoy music, and search for romantic or sexual partners. I will use the term LGBTQ nightlife to refer to various bars, clubs, etc catering or marketed to an LGBTQ audience.

*COC Nederland: Cultuur en Ontspanningscentrum* (Center for Culture and Leisure), Organization founded in 1946 with the goal of integrating gays and lesbians into Dutch society. Today the COC is mainly involved in advocacy and education.

*Gender binary*: Classification of gender into two distinct and opposite categories: male and female, masculine and feminine, man and woman. This logic discourages people from challenging traditional gender roles through their presentation or identity.

*GNC*: Gender non-conforming - a gender expression or identity indicating that a person either identifies outside the gender binary and/or presents themselves in a non-traditionally gendered manner (e.g. masculine woman or feminine man) (Killerman, 2016).

*GQ*: Genderqueer - a gender identity descriptor used by individuals who identify outside the gender binary or as an umbrella term for various non-conforming identifies and presentations (e.g. genderfluid, bigender, agender, genderfuck) (Killermann, 2016).

*Gender presentation*: The external display of someone’s gender through their physical appearance and mannerisms including how they dress and style themselves, speak, move, and interact with others (Killermann, 2016).

*Gender identity*: The internal perception of one’s gender and how they label themselves.

*Heteronormativity*: The assumption, both individually and institutionally, that everyone is heterosexual and that heterosexuality should be viewed as the norm and superior to other sexual orientations. This leads to the stigmatization and erasure of LGBTQ individuals and culture and preserves the dominance of straight individuals and culture.

*Homonormativity*: Based on the concept of heteronormativity, homonormativity describes the assumption that gays and lesbians (other members of the LGBTQ community are rarely included in homonormative discourse) want to be part of the dominant, mainstream, heterosexual culture. This term also describes how those who are most able to assimilate (e.g. white, middle class gay men) are rewarded and those least able to adapt to straight culture (e.g. poor, queer or trans POC) are punished (Kacere, 2016).

*POC*: People of color. Umbrella term for people who are not white.

### **Abstract**

This Independent Study Project explores how LGBTQ nightlife is impacted by the changing position of gays and lesbians in Dutch society. Specifically, this project seeks to

explore how the normalization and popularization of certain subcommunities of LGBTQ individuals in Amsterdam, lauded as one of the most progressive and gay-friendly cities in the world, influences how people navigate LGBTQ bars, clubs, and parties. Data was obtained by conducting 10 in-depth, semi-structured interviews. This data was then analyzed using Judith Butler's theory of normalization, recognition, and regulation and Gert Hekma's theory of homonormativity. The research revealed that despite apparent advancements in LGBTQ liberation, the Netherlands is still riddled with homophobia and interviewees expressed feelings of discomfort and even lack of safety when they visited straight-dominated bars. Furthermore, some participants expressed concerns that previously gay spaces were being appropriated by straight people while others viewed this influx of heterosexuals in LGBTQ nightlife as a positive step towards integration and gay liberation. Some participants preferred 'queer' spaces, such as the Vrankrijk and underground parties, to the more mainstream gay and lesbian bars of the Reguliersdwarsstraat (aka Reguliers-Amsterdam's gay bar heavy street), noting that they felt more comfortable to 'be themselves' in these spaces. Participants' perceptions of LGBTQ spaces (and how those spaces are changing due to an influx of straight people) was greatly informed by their own positionality. Ultimately, this research reveals that the normalization of gays and lesbians in the Netherlands leads to a reduction in spaces where queer people can be their authentic selves. Mainstream gay bars such as those found on the Reguliers become 'straighter', catering to a more heterosexual audience and mimicking mainstream heterosexual culture, forcing LGBTQ individuals to either assimilate or take part in the growing alternative queer nightlife scene.

*Keywords:* Gender Studies, Sociology, Recreation, Regional Studies: Europe

## **Introduction**

The Netherlands is often praised for pioneering legal rights for their LGBTQ citizens, granting their equality under the law in 1993 and the right to marry in 2001, the first country in the world to do so. This change came about rapidly. Following the sexual revolution of the



1960s, public opinion on homosexuality, prostitution, and premarital sex liberalized dramatically. According to Gert Hekma, “In 1971, the parliament decided to get rid of the only existing criminal law targeting homosexuals. Until the sixties homosexuality was generally considered to be a sin, crime, and disease and now, within 10 years, it was none of these things. This was a radical change” (2008). Currently, for example, the Dutch government promotes the acceptance of gays and lesbians in a number of ways. Prospective immigrants to the Netherlands, a large portion of whom come from majority Muslim countries like Morocco, are shown an image of two men kissing and asked if they find this display ‘normal’. In this way, “Respect for gay and feminist rights became ... a litmus test for eligibility to immigrate to the Netherlands” (Hekma & Duyvendak, 2011).

Despite these significant strides in the direction of legal equality, many contingents of the LGBTQ community continue to be excluded from Dutch society at large, namely those who are not masculine, white gay men in monogamous relationships; “Other research indicates that gay men particularly are only accepted under certain conditions, such as not behaving in an un-masculine manner and not being too sexually explicit or visible ... we accept you as long as we don’t have to see that you exist or have to see what you do. For their part, lesbians continue to remain largely invisible in public life and the media.” (Hekma and Duyvendak, 2011). Judith Schuyf, who writes about lesbian communities in the Netherlands, traces the origins of this rhetoric of gays and lesbians being ‘normal people’ back to the founding of the COC (Center for Culture and Leisure), a state-run LGBT organization, “This ideology of ‘normal people’ was the one propagated by the COC and is typical of reform movements of the 1950s. From the start in 1946 the COC aimed at integration of homosexuality on an equal base with heterosexuality in Dutch society. Especially in the 1950s and 1960s this meant that what were regarded as the more

unsavory sides of homosexuality (such as campy, gender-crossing behavior, cruising, and excessive drinking) had to be suppressed in order to show that homosexuals were worth being treated equally” (2002).

Many LGBTQ Dutch people have adapted to these conditions by adopting more mainstream (i.e. straight) presentations and mannerisms, participating in what queer theorists call homonormativity, a system where queer people who are more able to conform to heteronormative society are rewarded and those who cannot, or do not want to, are punished. As Hekma and Duyvendak explain,

The heteronormative discourse is adopted by gays and lesbians who are often eager to act ‘normally’ by shunning unmasculine (for men), unfeminine (for women) behavior. Heteronormativity thus becomes homonormativity as well, compelling both gay men and lesbian women to behave like straight people, making them afraid of showing any ‘gay’ or ‘lesbian’ signs, and prompting them to criticize others for behaving too much like sissies or dykes (2011).

Fobear, who studies lesbian women specifically, writes that “Lesbian women, both young and old, blamed the decline of lesbian social spaces on the feelings of younger lesbian girls that they shouldn’t be restricted to only socializing in lesbian-specific spaces... This growing detachment from identity politics and the desire to socialize in non-lesbian specific venues was seen as creating a tension between the younger and older generations of lesbian women in Amsterdam” (2012). This disconnect between various segments of the LGBTQ community is not only generational. As documented by queer theorists and former SIT students alike, a growing number of LGBT individuals are distancing themselves from the term “queer” and the alternative practices and presentations the word connotes (Atkins, 2010).

The rhetoric of “normal people” is thus a manifestation of homonormativity unique to Dutch culture. The ‘normal people’ discourse becomes a double edged sword. In many ways it has granted LGBTQ people greater societal acceptance and access to legal rights such as

marriage and adoption. On the other hand, notions of normalcy exclude LGBTQ individuals who cannot fit within the narrow confines of acceptable gayness, those who are “too queer”, and even those who successfully assimilate must often sacrifice aspects of their identity and community in order to do so.

For my Independent Study Project (ISP), I studied this phenomenon within the context of LGBTQ nightlife in Amsterdam. I have collected data on this topic by conducting interviews with patrons of various gay and lesbian bars within Amsterdam and analyzed these results through the theoretical framework of homonormativity, Hekma’s work on ‘normal people’ and queer assimilation, and Judith Butler’s theories of normalization and self-regulation. The resulting study seeks to answer the following questions; How has the normalization of gays and lesbians in Dutch society, which began in the 1970s and peaked with the legalization of same-sex marriage in 2001, impacted LGBTQ nightlife in Amsterdam, if at all? How has this change altered the bars and clubs themselves (for example which bars have become “straight”, which have shut down entirely, and how has the way these spaces market themselves changed?) How has this change altered how people of various LGBTQ identities feel in and navigate these spaces? Has this normalization affected normatively and non-normative queer people differently?

To answer these questions, I will first summarize existing research related to my topic and expound upon the theoretical framework through which I will be analyzing data. Next, I will discuss the findings of my research including quotes from interviewees. Finally, I will analyze my findings with relation to the aforementioned theoretical framework.

***Importance of Topic and Research Goals***

I am interested in this topic for several reasons. On a personal level, studying how to create inclusive queer communities is exceptionally important to me. As a queer, straight-passing femme, I struggled to integrate myself in the queer community at my historically-women's college which values a particular kind of queer person (in Smith College's case, white and butch, sporting short hair and a button up). With my winged eyeliner and waist-length hair, I grapple with how to find my place in this community while maintaining my own sense of identity. I often question whether I should alter my own appearance and mannerisms or attempt to change the community itself. Though I eventually managed to inject myself in the queer community at Smith, I understand the feelings of alienation and isolation that result from being excluded from purportedly inclusive spaces. My own experiences are reflected in scholarly research which has shown that historically, LGBTQ bars and clubs have been important to the queer community, providing a space for activism and social interaction as well as a safe space from straight-dominated society. According to Brondos-Casas who conducted research on the disappearance of lesbian bars in Amsterdam, "the importance of social networks of lesbian friends comes from the need for what Wilkens calls a 'community built on sameness' (2015:95). Such communities help those who participate in them to avoid feelings of isolation and loneliness" (2015, pg. 12). Thus, despite current perceptions, queer bars are more than just a place to drink, dance, and hook up, they possess great historical significance for many individuals within the LGBTQ community, past and present.

Existing research has documented both the phenomenon of assimilation and normalization of gays and lesbians in the Netherlands, and the importance of queer bars and clubs. I hope to build on this existing research by combining these two fields of study to interrogate how this phenomenon manifests in the specific social location of queer nightlife in

Amsterdam. It is my hope that my research will provide insights into how to establish a more genuinely inclusive queer bar culture in Amsterdam. In this way, my research is relevant to any queer individuals who have struggled to find a sense of belonging within an LGBTQ community so mired in the rhetoric and practices of homonormativity. Though the rhetoric of normalization is especially pronounced in the Dutch context, it is a global phenomenon. Thus, although Amsterdam provides an ideal environment for me to conduct research due to the Netherlands' history of gay rights and reputation as a global gay mecca, I predict that my conclusions may also provide an impetus for similar research in other cultural contexts, expanding the relevance of my research of queer people globally.

### **Literature Review and Theoretical Framework**

In this section, I will review existing research on queer nightlife in The Netherlands and expound upon the theoretical framework I will later use to discuss the findings of my research. The primary framework I will employ is that of homonormativity, supplemented by Judith Butler's theory of recognition and regulation. Homonormativity has been applied to the Dutch context by queer theorist Gert Hekma and analyzed in relation to queer nightlife by Podmore and Manuel Garcia.

#### ***Lesbian Bar Culture in The Netherlands***

Little research has been conducted about queer nightlife in the Netherlands. Hekma documents that throughout the 1970s and 1980s, “Amsterdam strongly profited from its liberal reputation as the ‘gay capital’ of Europe. There were new extravagant discos, with drag queens and kings and large and small parties for various sexual preferences and fetishes, from S/M to sport.” (2011, pg. 4). Aside from this brief mention, however, the majority of existing research on queer nightlife is specific to lesbian bars and cafés.

Ethnographer Judith Schuyf documents the formation and group dynamics of Dutch lesbian communities in the 1970s and 80s, including lesbian use of bars and cafés as spaces for political organising. The second wave feminist movement incited a spike in lesbian feminist activism and the formation of a distinct lesbian community in Holland. Schuyf explains that “Lesbian communities in the Netherlands were organized as cliques” and that “bar culture played a huge role in standardizing sexual norms, practices and presentations” (2002, pg. 55) within these cliques and the community at large.

Which bars and cafés lesbians frequented was highly dependent on their class status. Working class lesbians patronized bars governed by strict butch-femme gender roles. Particularly for butch lesbians who could not pass as straight, “The possession of a safe [lesbian-only] place to have a party was a cause of concern”(2002, pg. 59). Middle and upper class lesbians, however, tended to adopt more feminine gender presentations “they were not visibly different from heterosexuals. This meant that they were not out... and were more or less safe from discrimination”(2002, pg.59) and thus many ‘blended in’ in mainstream ‘straight’ bars.

In her thesis, Monica Brondos-Cases studies how the Dutch lesbians of the present day possess less of a connection to their sexual identity and queer activism than their foremothers, attributing the recent disappearance of lesbian nightlife in Amsterdam to this loss of identity.

Brondos-Cases argues that this loss of identity is the result of Holland's liberal attitudes towards LGBTQ individuals and a desire among queer people to be considered 'normal'

The fact that women feel like they are beyond the need for a lesbian space suggests that that they consider themselves free to mobilize in a variety of spaces. A number of the younger women in my study expressed the desire for integration into mainstream society so as to be seen as "normal." This freedom and desire are reflected in their belief that they no longer need to be involved in activism because they feel they have all their rights (2015, pg. 5)

Consequently, some young queer women opt to go to mainstream straight bars. Brondos-Casas links this pattern to the closure of Café Bordó, leaving Amsterdam with only two lesbian bars. The lesbian bars which have remained open "no longer seem to be associated with political activism and feminism, as they were in the past. Instead, they appear to have become commercialized places that target youth in a sexual way" (2015, pg. 4). Brondos-Casas also found that her participants from the younger generation were reluctant to associate with the more alternative 'queer' community, "To my surprise, most of the participants said they were not involved in the queer scene. In fact, they even claimed that they didn't know what it was. ... I even received the response, 'What is queer?' Marieke, who is involved in the queer scene, explained to me that I had probably not encountered other queer women in my research because the "lesbian scene and the queer scene don't mix"" (2015, pg. 21) a sentiment expressed by many of my participants as well. Attributing her findings to the generational shift of 'lesbian' from a political to a social identity, from 'activist' to 'normal', Brondos-Casas concludes that "lesbian women are being mainstreamed into society"(2015, pg. 32) as evidenced by their apparent disengagement with lesbian or queer-specific nightlife.

***Homonormativity and Heteronormativity***

To explain the concept of homonormativity, it is helpful to first define its predecessor, heteronormativity. A broad concept, heteronormativity describes a series of assumptions based on the idea that heterosexuality is natural and normal. Born from this idea is the conception that there are two distinct and opposite genders (heteronormative discourse consolidates sex and gender) which serve different, natural roles (Kacere, 2015). For example, women as caretakers and men as breadwinners. In heteronormative society, anyone who does not perform their sexuality and gender in accordance with these narrow standards is less deserving of legal rights and social acceptance.

Society is undeniably still deeply mired in heteronormativity and the resulting homophobia, but as queer people gain more rights and are subject to less explicit forms of segregation, they are increasingly susceptible to social policing from within the LGBTQ community in the form of homonormativity. Homonormativity is closely linked to other systems of social control including heteronormativity, sexism, capitalism, racism, and transphobia. The term describes how, in an effort to gain access to rights and recognition in straight-dominated society, members of the LGBTQ community are forced to assimilate to mainstream culture. Those who are unable or unwilling to do so, typically people who possess multiple marginalized identities including queer women, trans people, and queer POC, are pushed further to the margins of society by straights and assimilated “homonormative” queers alike. Homonormativity grants visibility and recognition to “those of a particular [class](#), of a particular [gender expression](#), and of a particular [race](#)”, thus queer people featured in the media are “more than likely be a cisgender, gender-normative, White, middle class, gay-identifying person” (Kacere, 2015). This portrayal of queerness renders invisible the existence of women, trans people, and POC,



minimizing the “complex realities of queer people; they participate in setting up a standard of a normative way to “be” LGBTQ” (Kacere, 2015).

This normative way to be queer includes getting married, exemplified by the prioritization of access to marriage over all other legal or social hurdles by the mainstream gay liberation movement. Placing marriage at the forefront of queer politics “sets up the requirement that all relationships should mimic this heteronormative standard of sexuality and family structure... reproducing, rather than challenging, heterosexual dominance and normativity and using this as a basis for who deserves rights” (Kacere, 2015). According to sociologist Lisa Duggan, proper queer assimilation also includes participating in neo-liberal capitalism. Duggan argues, “homonormativity comes equipped with a rhetorical recording of key terms in the history of gay politics: ‘equality’ becomes narrow, formal access to a few conservatizing institutions, ‘freedom’ becomes impunity for bigotry and vast inequalities in commercial life and civil society, the ‘right to privacy’ becomes domestic confinement, and democratic politics itself becomes something to be escaped” (2002, pg. 190). Thus, homonormativity regulates queer existence in a multitude of spheres including, as I will argue, LGBTQ nightlife.

### ***Recognition and Regulation***

The success of homonormativity depends on a system of inter-group and self-regulation, a theory Judith Butler develops in her book *Undoing Gender*. Butler argues that someone’s humanity is realized only when they are recognized within society. In order to be recognized as ‘socially intelligible’ one must conform to a set of norms, “The norm governs intelligibility, allows for certain kinds of practices and action to become recognizable as such, imposing a grid of legibility on the social and defining the parameters of what will and will not appear within the domain of the social” (Butler, 2004, pg.42). In the case of homonormativity, one must subscribe

to norms relating to their performance of gender and sexuality. On an individual level, this means that many queer people become what Butler terms ‘self-regulating subjects’, that is, they adopt normative practices in order to be recognized and legitimized by larger society, or, according to Goffman through socialization, “...the stigmatized person learns and incorporates the standpoint of the normal...thus, the stigmatized learns about normalization and how to be recognized by the larger society.” (1963, pg. 32). For example, a queer person may stop wearing flamboyant clothing that causes them to stand out as ‘abnormal’, resulting in a more subdued, “straight” appearance. Regulation may also take place on a community level. In the case of the LGBTQ community, members may regulate one another with the goal of accruing greater societal recognition for the group as a whole. Under this scheme, those who resist regulation are severely punished as “the viability of our individual personhood is fundamentally dependent on these social norms” (Butler, 2004, pg. 2). A group may thus ‘undo’ the person by withholding recognition; “recognition becomes a site of power by which the human is differentially produced” (Butler, 2004, pg. 2). Thus, regulation through the denial of recognition becomes an integral tool in the arsenal of homonormativity.

### ***Homonormativity in The Dutch Context***

Though they employ different terminology, Gert Hekma and his contemporaries have analyzed how the theories of homonormativity and regulation manifest in the Dutch context where blending in and being normal is considered paramount. Instigated by the sexual revolution of the 1960s, public opinion about homosexuality, prostitution, and premarital sex liberalized drastically in by the 1970s and in 2001, The Netherlands became the first country in the world to legalize same sex marriage. Following this major legal hurdle, “most Dutch citizens both gay and straight started to believe that the struggle for homosexual emancipation had finished. They

argue that there is no longer any need for a movement. But these legal changes have proven no guarantee for social acceptance of gays and lesbians” (Hekma, 1998, pg.5). Homosexuality became so normalized in Dutch society that even conservative politicians are tolerant of gays and lesbians. In fact in recent years, “right-wing and populist politicians such as Ayaan Hirsi Ali, Rita Verdonk and Geert Wilders took up the gay issue” (Hekma & Duyvendak, 2011, pg. 626).

These facts suggest that LGBTQ people in the Netherlands have gained full legal and social equality. The reality, however, is not so simple. Research conducted by Buijs et al suggests that “gay men are only accepted if they conform to certain norms such as not behaving in a feminine manner and not being too publically sexual... lesbians are usually absent from public life and the media”<sup>1</sup> (2008, pg. 152). Thus, Dutch society is still mired in homonormativity. Hekma argues that homonormativity is particularly acute in the Dutch context due to Holland’s emphasis on normalcy, evidenced by the famous dutch saying “*doe maar gewoon, dan doe je al gek genoeg*” which translates to ‘just act normal, that’s already crazy enough’.

Dutch homonormativity has serious repercussions. As Hekma and Fobear observe, those who engage in non-normative sexual practices or ‘alternative’ gender presentations are pushed to the margins of society. Only the “right” type of Dutch queer person (a white, masculine, monogamous gay man) is considered deserving of rights and recognition. As a result of pressure from both within and outside the mainstream LGBTQ community, “Many younger gays and lesbians prefer to keep their homosexuality as ‘normal’ and ‘private’ – and thus as invisible – as possible. They resist strong identities and communities; young lesbians attribute dyke styles like short hair, masculine clothing and behavior to an older generation” (Fobear, 2010). Hekma explains:

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<sup>1</sup> My own translation from Dutch

The heteronormative discourse is adopted by gays and lesbians who are often eager to act 'normally' by shunning unmasculine (for men), unfeminine (for women) and explicit erotic behavior. Heteronormativity thus becomes homonormativity as well, compelling both gay men and lesbian women to behave like straight people, making them afraid of showing any 'gay' or 'lesbian' signs, and prompting them to criticize others for behaving too much like sissies or dykes. Many gay men and lesbians share, for example, the ambivalent feelings of straight Dutch people regarding Amsterdam's annual Canal Pride Parade due to its ostentatious semi-nudity, drag and leather (Keuzenkamp, 2006: 234). Thus the homonorm has become not to behave in public like an effeminate fag, a bull-dyke or an erotically explicit queer (2011, pg. 629)

Thus, the LGBTQ community self-regulates, punishing members who engage in practices too far outside the straight-instilled norm. Under the domain of Dutch homonormativity then, even privileged queers must make sacrifices to their identities, presentations, and practices in order to realize their so called equality.

Former SIT Netherlands student Catherine Atkins wrote her ISP on Dutch normalization in relation to marriage equality, questioning to what extent the mainstream gay community and the alternative queer community are separated by the issue. Atkins found that mainstream gays and lesbians are more likely to view marriage as central to achieving full equality, attributing this pattern to a desire to 'just be normal' by mimicking the historically heterosexual practices. Like theorist Andrew Sullivan, this contingent of the queer community views integration with straight society the ultimate form of equality and marriage as a central means by which to reach that goal; "It could bring the essence of gay life – a gay couple – into the heart of the traditional family... It could do more to heal the gay-straight rift than any amount of gay rights legislation... marriage equality is key to normalizing homosexuality and thus reducing stigma, poverty, self harm and other problems within the LGBTQ community" (Sullivan, 1996, pg. 184)". Like Sullivan, many of the gays and lesbians Atkins interviewed viewed normalcy and

assimilation into mainstream society as a positive means of amassing legal rights and respect. Conversely, members of Amsterdam's alternative queer community, which Atkins argues is becoming increasingly divided from more mainstream gays and lesbians, were opposed to trying to 'act normal' or blend in. These participants were more likely than 'mainstream gays' to be concerned about intersectional issues like racism and environmentalism and were more likely to identify as activists. Ultimately, Atkins found that queers viewed marriage as an attempt to conform to heterosexual society and thus were less desirous to enter marriage themselves though not opposed to marriage as an option for other LGBTQ people.

In his thesis, Brandon Robinson analyzes Dutch homonormativity in relation to transphobia and cissexism from within the queer community. Robinson found that many trans, genderqueer, or non-conforming informants often felt marginalized even within the queer community. Robinson attributes these feelings of marginalization to homonormative views among his more mainstream informants who shared "the dominant heteronormative views of the correct way one should express one's gender", namely, that, even within the queer community, individuals should conform to the presentations and behaviors typically associated with their assigned sex at birth. Robinson found that "many Dutch sexual minorities are afraid of the general opinions about the naked men, drag queens, and leather men in the community, and specifically, in the Gay Pride Canal Parade", a conclusion supported by my own research (Robinson, 2011). Reflecting Butler's theories on regulation, "individuals within the community become regulators of those people who are butch, effeminate, or exhibit any other non-normative expression" (2004, pg. 14). Though not in the context of Amsterdam, existing research about homonormativity in LGBTQ bar culture supports the logic of these findings.

### ***Homonormativity in Bar and Club Culture***

In his essay “An Alternative History of Sexuality in Club Culture”, Luis Manuel Garcia documents how queers, particularly poor, queer people of color, have been written out of the history of club and rave culture despite being at the forefront of many underground music and dance scenes throughout history. According to Manuel Garcia, “Most of the music scenes that founded today's dance music genres—disco, garage, house, etc—were closely connected with marginalized groups, including gays and lesbians, trans people, racial and ethnic minorities” (2014). The author chronicles how these sexual minorities contributed to Club Culture in a plethora of locations and eras. In New York City, for example, “queers of color (primarily of African-American and Latin-Caribbean ancestry) and many straight-but-not-narrow allies came together to create small pockets of space in the city's harsh urban landscape—spaces where they could be safe, be themselves, be someone else for a while, and be with others in ways not permitted in the ‘normal’ everyday world” during the early part of the 1970s. At the same time, Chicago’s house music scene developed in the city’s primarily queer and black clubs, “mixing older disco with Italo disco, funk, hip-hop and European electropop”. Just one state away in Detroit, Michigan, “the dance scene was divided along sexual and racial lines: Ken Collier used to play at the Downstairs Pub, in the basement of the upscale disco club L'Esprit, but it was the setlists of the white DJ upstairs that appeared in Vince Aletti's "Disco Files" column”. Thus, although it was primarily black and latinx queer people spearheading the creation of new music and a surrounding culture, white and straight artists, DJ’s, and promoters received the majority of wealth and recognition.

At the same time as alternative queer clubs, run and visited primarily by people of color, were shutting down due to gentrification, mainstream gay nightlife was thriving. Circuit parties, enormous, corporate-sponsored events, populated by affluent, predominantly white gay men,

“came to symbolize mainstream white gay male culture, especially in the way their size and prominence helped to create a dominant, ‘normal’ gay identity that excluded a lot of other identities” (Manuel Garcia, 2014). In this way, American club culture exemplifies many tenets of homonormativity; queer people unable or unwilling to assimilate to straight society are punished while the gay elite are rewarded, a pattern continued in the present day. According to Loren Granic, one of the co-founders of A Club Called Rhonda (ACCR) in Los Angeles,

We're currently experiencing a total mainstreaming of dance music in America... many of these newcomers are straight/white kids who are very far removed from the LGBT community, despite fist-pumping by the millions to a music that was born from gay people of color sweating their asses off at 5 AM in a Chicago warehouse... I think it's important that we highlight the role that the gay community played and that we educate new fans of dance music to the ideals of community, equality and diversity that were so crucial to dance music's DNA from the beginning (Manuel Garcia, 2014)

This appropriation of queer dance culture by straight people has forced alternative queer communities to carve out spaces for themselves outside of the gay mainstream. Granic, for example, founded ACCR as "a safe place for the deviants, a place where gay and straight nightlife wasn't so compartmentalized but instead encouraged to mingle... it's a place where you can go to shed those labels and break down those walls in the interest of having a good time” (Manuel Garcia, 2014). Like many of my interviewees, Granic does not mind the presence of straight people in queer or gay oriented spaces, he merely wants to create a space free from hetero or homonormative expectations. Manuel Garcia concludes with a call to action; “there's more to this piece than reminding ourselves that queers were historically important for dance music, or that they're still musically relevant now. With the ongoing mainstreaming of electronic music culture, accompanied by a worldwide conservative turn, the struggle for sexual diversity in dance music is more urgent than ever.”

Ethnographer Julie A. Podmore analyzes how homonormativity pushed lesbians to the margins of the LGBT community in Montreal. According to Podmore, Montreal lesbians enjoyed their golden age during the 1980s when lesbians operated a total of 30 different bars, cafés, and restaurants throughout the city. Two decades later, however, the number of lesbian bars in the city dropped to just one (Podmore, 2006, pg. 597). Critiquing queer theorist Manuel Castells who, “attributed the creation of more visible enclaves by gay men to their territorial ‘nature’ and higher levels of disposable income, and the invisibility of lesbian communities to a greater commitment to political activism and a reliance on informal, aspatial networks” (2006, pg. 596), Podmore argues that the disappearance of a distinct lesbian community is the result of lesbians’ position as a marginalized group even within the LGBTQ community.

During the 1970s and 80s, when queers in Montreal suffered from legal discrimination, social alienation, and even police violence, gays and lesbians organized in distinct but allied communities, united by shared suffering. But during the 1990s, when Canada grew more tolerant of LGBTQ citizens, “The Village [gay male neighborhood] grew into one of the most consolidated and concentrated queer districts in North America, and the lesbian venues of St-Denis Street closed their doors and were not replaced” (Podmore, 2006, pg. 604). This acquisition of legal rights corresponded with the gentrification of both the primary lesbian and gay male neighborhoods in Montreal. The difference was that gentrification displaced the lesbian population, leading to the closing of lesbian operated nightlife, while gay men were the *cause* of the gentrification of The Village, displacing more marginalized queer individuals such as poor, queer POC. According to Podmore, white gay men embodied the concept of homonormativity, assimilating to mainstream, consumerist, straight culture by opening large, highly profitable night clubs and eventually an entire gay tourism industry. Starting in the early 2000s, middle and



upper middle class straight couples began moving into the now trendy and gentrified neighborhood, pushing out even more of The Village's former inhabitants including a number of lesbians. Thus, although legal and social changes ostensibly improved living conditions for all LGBTQ people in Canada, privileged queers such as white gay men reaped a disproportionate amount of the benefit.

The shutdown of women-only spaces led some formerly male-only spaces to open their doors to all genders, producing seemingly unified queer spaces. The production of queer territory in the Village however, "produced important gender asymmetries: while the consolidation of its commercial space had resulted in the multiplication of queer and gay male nightlife, the results for lesbians were less expansive. The loss of women-only bars and the deterritorialization of lesbian bar culture brought by a partial relocation had produced a decline in lesbian bars, territory and ultimately, lesbian space at the urban scale" (Podmore, 2006, pg. 619). To paraphrase, as gay male bars became "mixed" bars, lesbians were granted access to these established venues, but occupied only a marginal space, literally and figuratively, in this new "unified" queer culture, losing their autonomous territory and culture. Unlike the former lesbian bars of the Plateau whose focus was on community organizing and feminist activism, the few lesbian bars that opened in The Village "followed the broader Village format: they were night clubs where the entertainment centred around drinking and dancing; they featured DJs rather than live music" (Podmore, 2006, pg. 606). Like their gay male counterparts, lesbian establishments had to conform to dominant straight culture in order to survive. As is the case with alternative queer nightlife in Amsterdam, Montreal's lesbian nightlife currently revolves around "temporary venues such as women's nights held in gay bars in the Village or in community sites on the Plateau (Cadorette 2003). Advertised through networks using word-of-

mouth and email listservs, these are alternative events that are not listed in the city's official 'queer' guides" (Podmore, 2006, pg. 602). As I discovered through my own research, there are many parallels between how processes of homonormatization and normalization have influenced LGBTQ nightlife in both Montreal and Amsterdam.

### ***Gaps in Current Research***

Though homonormativity has been researched in the Dutch context and in relation to bar and club culture, no research exists which combines these two domains: studying homonormativity in Dutch bar and club culture. Additionally, nearly all existing research on LGBTQ nightlife in the Netherlands focuses exclusively on lesbian bars.

## **Methods and Methodology**

### ***Methods***

To investigate LGBTQ nightlife in the Netherlands, I chose to engage in qualitative, rather than quantitative research. Qualitative studies tend to be more comprehensive and in-depth than numeric-based research, asking *why* and *how*, rather than *if* a phenomenon is occurring. Because I am interested in discovering *how* the normalization of gays and lesbians in Dutch culture affects LGBTQ nightlife, qualitative research appeared to be the most appropriate option. To answer my primary research question I relied mainly on interviews which I conducted with 10 different queer residents of Amsterdam.

### ***Interviews***

Over the course of one month I conducted 10 in-depth semi-structured interviews with participants using open ended questions that I developed in an interview guide. The questions I asked were a mix of fact and opinion. For example, I asked participants what changes they had witnessed to LGBTQ nightlife, if any, *and* how they felt about those changes. Additionally, I utilized some aspects of an oral history interview. For example, I asked participants about their experiences ‘coming out’ as queer to family and friends. I asked these questions which were not directly related to the topic of my research in order to better understand my participant’s positionality and life experiences as queer people, taking into account how these experiences may affect their current experiences of and opinions about LGBTQ nightlife.

I located interviewees using both the purposive and snowball sampling methods. Though these methods pose a number of limitations which I will discuss later, they enabled me to identify a large number of people to interview, a difficult task considering the nature of my target population: young queer people who like to ‘go out’. This population is not readily identifiable,

particularly in Amsterdam where gays and lesbians tend to adopt a more mainstream gender presentation than gays and lesbians in the United States, a notion echoed by many of my participants. I considered attempting to meet participants at the sites I am studying, LGBTQ bars and clubs, but after spending some time in these locations I realized that the loud music, flashing lights, and prevalent alcohol create a less than ideal atmosphere for making professional or academic contacts. Thus, I chose to interview queer people with whom I had an established relationship as a starting point, and snowball sample to identify additional participants.

My first interviewee, Floor, was the younger sister of a Dutch friend I met when she was studying abroad at San Francisco State University. After my interview with Floor I asked if she could connect me with any queer friends she had who would be willing to get interviewed, which is how I located my second and third interviewees, Roos and Jasper. After running out of connections through Floor, I asked my girlfriend, Alex, if she would let me interview her and some of her friends, and she agreed. I was also able to interview the hosts of one of my friends in the program. Finally, I asked Nina and Keri the daughters of my host, Irene, if they knew of any potential interviewees. Nina who is completing her masters in Social Sciences at the University of Amsterdam connected me to her friend and fellow masters student Lucas who in turn connected me with other interviewees.

My target community was queer residents of Amsterdam between the ages of 18 and 30 who actively engage in LGBTQ nightlife. I wanted to interview people in this age category because younger people tend to be the target audience of clubs and bars and take a more active role in nightlife. Because I am researching the current state of nightlife in Amsterdam and recent changes that have occurred within the past few years, I decided to interview only young people who still go to bars and clubs. In the end, most of my participants were in their early to mid

twenties, my youngest participant being 19 and my oldest being 31. In terms of gender, all of my interviewees identified as either men or women and none of them expressed that they were transgender, leading me to postulate that all of my subjects were most likely cisgender. I interviewed 5 men and 5 women. All participants identified as LGBTQ in some capacity though some were hesitant to label themselves as such, preferring to, as Elise puts it 'just be me'. Male participants were more likely to strongly identify with a label, four of them referring to themselves as gay and one as pansexual. Female interviewees, on the other hand, felt less strongly connected to one particular label, often using multiple labels to describe their sexual orientation. Ultimately, two female participants identified as bisexual, two as lesbian, and one as 'gay or queer'. The majority of participants were originally from the Netherlands though most had moved to the city of Amsterdam within the last few years. Along with 7 Dutch nationals, I interviewed one individual from the Philippines, one from England, and one from the United States. Though participants came from a variety of countries, all are current residents of Amsterdam.

Prior to meeting in person (all of my interviews were conducted face to face), I contacted interviewees via Facebook Messenger or WhatsApp. Through this initial contact, I provided potential participants with the basic information about my research, informed them that the interviews would take 1-2 hours, and allowed them to choose a time and place to meet. By allowing participants to choose the location for our meetings, I gave each person the power to select a location where they felt most comfortable. Some participants felt safe talking openly in busy cafes or bars while others chose a more private location such as a study room at the University of Amsterdam or their own home.

Each interview lasted between 1 and 2 hours and I made sure interviewees felt free to take breaks as needed. The interviews were semi-structured. That is, I developed an interview guide which I used to prompt subjects when needed, but I avoided reading off the guide. Instead, I asked follow up questions based on subjects' responses. This style provided me with a more informal, conversational interview atmosphere. I found that subjects usually covered the topics included in my interview guide without formal prompting. Furthermore, this style of interview allowed subjects the freedom to focus on what *they* perceived as most important instead of what I, as an outside researcher, assumed to be most important. Following my first few interviews then, I was able to tailor my interview guide to include questions most relevant to my interviewee's experiences. All interviews were audio recorded and subsequently transcribed.

### ***Positionality***

Throughout my research, I have considered it important to keep in mind my own position and identities. My position as a foreigner undoubtedly influenced both my own perceptions and how participants viewed me-potentially as an outsider. Though my foreignness may have distanced me from some of my Dutch participants, this element of my positionality created solidarity between myself and my three expat interviewees. I could relate directly to their struggles with learning the language, getting in bike accidents, and other difficulties. In terms of race, my whiteness can be seen as both a boon and a detriment to my research. On one hand, my nine white participants probably felt more comfortable discussing racial issues with me because they could do so with less concern about being perceived as racist. This became evident to me during my interview with Aiden. As we sat at a café near Museumplein, he shook his head and muttered 'fucking asians' under his breath. Later, in response to me asking him if there were any groups of people he wouldn't want in a gay club he explained, 'It's like a small group who

are like fucking it up for everybody else. Like just a few Moroccan people who are sexist mess is up for all the Moroccan people and same with Turkish people,' s a statement I suspect he might not have made to a person of color. Conversely, my whiteness may have made my single interviewee of color, Jasper, who is from the Phillipines, less comfortable discussing racial issues.

My gender identity and expression seemed to have played a minimal role in my research. Most of my participants seemed to read me as a woman due to my feminine appearance. Though I do not necessarily identify as such, I am accustomed to being read this way and this did not bother me. My sexual orientation, however, greatly influenced how my interviewees perceived me as a researcher. I am often read as a straight person by people who do not know me well and therefore I suspect most participants initially read me that way, as a straight outsider conducting research on a community they are not a part of. In order to build rapport and solidarity then, I outed myself as a queer person before the start of or early on in the interview. I noticed participants seemed visibly more relaxed and open about discussing personal details about their life once this commonality had been established.

### ***Bias and Assumptions***

Before entering my research, I had a number of assumptions about what my research would reveal, assumptions which were undoubtedly informed by my own identity and experiences. First, because I feel so strongly about identity as a queer femme and such a deep connection to the queer community, I assumed that most of my participants would have similarly strong ties to their own sexualities and communities.

Based on my experiences getting hit on my straight men at LGBTQ bars in the U.S. and subsequent anger, I presumed that participants, particularly women, would also feel perturbed by the presence of straight people in historically queer or gay spaces.

Finally, because the population of my home institution, Smith College, is both exceptionally queer and activist, I often consolidate the two identities in my head. Thus, I was surprised to discover that the majority of my interviewees did not identify themselves as activists or even more than marginally politically active. Though it is impossible to disconnect myself entirely from my bias and assumptions, I made my best attempt not to let these factors influence my research.

### ***Ethical Issues***

Ethical issues are important to consider when researching a marginalized group of people such as the LGBTQ community. My shared identity as a queer person eliminated potential sexual orientation based power dynamics that could have arisen had a straight researcher been conducting the same investigation. Additionally, my research topic is something unlikely to provoke traumatizing memories or provide particularly sensitive personal information. Regardless, I changed the names of all research subjects to ensure their anonymity, and eliminated any unique personal details from transcripts included here. I also deleted recordings of my interviews after they had been transcribed.

### ***Limitations***

There are several notable limitations to this research. First, due to time constraints, I was only able to interview ten people. Consequently, the perspectives represented in the research, as well as the conclusions drawn, are not representative of all points of view within the queer population of Amsterdam. In addition, though I attempted to talk with as diverse a sample of



people as possible, several populations were underrepresented. The majority of participants were white and cisgender. I postulate that the homogenous nature of my participants is partially due to my sampling methods (convenience and snowball). It is possible that talking to a more diverse group of people would have altered my findings. Finally, the fact that eight of my interviewees were non native English speakers created somewhat of a language barrier. A number of participants expressed frustration at not being able to convey their thoughts clearly or with proper nuance.

### **Findings and Analysis**

Through my interviews, I identified several main themes, each of which relates to my primary research question and theoretical framework.

#### ***Perceptions of Identity and Community***

I found that although all of my participants identified as LGBTQ in some way, many expressed an aversion to labels, particularly the label ‘queer’.

*How do you identify?*

When asked about how they identify in terms of sexual orientation, nearly half of my subjects reported that although they adopted a label for the sake of practicality, they found labels distasteful. Elise, who is married to another woman told me, “why should I tell that I am this or I am that. I am a human being. That’s for sure. I think everybody has their value and their standards but I think it doesn’t really matter if you’re attracted to men, women, or whatsoever”, despite being in a lesbian relationship, Elise felt that her sexual orientation was not a central component of her identity. Floor, who identifies as a bisexual woman told me “I noticed that people who are bisexual they might say that ‘I’m bisexual or pansexual but I don’t like that term, I just like who I like’ and I guess I said that too” she explained that ‘I just like people’ and although she was proud to be bi, she did not want her sexual orientation to define her.

*What are your thoughts about the term ‘queer’?*

Though a number of the people I interviewed including Alex, Lucas, and Patrick identified as queer, some of my participants were confused and even frustrated by the term. Vera, Elise’s wife declared, I don’t like to define myself in *any* way. Not in *any* way. What does queer say? Like nothing? That I’m a lesbian? That I’m bisexual? The only times that I define myself as queer is when it comes to those days like today when people are marching at Dam square because of those two gay men who were harassed. Then I do feel queer. Then I do feel connected to that part of society”. Vera associates queerness with activism and because she does not see herself as an activist, she rarely sees herself as part of the queer community. Others, including Aiden and Roos, were simply confused by the term. When asked if she considers herself a

member of the queer community, Roos admitted, “I don’t know actually. I’m not really sure how to use it. I never use the word queer actually”. These attitudes reflect a pattern Lucas explained to me in which some members of the Dutch LGBT community feel frustrated by the term ‘queer’ because it is too ambiguous,

The few people that I’ve met where I’ve been like ‘oh I’m queer’ sometimes that will elicit the reaction of ‘what does that even mean? What’s the point of that term?’ and that kind of frustrates me because the point of the term is kind of this broader, non-term in a sense and then they’re very quick to say ‘well you might be queer but I’m gay’ or ‘you might be queer but I’m bi’. . . . Dutch people want a category to put themselves into. They aren’t necessarily so open to this blurred lines mentality that I think is gaining some traction elsewhere in the world.

Thus, while some participants disliked all labels, others were fine with labels, so long as those labels had clear cut definitions and parameters.

This reluctance to identify as queer may be an attempt by some of my participants to blend in with ‘normal’ straight society. Though heterosexuals have a sexual identity, most of them are not forced to think about that identity on a regular basis, as straightness is the norm. Thus, their sexual orientation is not important to their identity just as Vera and Elise’s lesbian identities were not particularly important to them. Additionally, some participants, including those who identified as queer, associated queerness with activism and eccentricity, the antithesis of normality. LGBT people who choose to adopt labels are thus encouraged to identify with a label that is intelligible to society at large, a label that is easily definable and, unlike ‘queer’, does not call into question the gender binary, or heteronormative practices. For some this distance from labels translated into a distance from the community.

### ***Illusion of Liberation and Desire for Integration***

A few interviewees reported that they felt no particular connection to the gay or queer community, preferring to socialize in integrated, ‘straight’ bars and clubs over establishments

marketed towards the LGBTQ community. A few participants even asserted that in Amsterdam gays and lesbians have achieved full equality, negating the need for most queer-specific spaces and critiquing these spaces as too flamboyant or sexual.

*Do LGBTQ people in Amsterdam still face discrimination?*

When asked whether Amsterdam still has a need for LGBTQ bars, Vera explained that because The Netherlands is so open-minded, the need for queer-specific spaces is less, “I mean we have the gay pride, we have same sex marriage. We have the pink police. We have gay rights, the law with us. And also for almost everyone. I consider Holland as a really open minded country so I think the need is less. So I think you don’t need that much gay clubs or groups”. Similarly, Jasper, who moved from the Phillipines to Amsterdam a few years ago explained, “a lot of the LGBT people have just become apathetic and that’s because in Amsterdam it’s safer. And therefore you stop. But there’s more to do. They’re like ‘well that doesn’t happen to me so I don’t care’”. Vera herself admits that her perception of Amsterdam’s progressiveness may be colored by the fact that she and her wife “are of a generation where being married to a woman is quite normal. We got married three years ago and by then gay marriage had been legal for ten years. So I never saw it as a struggle and I never have any difficulties with telling people I am married to Elise because nobody gives a damn. So I don’t have to fight for being who I am or doing what I do. I don’t feel angry about certain things and I don’t feel the need to be in a big group”. The couple went on to explain that their lack of feelings of persecution were one of the reasons they avoid going to Café Vivelavie “I feel like it’s a place for some angry older women who had to fight for being who they are and kind of looking at you like they’re blaming you for not having to fight for that.” Elise also disclosed that she avoids Canal Pride and other large displays of queerness “because I think it *makes* you a minority”.

Though none of the other participants shared these feelings, Finn told me that some of his LGBTQ friends avoid Canal Pride for similar reasons, “I mean you can be against it because it anti-normalizes gayness. It’s too extravagant. It brings all the stereotypes together. There are guys in shorts and no shirts on those aqua jets flying around as angels. I mean sure that is VERY gay. But if people want to do it and people enjoy it”. Floor explained that many of her friends hold these views as well, “They’re like yeah of course I’m proud to be gay but I don’t have to do it in a pink thong on a boat”. Instead, Floor’s friends and others like them opt to drink and socialize in non-LGBTQ specific spaces. Vera and Elise, for example, asserted that they didn’t care if a bar was gay or straight as long as they had good beer.

As Robinson and Hekma argue, many mainstream gays and lesbians distance themselves from LGBTQ parties and communities that are too extravagant, activist or far from the norm. According to Hekma, “gays and lesbians in the Netherlands maintain their sexual life and identity in the private bedroom, and most do not consider themselves part of a larger LGBT community (Hekma 2005)”. This dissociation from queer community is particularly acute among those who, like Vera and Elise, did not face oppression themselves. It may also be borne from a fear that by socializing with leather-clad men on boats or ‘angry’ feminists at the Vivelavie, they will no longer be viewed as a normal member of Dutch society and thus no longer deserving of rights and recognition.

### ***Homophobia in Amsterdam***

Despite the fact that a few participants felt fully emancipated, the majority of interviewees reported that LGBTQ people still face discrimination, even in the liberal city of Amsterdam.

*Do LGBTQ people in Amsterdam still face discrimination?*

When prompted with the same question, the majority of participants offered very different responses from Vera and Elisa, arguing that homophobia in The Netherlands is alive and well. Jasper explained that although conditions for LGBTQ people are better here than they are in the Philippines, “There’s SO much more work to be done, even in the Netherlands, like this is a progressive country but if you go outside of the cities, especially in the South where it’s very Catholic there is still a lot of homophobia”. This conclusion was echoed by Aiden, “Of course it still exists! It’s bullshit to say otherwise! Day to day life in Amsterdam is fine, it’s perfectly fine, I’m not unhappy with it or anything but of course shit still happens... it will never cease to exist probably. In some way or another, there will always be a new sexual barrier to break. Roos, who is from a small village outside of Amsterdam and experienced bullying because she “looked like a boy”, explained that although she has faced minimal instances of discrimination since moving to Amsterdam, “some of my gay boys are screamed at or yelled at. Amsterdam is the best gay city in the world but there always will be discrimination everywhere”. Floor recounted a time where a friend was brutally attacked in the street after a man yelled at her for kissing another girl, calling her a “dirty lesbian”. These instances are not necessarily representative of the conditions all LGBTQ people face but they demonstrate that homophobia is still present even in this liberal setting.

*Have you had any negative interactions in straight bars?*

Participants reported that homophobia often carried over into the domain of nightlife as well, causing respondents to feel uncomfortable and at times unsafe. Lucas explained to me that after he yelled at by a group of men in a straight bar, he avoids kissing his boyfriend unless they are in an LGBTQ space. Similarly, Roos reports, “there was one time with my girlfriend when some guys came up to us and they asked her why she was dating a girl, didn’t she want the real

thing?” Later that night she was barred from entering the club Jantjes Verjaardag because the bouncer told her ‘there are a lot of straight people and I don’t know if they will accept you’. Alex experienced a similarly traumatic event at the bar Coco’s Outback:

It was an absolutely a terrible experience. There were guys there who would look at me like I was an alien. And I would go into the girl’s toilet and people would look at me like what are you doing here? Because I’ve got like quite a masculine look so it’s very like not welcoming ... there were people who were just like a bit confused. Or, I think they might have thought that I was a trans guy in which case they started treating me like one of the lads. Like quite a lot of times a guy will start a conversation with me, not with any intentions. It was definitely a weird night.

Both Roos and Alex were perceived as too outside of the heterosexual norm, too masculine, to engage with straight bar culture. In other words, they were punished for not conforming to heteronormative society by being made to feel ‘like an alien’.

The experiences some participants had with homophobia, compared with Vera and Elise’s feelings of emancipation, demonstrate the impact one’s presentation has on their nightlife experience. Vera and Elise, who are both white, upper middle class, and rather feminine, could easily integrate in straight bars and clubs. Conversely, Roos and Alex, who both have short hair and a more androgynous or butch gender presentation are marginalized within straight-dominated spaces.

### ***Current Relevance of LGBTQ Nightlife***

In light of these findings, it is no surprise that the majority of respondents reported that there is still a need for LGBTQ-specific nightlife. When I asked what they perceived the primary function of LGBTQ bars and clubs to be, participants had three primary answers: Finding sexual or romantic partners, finding a community, and being in a ‘safe space’.

*What purpose does LGBTQ Nightlife Serve?*

Many participants explained that at least part of their motivation for ‘going out’ was a desire to find romantic or sexual partners. Not only did interviewees feel safer hooking up or ‘cruising’ in LGBTQ spaces, it was also an issue of practicality. Jasper explained that “Especially in Amsterdam, straight men just know how to take care of themselves. So the line between knowing a straight man and knowing a gay man is very difficult”, and in LGBTQ bars he could approach another man with confidence, knowing that he would most likely be queer and if not, at least he wouldn’t react violently. He elaborated, telling me that many of his gay male friends feel uncomfortable flirting in mainstream bars, “A lot of them feel uncomfortable in the sense that a lot of them feel like they’re gonna get attacked by a straight man. They just don’t feel safe at all, like perhaps the straight people are going to get aggressive towards the gays”. Consequently, several people described LGBTQ bars as “a very sexual atmosphere”. Finn theorized that the sexual nature of bars was the result of “compensation of not being able to do that in normal life and then you’re suddenly all together. And there’s this big chemistry with everyone”. Thus, he felt that the hyper-sexual nature of these spaces was the result of pent up repressed sexual energy.

Those who already had partners reported that they felt that they benefited from this function of LGBTQ bars as well. I asked Roos, who is in a monogamous relationship with another woman, whether she felt more comfortable engaging in public displays of affection in queer-specific spaces, “I mean I’m not afraid to kiss her in a straight club but I’m a little *more* comfortable kissing her in a gay club. Because sometimes it gets some attention like guys will look or something like that”. Women, then, as a marginalized group even within the queer community, are especially susceptible to harassment from heterosexuals, making the safe haven of LGBTQ bars a necessity. Similarly, Mika and Vera both reported that they used gay bars to



meet potential partners when they first came out and were still questioning their sexuality. For them, bars were a place where they could experiment outside the gaze of leering or potentially violent straight men.

Distinct, but related to finding sexual partners, was a desire to find friends and community. When I asked Roos how gay and straight bars are different, she replied, “I think in gay clubs people are more outgoing. Really hyped. It’s more intimate. And in straight clubs it’s more groups, you go there with a group and you stay there with a group. And in gay clubs it’s just everybody walking around, making new friends”. She went on to explain that prior to visiting gay bars in Amsterdam, she knew no other queer people and felt extremely lonely. LGBTQ bars were a place where Roos was able to meet people who made her feel normal, visible, and validated. These sentiments were echoed by many of the other people I interviewed.

Finally, LGBTQ bars seem to function as a safe space for queer people, particularly for queers either still coming to terms with their identity or who feel especially vulnerable in mainstream, straight society. Lucas, who is originally from the U.S., explained that he comes from a very diverse queer community in D.C. and was therefore surprised by the reaction he received after wearing eye makeup to a Carnival party at Oedipus Brewery,

I had like huge eyeshadow and I’d done a little bit of lipstick and had glitter all over my face and then showed up and that was clearly not the mojo that they were going for in this space ... It was one of the first times I started to second guess the queer nature of Amsterdam nightlife in general. Which was unfortunate in a lot of ways because I loved my makeup but I definitely got a lot of stares... I felt VERY uncomfortable in that space.

Due to his non-normative gender expression, Lucas felt alienated from the straight-dominated party at Oedipus. For Lucas, LGBTQ parties serve as an alternative to this space where he feels safe to decorate his face in glitter and exhibit other non traditionally male qualities. For Jasper, it

was his eccentric style of dancing, rather than his physical appearance, that made him feel uncomfortable in mainstream spaces:

There was this one time that a straight woman friend of mine invited me to go to this festival and the DJ's playing were very mainstream, so I knew immediately that it was gonna be these douche bags like a lot of straight men and women... I felt really uncomfortable being myself there. Like if I were dancing for example in De School, I usually dance super eccentric, like I don't care what I look like, I just let loose. And it's fine, people in the underground scene whether they're gay or straight, they don't care they actually LOVE that you're letting loose. When you go to these mainstream events though, then you see these straight people watching you and you don't feel safe letting loose, mainly because you don't conform to how you should dance or how you should dress... And if you don't conform to 'the usual', you see the looks, and I noticed, at this one event, that they were copying me, mocking how I danced. And then I realized I wasn't in my safe space anymore... I am very conscious about only going places that I know are going to be queer friendly. Because otherwise I don't feel free, I don't feel safe. I think the more you blend in, the more you feel free. And if you go to gay parties, everyone is crazy so you blend in in the sense that if you're just normal, they don't care and if you're extreme they also don't care. So whatever you're wearing, whether it's a shirt and jeans or a kimono, most people don't care, so you feel like you also don't care. So I think that's what makes clubbing with LGBT people so enjoyable. It affects me a lot because then I feel like I'm not really worried about what other people think, I'm just caring about my enjoyment. And it's hard to find that experience in most mainstream straight clubs.

Jasper's comments also reflect Butler's theories of recognition and regulation. In mainstream spaces, Jasper was made to feel like an 'other' because his dancing style didn't conform to 'the usual'. He was thus denied full recognition within the mixed club space, and evidently didn't feel free or safe in mainstream spaces. For Jasper then, LGBTQ bars were places where he felt recognized and validated, where he could fully 'let loose'.

These findings demonstrate how one's identity determines their level of freedom to navigate in different spheres of Dutch nightlife. Those of my participants who had more privileged, normative identities and presentations such as Vera, Elise, and Aiden did not feel that they *needed* to be in queer spaces to be safe. Aiden, for example, stated "Like for me it's not a

problem, I'm safe everywhere, I can go wherever I want. But it's more for the people who are not out and are struggling with themselves". As a white, cisgender, gay man, Aiden felt comfortable moving between gay and straight spaces. Still, he recognized that these spaces are necessary for some, particularly for those still coming to terms with their sexual identity. Those of my participants with more less normative, more 'queer' appearances and practices such as Jasper and Lucas were more likely to utilize LGBTQ bars and clubs as safe spaces where they could seek shelter from the homophobia they face in mainstream society.

The majority of participants felt that even in light of recent legal and social gains made by the LGBTQ community, queer nightlife continues to perform a valuable function, if not for themselves than for more marginalized members of their community. As Finn bluntly asserts, "It's so egocentric to say, we don't need those spaces anymore because *I've* never had problems. If there's still people going there, of course queer bars are necessary. There is a demand. It is a safe space for some people". In short, bars and clubs continue to provide queer people with a space to seek community and romantic relationships or 'just feel safe'; a space that possesses more or less importance depending on one's own identities. Unfortunately, the safe space of these bars is being compromised by a recent surge in homonormativity within the LGBTQ nightlife scene.

### ***Straightening Up: Homonormativity in LGBTQ Nightlife***

Homonormativity manifests within the context of LGBTQ nightlife in a number of ways. As a number of interviewees reported, this shift towards normalization occurs primarily in the mainstream gay and lesbian bars of the Reguliers and Amstel rather than alternative queer events and spaces, a topic which I will expound upon in the next section. Based on my discussions with participants, I identified several recent trends in LGBTQ nightlife relating to homo and

heteronormativity including an influx of straight people, the use of gayness as a marketing strategy, and the exclusion of lesbians, queer POC, and other groups within the queer community.

*Have you noticed any recent changes to LGBTQ Nightlife?*

When I asked whether they had noticed any changes to bars and clubs in recent years, nearly all interviewees brought up the NYX. According to Flor, when Club NYX first opened, it was immediately became one of the top gay bars in Amsterdam, catering to a young, hip, queer crowd. After being open for only a year, however, the club began to change, “it became so mainstream, mainstream music, mainstream people, mainstream outfits, mainstream decorations. I was like, we have enough straight clubs already, why make another one?” As Floor’s comment elucidates, changes to the NYX made the club more closely resemble one of the many straight clubs around the city. In this way, the NYX embodied homonormativity, changing itself to mimic the model of straight society. The normalization of the NYX culminated in the club hosting a ‘straight night’ every Thursday and altering how they brand themselves from ‘gay club’ to ‘open minded club’. Naturally, these changes brought about an influx of straight patrons to the bar. Jasper, who stopped going to the NYX due to this change in audience explained, “when I first started going to the NYX it was 3 years ago, and I really liked it because it was more my age group and I easily connected with people there.... I felt like before NYX was playing stuff that was more obscure and now it has become more and more mainstream. And I think it happened because more straight people were coming but also it brought more straight people to the NYX. I also realized that the people I went out there with didn’t want to go anymore”. Jasper was not the only person I talked to who held these views. The majority of participants explained that the establishment lost much of its appeal after it ‘straightened out’,

complaining that the club had sold out its core audience (queer people) by trying to market itself to a wider audience for financial gain. Though discussions centered on the NYX, participants reported that similar changes had been occurring throughout the bars and clubs of the Reguliers and that Club Air underwent similar changes before it officially switched from being a gay to a ‘general’ club.

Why did normalization drive out many of the NYX’s former patrons? One explanation is simply a loss of culture. NYX went from being cutting edge to, in Aiden’s words, “basic as hell. It’s a lot of people being 17, white, blonde hair, listening to mainstream music”. Roos went as far as to describe the NYX’s new population as “like human Barbie Dolls”. The more insidious reason for this exodus of queers, however, were the negative experiences with straight patrons many reported having. Aiden explained to me that when the club first opened, they had a ‘door bitch’, a drag queen named Jackson who stood outside and filtered out people who she thought might cause trouble. He attributes some of the club’s recent problems to Jackson’s replacement by a stern, male bouncer. Whatever the reason, more than half of the people I interviewed reported experiencing an increase in homophobia within LGBTQ bars in recent years. Floor, an attractive, feminine woman, recounted multiple instances of straight men harassing her including men filming her kissing another woman, and guys pestering her relentlessly for her number. Additionally, Lucas described how bachelorette parties act in gay bars, “some of them are giggling and laughing the whole time, whenever they see a gay couple kiss, or anything like that, which I find extremely offensive”. Given these behaviors, it is no wonder Finn described the feeling straight people staring at him in the club to kids staring at a “monkey in the zoo”. Participants from marginalized groups within the queer community, including Jasper who is a person of color, and Floor, a woman, stated that they no longer even felt safe at the NYX and

similar venues, “It’s the same story everywhere. They start it, they make it cool, and then it gets taken over by straight people, they drive away the queer people who started it because then they don’t feel safe anymore”. Thus, the incursion of heterosexuals at the NYX displaced especially vulnerable queer populations.

Based on my interviews, even privileged groups of queers, such as white gay men, were negatively affected by the NYX’s transformation. Floor explained that following the mainstreaming of the club, many of her queer friends and her brother, who is gay, began changing their styles, “there’s something funny I see right now; my brother, he was so outgoing in his style like big shirts and trousers with strange prints and he still dresses really cool but he worries so much about what people think about him that he’s kind of changed his style... I think a lot of friends of mine were more outgoing in their clothes when they were younger and now they’re afraid of what people will think of them. I think it’s a shame, I miss the fun trousers.”. Thus, even though some normative LGBTQ people still feel safe at the NYX, their acceptance and recognition is conditional on their adherence to standards set by dominant straight society.

*Have you noticed any changes in the way LGBTQ bars market themselves?*

Interestingly, a year after the NYX adopted the label of ‘open minded’ bar, they returned to their previously held title of gay bar. Elise explained, “they changed it back because they were losing their edge”. Similarly, Jasper reported that one of his friends who works as a floor manager for a new ‘straight’ bar, is making an effort to attract queer patrons:

They started to invite LGBT DJs to the club. They said it was a conscious decision from management. Because they needed to attract more diversity and more LGBT crowd who are usually the ones dancing and going crazy and making it a cool place to go... so they’re using LGBT people to make it more fun. And that’s something that has been done for so long. Like I think in the 1980’s or 90s, in the US, there was this group called the Club Kids, they were this group of gays, and they were invited and paid to go to parties just because they would make parties more extravagant or cool. But I think it’s also

interesting to see that the LGBT crowd is being used as a tool. Could be good, could be bad, I don't know.

He went on to postulate that straight people visit gay bars in order to flaunt their open-mindedness “they're just doing it for the coolness and not really understanding what it's all about. Like ‘oh I'm open, I go to queer parties’, it doesn't end there. Like there's no action. Your daily actions do not reflect your one time action of going to a queer party... queerness gets minimized to an accessory than an actual way of thinking or a way of perceiving sexuality or gender identity”. Thus, under the domain of homonormativity, the queer people who cannot assimilate are forced to either leave the space or become a spectacle for the enjoyment of straight people.

*Can you tell me about your experiences with gay bars?*

Based on my interviews, homonormativity seems to manifest even in the gay and lesbian spaces *not* overrun by straight people. Lucas, a gay man from the U.S., told me that he dislikes the strict top versus bottom dichotomy that exists in some many of Amsterdam's gay bars, “if you don't present as if you were a top or a bottom in some type of way and make that very well known publically, then people just tend to look over you or not really want to engage with you... So when you don't fit into really strict top bottom categorization, you can definitely feel a little bit ostracized”. He argues that these binary sexual tropes mimic traditional male/female gender roles, leaving heterosexual dominance unquestioned and restricting queer sexual expression, “part of the thing that I really appreciate about being queer is that we have this sort of unspoken freedom to really transgress all sorts of boundaries. And whenever you have people trying to reaffirm hyper-masculine ideals, it's almost putting us back in a box that, just by virtue of being queer, we don't necessarily have to belong to in the first place”.

Similarly, some people reported feeling pressure to conform to traditional gendered displays. Mika, for example, enjoys wearing glittery makeup and heels but reported that he no longer feels comfortable to do so in mainstream gay bars like The Eagle and Dirty Dicks. This observation accords with Finn's theory that femininity is not valued within the mainstream gay scene, "There are a lot of gay men who have a strong dislike for feminine gays because they are afraid of what straight people will think. Like when there's a lot of feminine gay guys in the club of course a straight guy thinks 'well that's what a gay looks like'... You get taken more seriously as a guy when you are less feminine, even within the gay community". Thus, mainstream gay bars take part in maintaining sexist and cissexist ideologies that men are naturally masculine and masculinity is naturally superior to femininity. In line with the theory of homonormativity, mainstream queers may be engaging in regulation within the community in an effort to gain acceptance and validation in society at large, rewarding hyper-masculine men for emulating heterosexual masculinity and censuring effeminate men for breaching their 'natural' gender role.

Sexism also manifests within mainstream gay bars with regard to how lesbian women are literally and symbolically pushed to the margins of LGBTQ nightlife, which, even now that most establishments have ostensibly been integrated, is dominated by gay men. When queer women *are* present in mainstream LGBTQ bars, Aiden informed me that they generally occupy "their own little bubble, they don't mix with the rest of the club". When I questioned why he thought that was, Aiden explained, "I think 'gay' is more accepted than lesbian. Maybe it has to do with sexism... Especially now with Trump, women still don't have equal rights. And maybe it's the same with gays and lesbians. Gays got their rights earlier... I have friends who are fine with me as a *homo*, a gay man, but when they see a gay women they go 'ewww a lesbian!'" Likewise, when I asked him if women were welcome in gay bars he responded, "even if women are



welcome, they can definitely feel pushed to the outside or not even realized, like people don't even realize that they're there. That's definitely something that I can see, unfortunately even myself doing". Like Podmore who conducted research on lesbian communities in Montreal, I found that even in ostensibly integrated spaces women are often rendered invisible by the centering of male experiences, opinions, and voices. As Butler argues, this lack of recognition translates into denial of full personhood.

*Can you tell me about your experiences with lesbian bars?*

My findings about homonormativity within the lesbian bar scene are complex. On one hand, as the preceding examples demonstrate, gay women are often subject to regulation by privileged (male) queers. Many interviewees described Amsterdam's only remaining lesbian bar, The Vivelavie, as territorial, which I propose may be a response to discrimination queer women face from both within and outside the queer community. Though The Vivelavie succeeds in establishing a space that is lesbian-dominated, the territorial nature of the space works to exclude those who are not the 'right' type of queer including femmes and bi women. Alex makes this point, arguing, "I think there would be more acceptance of the butcher looking girls than super femme because it might be that they're not seen as gay enough to be in a gay bar... I would assume that girls who are quite femme looking would probably find it difficult going to a lesbian bar and having people take them seriously. They might assume that they weren't gay or queer so were like encroaching on their turf. As for bi women, I feel like they'd be accepted until or unless they got off with a guy... She wouldn't be kicked out or anything ridiculous. But I reckon there would have been like a few heads turning". Thus, by resisting the homonormative nature of mainstream gay bars, The Vivelavie excludes those most in need of protection and validation;

the bisexual and queer femme women who are a highly neglected contingent of the queer community.

Discussions with patrons of the bar also revealed that, like the mainstream gay-male bars, The Vivelavie is dominated by sexual scripts based on heterosexual gender relations. Lucas recounted that the lesbian party his friend attended “was very much butch lesbians on one side of the room and femmes on the other. And she said there was very few in between and if you were talking to another femme lesbian, then that’s just a friendship. So it was almost like a reproduction of heteronormativity just in like who you’re even allowed to talk to for a sexual partner.”. Lucas’s commentary reveals that like their male counterparts, mainstream lesbian bars not only fail to deconstruct, but in fact support heterosexual supremacy by reproducing stereotypical gender roles.

*Have you witnessed any discrimination within the LGBTQ nightlife scene?*

Finally, conversations with participants revealed that mainstream gay bars may not be comfortable spaces for transgender people, GNC folks, or queer POC, a trend I argue can be linked to normalization. In general, when I asked participants about the racial and class composition of a space, they reported that mainstream bars are largely white, largely middle or upper class, and seemingly largely cis (although this last identity is less easily identifiable). Though I was not able to interview anyone who identified themselves as trans, Lucas told me that his friend who is a trans woman “very actively avoids nightlife just because she says it’s a very rough experience for her. They have like a really interesting concept of what drag is like, but I don’t think they’re really fully embracing trans identity yet, at least not in the nightlife scene”. Additionally, Elise explained that she stopped visiting The Vivelavie after she witnessed patrons at the bar making fun of someone she read as a trans woman, “In moment that I realized

that I hated it there. There was this trans woman sitting at the bar alone with a drink. And you could see she was kind of looking for contact. And then you could see other people talking behind her back and making fun of her and in that moment I was like ‘okay I’m done’... So they’re claiming to be open minded but, only if you’re a lesbian.”. Similarly, based on my interview with Lucas, mainstream LGBTQ bars are potentially hostile to those who identify beyond the binary. Lucas theorized,

I think that whole concept of non-binary is not easy to bring across here for some reason and I wonder sometimes if it’s because they have such progress in queer rights and trans rights early on, ...categorization helped them to gain their rights back in the 80’s and even before, but it’s sort of a downside because you can’t move beyond the categories, ...And then you come here and they’re still like ‘no you are either a man or you are a woman’ and you can be trans but you’re then either a trans man or a trans woman. I think people work very hard to present specific types of categories here.

Lucas’s comments reveal that even in LGBTQ bars which claim to be progressive and inclusive, gender and sex are consolidated, forcing bar patrons to either conform to stereotypical gender roles and expressions or be rendered invisible.

Nearly every person I spoke with reported that, with regard to race, mainstream LGBTQ nightlife is homogeneously white. Additionally, Mika asserted that racialized stereotypes are rampant in gay bars,

You see a lot of intersectionality in the oppression of ethnicity. And for me this shows why gay bars are not safe spaces. Because also the sexualization of the male body, like ‘oh when you have a dark skin color you have a big dick’ or like ‘don’t bother with asians’ are stereotyping thoughts that really are alive in the LGBT community and also being dispersed in behavior in gay bars. I think it’s to be seen as a safe space for the white LGBT people who behave themselves towards the norms of gay, lesbian, and when you don’t fit those two categories, I don’t really think it’s a safe space. Maybe safer than the non-LGBT scene, but still not safe.

These notions were confirmed by Floor who hypothesized that these racial stereotypes go unchallenged due the erroneous perception among many Amsterdammers that Holland is a post-racial society.

How does this discrimination relate to homonormativity? As theorist Lisa Duggan asserts, homonormativity establishes hierarchies of worthiness within LGBTQ communities where queer people who come the closest to mimicking heteronormative gender identities are seen as most deserving of rights (2012). But these hierarchies are not just gendered, they are based on other systems of power at large in heteronormative society, such as racism, transphobia, and cissexism. Thus, by mimicking mainstream heterosexual society, normative queers are enforcing these other mechanisms of social control, effectively fragmenting the queer community and discouraging those at the bottom of the hierarchy (including gender nonconforming people, queer people of color, and trans people) from occupying public space.

The culmination of these findings produce conditions within LGBTQ nightlife hostile to the populations that these establishments purport to serve. Fortunately, many of the queer individuals fleeing normative nightlife have found solace in alternative, queer parties and bars.

### ***Establishment of the Queer Underground***

At the same time as the gay and lesbian bars of the Reguliers and the Amstel are growing increasingly normative, Amsterdam's underground queer scene is becoming increasingly popular, a trend I link to many queer people's dissatisfaction with the exclusivity and homonormativity present in the mainstream gay scene.

### *How is Amsterdam's queer scene distinct from the mainstream gay scene?*

Those of my participants with experience in Amsterdam's more underground, alternative, 'queer' scene described this scene is distinct from the bars of the Reguliers and the Amstel.

Mika, who is writing his thesis at the University of Amsterdam on GNC people's experiences with queer nightlife explained, "we see a clear distinction between queer nightlife and what is theoretically to be seen as queer nightlife but don't explicitly define themselves as queer spaces". Instead of permanent, physical spaces, queer nightlife tends to take the form of parties, hosted at a different venue each time, the exceptions being De Trut and The Vrankrijk which explicitly define themselves as queer bars (rather than lesbian or gay). The Vrankrijk hosts a number of events catering to a more activist, anarchist clientele, interested in a diverse range of issues from veganism to communism. De Trut is unique in that the venue has a strict no-phones policy which creates what Lucas describes as a more intimate, familial, *gezellig* vibe. The parties participants discussed were often themed or filled specific niches. For example, events hosted by the House of Vineyard cater to kinky queer people interested in BDSM, Yarr is a party mainly for queer women and femmes, and the organizers of Spellbound describe it as a "queer underground techno dance party".

*What makes queer parties and spaces so special?*

When asked why they prefer queer parties over mainstream nightlife, participants explained that these parties were inclusive of a much broader range of identities and experiences than their more normative counterparts. Though queer parties and spaces are exceptionally diverse, their organizers and patrons seem to all be concerned with what Mika terms 'the multi-layered consciousness' which I understood as a form of intersectionality, "'Queer' is not just who you are attracted to, it goes beyond that I think. It is about the multi-layered consciousness-caring about environmental issues for example. To be conscious about what's going on this world. And challenging your point of view, being aware of other people's difficulties and trying to change things whenever it's difficult for someone else". Thus, queer parties are united in their

dedication to challenging oppression, creating more inclusive spaces for those who face marginalization due to aspects of their identity other than sexuality. Consequently, Finn reported that he noticed more black people and people he read as trans in queer spaces than he did at the NYX. Similarly, Daphne, who photographs for one of the main queer parties in Amsterdam, Milkshake, conveyed, “It’s really nice. I have worked in the organization as a graphic designer. I think they’re a really good example of really open minded. Like everybody’s welcome. They really do that well in their communication and their promotion. Not only gay boys, really everyone. Also trans. That’s really good because I think they’re a forgotten group in Amsterdam, even among the gay community”. In short, unlike the gay and lesbian bars of the Reguliers, underground queer spaces were sites where oppressive power structures like racism and transphobia were actively dismantled.

Interviewees active in the queer scene were also quick to praise queer parties and bars for validating a whole range of gender and sexual presentations. When I asked him why he enjoyed the atmosphere of De Trut, Lucas explained, “you don’t have these stereotypical, misogynistic and verrrry hyper-masculine images of men there. I mean obviously you’re gonna have built guys everywhere but I don’t feel like they’re making a show of their masculinity like you have in some of the other bars here where you just have muscle bros and twinkles and you don’t really have that in De Trut which is really cool”. Unlike the aforementioned mainstream gay bars, patrons of De Trut did not have to adopt to a particular sexual role to be included. Likewise, Mika explained that, even as a cis man, he felt comfortable to exhibit femininity because in queer spaces,

The expression of gender is not that stereotyped. For example, there are times when I wear heels or I wear makeup or women’s clothes to Fucking Pop Queers or a similar party. And I would define myself as a man, or male, but I do not necessarily stick to the gender expression of what’s supposed to be male.... I sooner would wear heels to these

kind of parties than to the NYX... these kinds of parties I see a higher level of gender blends or gender non-binary than I would at the Reguliers.  
Thus, the underground queer scene rejects traditional gender roles and identities, becoming the antithesis of the mainstream LGBTQ scene and the homonormativity that scene has come to embody.

## Conclusion

Several major themes arose throughout the course of this research which shed light on my original research question: How has the normalization of gays and lesbians in Dutch society impacted LGBTQ nightlife in Amsterdam, if at all? Based on my conversations with interviewees, I was able to determine that normalization does indeed have a profound and insidious impact on LGBTQ nightlife.

Despite Amsterdam's reputation as one of the world's most progressive cities, my findings indicate that LGBTQ people continue to endure instances of homophobia and oppression, particularly within the domain of nightlife, indicating that LGBTQ-specific bars continue to serve a crucial purpose.

Unfortunately, the normative changes to these bars in recent years has resulted in the strict internal regulation of gender and sexual practices and presentations within the queer community. Based on Hekma's theory of homonormativity, the impact of these changes is highly dependent on one's identity. More privileged queer people (e.g. those who are white, middle class, cisgender, and/or male) are rewarded when they assimilate to mainstream, heterosexual society. In the process, however, they may be forced to sacrifice important components of their identity. Conversely, more marginalized queer people (e.g. those who are of color, poor, trans, and/or female) are often not even given the same option as they are too alternative to assimilate and pose a risk to the successful assimilation of their privileged peers. Consequently, they are punished, often through lack of recognition which, as Judith Butler argues, is tantamount to denial of one's full humanity.

Within the context of my research, I found that homonormative changes to gay and lesbian nightlife, including reliance on dichotomous sexual roles (i.e. top/bottom, butch/femme),



contributing to systems of power (e.g. racism, transphobia, etc), and even loss of their gay identity (in the case of the NYX), caused many of my participants to feel uncomfortable and, at times, even unsafe. In response to frustrations relating to the mainstreaming of these spaces, a vibrant underground queer scene has emerged. The underground queer scene offers LGBTQ people from all walks of life space to feel recognized and valued, to wear heels and glitter, to let loose on the dance floor, and to celebrate the differences that make the queer community queer.

### ***Recommendations for Future Research***

I hope this research will act as an impetus for future studies of queer nightlife and community formation. As both my own research and prior studies demonstrate, LGBTQ bars and clubs, historically and currently, serve a number of important roles in the lives of queer people, allowing them to explore their identity and find community in a safe environment. In light of these findings, the establishment of genuinely inclusive queer nightlife settings is a worthy goal. Future research could perhaps investigate these issues with more specificity as my research was broad, covering a plethora of topics. I was thus unable to delve into any one of the topics my research addressed in as much depth as I believe these issues deserve. Additionally, I hope future researchers make an even greater effort to interview people of color and or marginalized groups within the queer community. Still, despite participation by a limited cross section of queer life, my research points the way toward further investigation into the intersection of queer people, nightlife, and identity.

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- Alex, Personal Interview (LGBTQ Nightlife), 17 March 2017, Robin Food Kollektief, 1 Frederik Hendrikstraat 111A, 1052 HN Amsterdam

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Finn, Personal Interview (LGBTQ Nightlife), 25 April 2017, Hutspot, Van Woustraat 4, 1073 LL Amsterdam

Aiden, Personal Interview (LGBTQ Nightlife), 27 April 2017, Corner Bakery, 1071 ds, Johannes Vermeerstraat 40, 1071 DS Amsterdam

Roos, Personal Interview (LGBTQ Nightlife), 28 April 2017, CT Coffee & Coconuts, Ceintuurbaan 282-284, 1072 LR Amsterdam

Mika , Personal Interview (LGBTQ Nightlife), 30 April 2017, University of Amsterdam School of Social Sciences, 1012 WX Amsterdam

## **Appendices**

### ***Appendix A: Guiding Interview Questions***

After having them sign consent form, I asked participants if they are comfortable with me recording the interview (all of my participants were). If they agree to have it recorded, I can pause the recording at any point they want. I also took this time to clarify to each participant that they do not need to answer any question that makes them uncomfortable or stressed, we will simply skip over it and move onto the next question. I informed each participant that we can stop or pause the interview at any point: if they need a break, they can take it and we can continue our interview after they have recovered. I also told them that if they later changed their minds and

did not want a portion of their response included in my final report, they could inform me at any point prior to the due date and I would delete that section of the interview.

I did not use the following questions as a strict script. I merely used this list as a reference to check that I had covered everything I wanted to talk about or to prompt a participant if they had run out of things to discuss.

### *Introductory Questions*

1. How old are you?
2. Where are you from originally?
3. If not originally from Amsterdam: How long have you lived in Amsterdam?
4. What do you study/what do you do for work?
5. How do you identify in terms of...
  - a. Gender?
  - b. Sexual orientation?
  - c. Any other identities that are important to you?
6. Are you out to? To whom? When did you come out?

### *Questions About Identity and Community*

7. How do you feel about the term queer? Is it a label you use for yourself? For your community?
8. Do you see a difference in the lesbian/gay scene and the queer scene? In what ways?
9. Are your friends mostly queer or straight or both? Men or women or both? Do you hang out in mixed groups of people or is there a divide along gender and sexuality lines?

### *General Questions About Nightlife*

10. What are your experiences with LGBTQ nightlife in Amsterdam?
11. What bars/clubs do you go to most often? Why?
12. Are there bars/clubs that you feel more comfortable in? Why?
13. Are there bars/clubs that you feel less comfortable in? Why?
14. What group(s) of people fit in most at X bar? What group(s) of people fit in least? Why do you think that is?
15. What kind of person would fit in best in X bar? What kind of person would stand out?
16. What are your experiences with mainstream/straight nightlife in Amsterdam? How do you compare to your experiences at LGBTQ bars?

17. How do your experiences at LGBTQ bars in Amsterdam compare to your experiences at LGBTQ bars in other parts of Holland? Other Countries?
18. Have you noticed any changes in who goes to these bars? How so?
19. Have you witnessed any changes in how these bars are marketed or managed? In what ways?
20. Describe the “average” patron of X bar/club?
21. Have you heard of any LGBTQ bars that have recently shut down?
22. Have you heard of any bars that have become straight/straighter?
23. Have you noticed more straight people going to LGBTQ bars? Why do you think that is?
24. Do your straight friends ever want to go to queer bars with you? Why do you think that is?
25. Is there discrimination within the LGBTQ bar scene? Have you witnessed any specific instances of discrimination?
26. Does it seem like X bar accepting of trans people? POC? GNC people? Women? Why do you say so?
27. Have you noticed any stigma against certain groups in X bar? For example feminine gay men or feminine lesbian women?

*Opinion Questions about Nightlife and Community*

28. Do you think your identity/presentation affects your experiences at X bar/club? In what ways?
29. How do you feel about the fact that there are not many spaces/bars/clubs specifically for women, POC, or other marginalized groups? Do you think there needs to be? Why or why not?
30. What sort of impact does a high percentage of straight people have on a bar or club?
31. Have you noticed a gender divide in LGBTQ bars? Why do you think the separation between gay male and gay female spaces exist? How do you feel about this separation?
32. Do you think LGBTQ bars are still necessary? For whom? For you? What primary function do they serve?
33. How do you feel about Canal Pride?
34. What is your purpose in going to LGBTQ bars? What do you think is the purpose of others?
35. Do you think LGBTQ bars are activist spaces? Should they be?
36. How do you feel about integrating LGBTQ and straight bars? How do you feel about integrating bars for gay men and lesbians?
37. What impact has spending time at LGBTQ bars had on you and your identity?
38. What is your ideal queer space?

39. If you could change one thing about LGBTQ nightlife in Amsterdam what would it be?

### ***Appendix C: Bar and Club Guide***

#### Reguliers

*Club NYX- <http://clubnyx.nl/> Reguliersdwarsstraat 42, 1017 BM*

*Bar Exit- Reguliersdwarsstraat 42, 1017 BM*

*SoHo <http://www.soho-amsterdam.com/> Reguliersdwarsstraat 36, 1017 BM*

*Taboo <http://www.taboobar.nl/> Reguliersdwarsstraat 45, 1017 BK*

*Café Reality <http://www.realitybar.nl/> Reguliersdwarsstraat 129, 1017 BL*

#### Amstel

*Café Vivelavie <http://www.vivelavie.net/?lang=en> Amstelstraat 7, 1017 DA*

*Queers Cafe <http://www.queerscafe.nl/> Amstel 60, 1017 AC*

*FAME <http://fame.bar/> Amstel 50, 1017 AB*

*AIR Amsterdam <http://www.air.nl/> Amstelstraat 16, 1017 DA*

#### Other Neighborhoods

*Club Church <http://www.clubchurch.nl/> Kerkstraat 52, 1017 GM*

*De Trut- <http://www.trutfonds.nl/> Bilderdijkstraat 165-E, 1053 KP*

*Café Saarein-<http://www.saarein2.nl/> Elandsstraat 119-HS, 1016 RX*

*Prik <http://prikamsterdam.nl/> Spuistraat 109, 1012 SV*

*Vrankrijk-<http://vrankrijk.org/> Spuistraat 216, 1012 RB*

*De School <http://www.deschoolamsterdam.nl/en/> Doctor Jan van Breemenstraat 1, 1056 AB*

*Lellebel <http://www.lellebel.nl/> Utrechtsestraat 4, 1017 VN*

*Dirty Dicks <http://www.dirtydicksamsterdam.com/> Warmoesstraat 86, 1012 JH*

*Eagle Amsterdam <http://www.theeagleamsterdam.com/> Warmoesstraat 90, 1012 JH*

*Spijker Bar <http://spijkerbar.nl/> Kerkstraat 4, 1017 GL Amsterdam*

*Shelter Amsterdam <https://shelteramsterdam.nl/> Overhoeksplein 3, 1031KS Amsterdam*

Parties and Festivals

*Milkshake Festival* <http://www.milkshakefestival.com/en/> Westerpark

*Rapido and FunHouse* <http://www.clubrapido.com/> different locations

*Fucking Pop Queers* <https://www.ultrasexi.com/> different locations

*Canal Pride* <http://pride.amsterdam/> different locations, main stage at Dam Square

*PANN Parties* <http://pann.nl/english/> different locations, based in Utrecht

*QueerKlub* <https://www.facebook.com/events/305557142987469/> Louwesweg 1, 1066 EA

*Boy Scouts* [https://www.facebook.com/boy.scouts.amsterdam/?ref=timeline\\_chaining](https://www.facebook.com/boy.scouts.amsterdam/?ref=timeline_chaining)  
different locations

*Spellbound* <http://www.spellbound-amsterdam.nl/> Amstelveenseweg 134, 1075 XL

*Is Burning* <https://www.facebook.com/IsBurning/> different locations

*House of Vineyard* <https://www.facebook.com/houseofvineyard/> different locations

*Yarr Amsterdam* <https://yupnyarr.wordpress.com/yarr-production/> different locations