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COMMUNITY FORMATION IN GAY BUFFALO, NEW YORK

by

Justin Paul Azzarella
May 9, 2002

A thesis submitted to the
Faculty of the Graduate School of State
University of New York at Buffalo
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the
degree of

Master of Urban Planning

Department of Urban and Regional Planning

Mom, Dad and family

I hope this helps you, I know it helped me

I love you all so much

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ABSTRACT

There has been little to no research completed on the formation of the gay community in Buffalo, New York. Other gay communities, such as New York City, West Hollywood and San Francisco, California have been well documented. Their history tells the story of vibrant gay neighborhoods and social communities with shops, restaurants, clubs, organizations, medical services and community centers.

This thesis examines the formation of the gay community in Buffalo, New York from the inception of the gay liberation movement to the present. The thesis is primarily a collection of case study interviews. The testimonials of those interviewed have been woven into the local and national history of gay community formation in America.

The significance of community formation in Buffalo, New York is important for documentation purposes. Currently the timeline of events such as oppression, bar raids, gay liberation and political adaptation are held in the minds of our elders and those few individuals who have made a point to learn about the strive and victories of their forefathers and sisters. It is my hope that this thesis will allow Buffalo's gay community to learn from its past, take pride in its community, and effectively plan for the future.

Chapter 1: Introduction

Believing in our democratic heritage and self-determination of ethical values, we organize under this constitution for: re-affirmation of individual pride and dignity; elimination of stigma attached to human self-expression; effective changes of unjust laws concerning one's individuality and relationships among consenting individuals; promotion of better physical, mental, and emotional health; creation of a sense of Gay community; and a constructive outlet for members and friends.

- Constitutional Forward; The Mattachine Society of the Niagara Frontier

This thesis argues that Buffalo's gay community followed a national model of community development while also concluding that Buffalo's gay community has numerous levels of social interaction. The type and setting of social interaction between the gay community has changed over the years and will likely change in the future. This thesis examines the formation of the gay community in Buffalo, New York from the inception of the gay liberation movement to the present. Local planning journals are filled with studies on the formation of various ethnic and social groups within the context of our urban environment. African-Americans, Women, Italians and Poles are all well documented. However, the issue and importance of gay community formation in Buffalo, New York has not been well documented or made easily accessible to the community.

Consistent with a University approved research protocol the names of those interviewed for this thesis have been omitted in favor of pseudonyms and generic descriptions of each subject's involvement and stature within the community. Nearly all of those interviewed questioned the need for changing their actual name to a pseudonym. Some felt that they had worked diligently throughout their life to make it possible for them to no longer hide behind false names and pretenses while others simply stated, "I'm out, it's who I am and everyone knows."

The Road Ahead

To tell this story I rely on the broad literature on national and local gay community formation, and to chronicle the past, present and future outlook of gay community development in Buffalo case studies of various members of Buffalo's gay community. The case studies consist of open-ended recorded interviews with prominent members of Buffalo's gay community including, but not limited to, social coordinators, human service leaders, health service representatives, bar and club owners, and seasoned and young members of the gay community.

I tell the story of gay community formation in the next four chapters. Chapter 2 will cover the emergence and ascendance of gay community formation at the national and local levels. Chapter 3 deals with the Gay Power movement that developed out of New York City's Stonewall bar in 1969. Public Identity and the Triumphs and Tragedies of the Sexual Revolution through the difficult era

of feminism, sex, drugs and AIDS are also discussed in Chapter 3. Chapter 4 outlines the reemergence of Buffalo's gay community in the 1990s. Lastly, Chapter 5 synthesizes the thesis with concluding remarks on the future of Gay Buffalo.

A total of nine people were interviewed. Each person gave valuable insights into the formation of Buffalo's gay community. Their pseudonyms and brief descriptions are as follows:

Frank: A gay college professor approaching retirement. Frank, one of the original members of what would become Buffalo's Mattachine Society, was very active during the early years of the gay liberation movement in Buffalo.

Chuck: A gay man active in Buffalo's gay liberation movement while a college student. Chuck was also an original member of Buffalo's Mattachine Society.

Sherry: A self-affirmed bohemian, Sherry hadn't given much thought to organized politics. As fate would have it she later found herself in the national spotlight. Sherry championed the inclusion of gay and lesbian issues in the national Democratic platform.

Kevin: A thirty-something professional, Kevin is a current mover and shaker in Buffalo's gay community. He is a member of numerous clubs and organizations that promote gay issues in the political, social and spiritual arenas.

Cody: In his twenties, Cody is also a young professional. He's taken part in Buffalo's artistic community and gives a vision for the future of the gay community.

Scott: A patron of a local gay bar. Scott remembers the wild days of sex and drugs that were once so prevalent in Buffalo during the 1970s and 1980s while also reflecting on the strong sense of brotherhood and family that united the gay community.

Patrick: The owner of Buffalo's oldest continually running gay and lesbian bar. His bar has served as a meeting place for gay and lesbian clubs. Patrick left the area for a larger more progressive city and later returned to care for his parents.

Chris: A prominent member of Buffalo's political community. He believes he's done more for the gay community by being a politician who happens to be gay, rather than a gay-politician.

Thomas: A black-gay man in Buffalo. Thomas is a successful professional that attributes his accomplishments to "the entire package"; and being gay is just part of his recipe for success.

Chapter 2: Emergence and Ascendance of Gay Community Development

At the midpoint of the twentieth century, the life of a gay or lesbian American was one of internal exile. Secrecy, isolation, and denial; self-hatred and self-destruction: these were the common themes of gay existence. Under the triple burden of unjust law, uncaring religion, and inflexible custom it was a struggle just to live; to live with pride was an impossibility (LeVay 1995, p.43). Levay and Nonas, in their book, *City of Friends: A Portrait of the Gay and Lesbian Community in America*, tell the history of the gay community from WWII to the late 1990's. Although the authors deal briefly with international developments within the gay community their focus is on the development of gay communities in the United States.

Lesbian women who had served in the service during the Second World War had grown accustomed to their all-female surroundings where lesbianism was commonplace and generally much more accepted than in their small American hometowns prior to and following the war. Both gay men and lesbians alike, although brave on the front lines and intelligent and strong willed in military medical services found their accomplishments negated due to their "choice" of sexual orientation. Psychiatric clinical records from the U.S. State Department documenting a homosexual nature demanded immediate expulsion from the service. One lesbian service woman tenderly stated, "My plans for the future, my feelings of worthwhile accomplishment, and the work which had come to mean so much to me, were brought to an abrupt and cruel end" (LeVay 1995,

p.44). The real and immediate fear that a person's livelihood could be stripped away because of their sexual orientation was and still is a major hurdle in the formation of gay communities. This fear has also, however, served as a point of unification, a reason for gay ghettos to sprout up and later mature in the major postwar port cities of America, notably New York City, San Francisco and Los Angeles. Gay communities provide comfort, stability and safety. These are the wants of any community.

The segregated all male and all female culture of the military had given soldiers, curious of their sexuality while isolated in "Small Town, USA" a chance to further explore their options. When they returned to America they settled in diverse post-war port cities. For all intents and purposes, the first gay communities formed out of these postwar seeds. The physical gay ghetto began to emerge while the foundation for a new social community of gay men and lesbians developed.

1950s: Social Integration

The first flower to bloom in the garden of homosexual communities is the gay bar. Bars that catered to lesbians or gay men were subject to constant police harassment during the 1950's and beyond in most American cities. This harassment took two forms. First, undercover agents posing as homosexuals attended the bars to gather evidence that might be used to revoke the bars' licenses. Same-sex kissing or dancing, suggestive talk, or inappropriate dress

were all grounds for revocation. The other technique was the police raid. Arriving in force late on Friday night, accompanied by dogs, the police would push the patrons against a wall and strip-search them, then throw them in the paddy wagons for the trip to the police station, where they would be held overnight or charged and released. The charges were usually vague: disorderly conduct, frequenting a house of ill repute, impersonating a person of the other sex, and so on. Very often the charges were thrown out, but by that time the damage was done: local newspapers had published the names of the people charged, and their jobs, marriages, and positions in society were all at risk. The harassment of gay bars was a far greater impediment to lesbian and gay life than it would be today, because at that time there were so few other opportunities for meeting gay people (LeVay 1995, p.44).

In Buffalo, New York the story remained largely the same. Buffalo had a thriving gay community in the 1950s, as recalled by three old friends and early members of what would later become the Mattachine Society of the Niagara Frontier, the local gay and lesbian liberation movement.

Sherry remembers the days of the gay and lesbian bar scene in Buffalo prior to the Stonewall national movement and the local gay and lesbian liberation movement:

Let me give you a little background about how that came about, the closing of the bars. Buffalo in the 1950's had a thriving gay community. One of the reasons that those bars had stayed open is because the Buffalo Police Department was on the take. Anybody from the cop on the beat,

right on to the top could be bribed. The cops would come into the gay bars and pick up a bottle and an envelope and so the bars never had any trouble. In the mid 1960s Rockefeller ran on a ticket to clean up the mess in the Buffalo Police Department along with all the other things around the state that he was going to do. And when he (Rockefeller) came in and started to crack down that meant the police were being watched and could no longer take bribes and the police came through and closed all the bars. So we were fairly barless for two years. The thing that had happened is that the captain of the Vice Squad in 1967 had closed down all gay bars for a period of about two years. Gay people had nowhere to meet.

American Political Change and the Mattachine Society

The treatment of gay men and women in these bars set the stage for ill feelings and political organization. Although gay political action was limited before 1950, other disadvantaged groups had made significant advances. In 1920, after a seventy-year struggle, women's right to vote was secured by the passage of the Nineteenth Amendment. This was the event that made possible the women's movement of the 1960s and 1970s. African-Americans had made few political gains since the Civil Rights Acts of the Reconstruction era, but the groundwork for change had been laid by the urbanization of many blacks, a flowering of black culture in the interwar years, and an increasing movement to end segregation.

In 1948 President Truman signed an executive order ending racial segregation in the armed forces. This action was a prelude to the landmark Supreme Court decision, *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka Kansas*, in 1954 that declared racial segregation in schools to be "inherently unequal." Jewish Americans were also extremely active in the postwar years: they were heavily involved in the creation and development of the State of Israel. A few politically aware gays and lesbians saw all these developments as examples of what could be achieved for their own community (LeVay 1995, p.49).

In July 1950 Harry Hay, a former Hollywood actor and Communist Party member who lived in Los Angeles, drafted a prospectus for a gay rights organization. Hay's organization, made up solely of gay men during its infancy, and later known as the Mattachine Society, began to put on private and semi-public meetings for discussion of gay issues (LeVay 1995, p52). The society was largely ineffective during its first few years of existence, to some degree because of the founding member's fears of exposure but more likely because of the Communist Party mentality that had been engrained in the mind of its founding father. The most important aspect of the Mattachine Society was that it rightfully defined gays and lesbians as an oppressed minority group within American society.

Frank, Chuck and Sherry remember how the closing of gay bars, police harassment and the political fever that was running rampant throughout the rest of the country led to the development of the Mattachine Society of the Niagara Frontier.

Franks remembers:

Our first meeting was in December of 1969. There was a bar owner that came up from Florida. He opened a bar, and because of a prior record he couldn't get a liquor license. It was located on Delaware and Huron where the county court building is now. The Buffalo Athletic Club was not too happy about its influx there. So what he did was set up a private club, well first he opened a juice bar for underage people. And then he decided he'd have a private club and people would bring their own liquor. Well they didn't, he provided liquor there, but you could bring your own too. That place was raided in mid 1969. There were people herded into patty wagons and the bar was right up the street from the Buffalo Holding Center so some people were just marched down the street. Names were published in the Buffalo Evening News and I know one woman who was smacked around a lot and hurt.

Chuck adds:

But that raid didn't take place until after our first meeting to organize. It was January 1970 that the second meeting to organize a gay liberation movement in Buffalo took place. And it was held at that same bar. The raid we spoke about happened about three weeks later.

Frank and Chuck spoke of the atmosphere surrounding the first meetings of the Mattachine Society of the Niagara Frontier:

There were about 350 people all crammed into a room, all wanting gay liberation right away and they were all smoking. There was a very large heavysset dyke with her T-shirt rolled up. She was trying to be the Sergeant At Arms because everyone was trying to talk at once. She was trying to keep order in this absolute chaos. And the meetings went on and on and on. It was 2:00 a.m. in the morning before we ever left.

Chuck recalled how Frank, his partner, became a permanent fixture in the gay liberation process:

In that first meeting, after about an hour and a half of everyone yelling, Frank put up his hand and said we needed to deal with one issue at a time and he was immediately appointed parliamentarian. We keep meeting, and they were terrible meetings.

Frank added:

I (Frank) was a lot younger then and I could tolerate cigarette smoke much more. The room was blue, do you remember that?

Sherry gave a further description of where this gay liberation group met:

This all happened at the Tikki Club. The bar was originally on the corner of Franklin and Tupper, in the Laughlin's building. Then the

owner moved the bar down to Delaware and Huron and I think he still called it the Tikki Club. He used to have those little Hawaiian statues and we hung them around our necks. We called them Tikkis, I don't know why. I'm not sure if that's their real name.

Frank speaks about the second meeting of the organization and its choice of name:

Anyways, at the second meeting it was decided that we needed to put together bylaws and all that bit. No one could agree, you get a bunch of gays and lesbians together... and trying to get a governance body together, well it's not easy. It was by the end of April 1970 that we finally adopted the name The Mattachine Society of the Niagara Frontier.

Sherry interjects:

Which was not formally aligned with the national organizations. There were Mattachines in Chicago, New York City, San Francisco and one in Washington. And they were what we called Homophile organizations, which is what we were in the beginning. The difference between a homophile organization and what we would now refer to as a gay liberation organization is very subtle. A homophile organization would be somewhat more conservative. Looking for equal rights, looking for representation in political bodies... working for political clout, kind of the philosophy that we really are like everyone else except for our choice

of sexual partner or lover partner. Gay liberation, which we evolved into, took that a bit farther. It acknowledged that we are different in some other ways besides choice of sexual partner. That sociologically, we form different kinds of unions and different kinds of groupings. That gay men and gay women have different needs and form groups and unions in some different ways.

Frank and Chuck tell of the first major event put on by the Mattachine Society.

Chuck recalls:

The first big event that we had was a Halloween party. Sherry and Frank were MC's and they helped judge. We had endless meetings to plan for this. The party was at the Great Arrow VFW post. It was October 1970. We had observers from the UB Law department present to serve as legal observers in case anyone tried to cause trouble. We were all pretty nervous and most of us took on pseudonyms. We advertised it to the entire community, gay and straight. There was a two and half hour drag show and the whole event went off really well. The people at the VFW post were very good to us and appreciative.

Frank adds:

Anyhow, we had numerous meetings about this. We were all scared but we were committed to having this kind of thing in Buffalo, this was going to be a liberating type of thing and it was. We were afraid the

police were going to raid us and that's why we had the law students there. We also had guards there.

We had all these observers from the UB law school and wanted to be sure that all of our roles were clearly defined. Those of us who were gay and lesbian were going to act as in the gay and lesbian situation. But those who were there from the UB law school were simply there as observers to see if we were roughed up by the police or improperly arrested. We knew some of them were gay and lesbian but they weren't going to identify as such that night in order to remain unbiased.

It turned out to be a wonderful evening. It was a packed house. There was a very elaborate drag contest. They had guys in tuxedos and guys in drag. It was huge and so fabulous. It was one of the first times that we had such a large show. We even debated if we should give the drag queens flowers after their show. After about three hours we finally decided that yes, it would be appropriate. The gowns were extremely elaborate. You get a bunch of gay drag queens together and I'll tell you there wasn't an inch of lace or satin left in Buffalo!

Despite the successes of the Mattachine Society in bringing the gay community together and raising social and political awareness other members of Buffalo's gay community feel that in order to make real political change in Buffalo you can't focus on a gay agenda. Rather, you should use your influence as a respected politician to help subtly push for justice among the gay community.

Chris tells his story of a local politician that has made a difference in the gay community without focusing on gay issues:

In the early 1980's the common council passed a gay friendly resolution, it was big because Buffalo Mayor James Griffin was a big homophobe. The fact that the community was able to get positive legislation passed was and is a huge deal. I've been involved in Buffalo politics since I was sixteen, actually younger, Democratic Party politics. I've always been gay but I've never been a gay politician. Locally you could be involved in politics and working for gay rights and marriages but that's not how you get things done around here. You do it by getting to know the politicians and convincing them of your point of view, not ramming it down their throat. I'm Polish and I grew up in South Buffalo. I made my own way and never hid being gay but I never wore it on my sleeve either. So I was able to get a lot more done than people understand. I made my mark in politics not because I'm gay but in spite of being gay and because I am gay I'm able to use that in many ways.

But the more important part of my career was being able to talk to guys in the state assembly and senate and getting them to vote the right way on gay-friendly bills at the state level. Even more important was being able to talk to judges. I remember calling a judge about a domestic dispute between two gay guys. I called him and told him that this was just a marital dispute and not really a gay issue. Take away one of those guys and add a women and you've got your typical domestic, and that's how it should be treated.

I became the local Democratic Party Secretary and someone within the party said I couldn't be secretary because I was a fag. Yet the majority of the party stood up for me and said that it didn't matter, I did my job well and that's all that mattered. That fear and ignorance, it's more of a generational thing than anything. People like that guy look at gays in a different way than they should.

The problem in politically organizing the gay community is the same as in any other community. There are liberals, conservatives, those that want to take an active role and those that don't.

Thomas added:

The big problem is that this town is one big closet! So we need more open leaders. Yet, open leaders aren't the answer either. We need leaders to be involved in all aspects of the community. Not just gay clubs and such. Don't limit yourself to just gay things. Get involved with what you want to get involved with, gay or straight, and the fact that you're gay will work to your benefit, that's what I've found.

We're members of Parkside Neighborhood Community. They asked us to give a home tour. The write-up in the pamphlet said that we were a couple and nothing was left to a surprise when people came into our home for the Parkside tour. We didn't join because we were gay and

they didn't ask us because of it. They just thought we had a nice house. But after that home tour we had about 100 of our neighbors at our house. We had them over for drinks and to mingle, they got to know us better and we got to know them. That's how things will change here. Maybe Mr. Smith down the street can't stand gay people but he'll come to our house, just to see, and he might find that we're not bad after all. And that's how things get better.

At the national level later members of the Mattachine Society took the Organization in a more public and "out" direction. The society, by this time, was open to both men and women but was still largely dominated by gay men. The home base of the society shifted from Los Angeles to San Francisco. Mattachine helped people arrested at police busts of gay bars, it put out a magazine, the *Mattachine Review*, and it helped publicize gay causes. Chapters were founded in New York and other places but the society gradually lost steam and by 1961 the national Mattachine Society organization had dissolved into independent local branches throughout various American cities (LeVay 1995, p.53).

San Francisco became the city of gay political ferment. By 1959 homosexual activity in the city became an issue in the mayoral campaign. A gay backlash followed where the police harassment of gays and lesbians increased. Many gay bars were closed down and raided. The crackdown continued until 1961 when, responding to oppression, a drag entertainer, Jose Sarria, ran for city supervisor (LeVay 1995, p.57). Sarria was the first openly gay man to run for public office. His actions awakened San Francisco's gay community to the

possibility of political action. By 1962, several gay bar owners formed the Tavern Guild to resist the bar raids. This later led to the formation of the Society for Individual Rights (SIR). The SIR was active both at a political and social level. It campaigned for gay-friendly candidates for office, opened the first gay community center, and offered testing for venereal disease (LeVay 1995, p.57).

The events of the upcoming decades including Stonewall, the sexual revolution, feminism and its consequences for the gay and lesbian liberation movement proved to be formidable challenges for emerging gay communities. Numerous successes and set backs outlined this period of gay history allowing for mainstream America to develop a new concept of the gay lifestyle. The stage was thus set for a more public emergence and ascendance of gay communities in major metropolitan areas, as the next chapter outlines.

Chapter 3: Gay Power, Public Identity and the Triumph and Tragedy of the Sexual Revolution:

Most chroniclers of the national homosexual rights movement trace its beginnings to the last weekend of June 1969 at New York's lower-Manhattan, Stonewall Bar. There, for the first time on record, homosexual patrons fought back against gay oppression when Stonewall was raided by New York City policemen, who came hoping to arrest gay individuals for engaging in then illegal homosexual acts.

The uprising was powerful. Police and Alcoholic Beverage Control Board agents entered a gay bar, The Stonewall Inn, on Christopher Street, in New York City (Duberman 1991, p424). Allegedly there to look for violations of the alcohol control laws, they made the usual homophobic comments and then, after checking identification, threw the patrons out of the bar. Instead of quietly slipping away into the night, as the gay patrons had done for years, hustlers, drag queens, students and other patrons held their ground and fought back. Someone in the crowd uprooted a parking meter and used it to barricade the door. The agents and police were trapped inside the bar; they wrecked the place and called in reinforcements. Police vehicles raced to the scene. The crowd outside the bar grew as others sympathetic to the gay lifestyle joined the fierce protest. Someone set a fire and yet more people came. For three days, people protested. And for the first time, after innumerable years of oppression, the chant "Gay Power" rang out.

The Stonewall event has taken on mythic significance in the gay community. As Alan Batie, a gay man present at the riots, observed, "We came out, we drew strength from those around us, and we felt pride in our community."

Locally the events at Stonewall along with the formation of the Buffalo-area Mattachine Society helped push otherwise reluctant gay liberation leaders into the forefront. The community had become united and realized the need for equal rights and representation on the national level. Sherry tells the story of her transition from local activist to national spokesperson:

We (The Mattachine Society of the Niagara Frontier) had done a number of political actions including picketing. Mattachine was a very active organization. It was coming springtime, late winter early spring of 1972 and they were putting together committees where people would be chosen as delegates to different conventions. They were taking applications and doing interviews for the Democratic National Conference.

A professor of political science at UB asked me if I was a Democrat. I said no, and he asked if I was a Republican and I said no. I had never registered to vote in my life. And he said, 'you get your ass downtown tomorrow and you register Democrat. We're submitting you for a Democratic representative to the national convention.' You have to understand that my politics, before then, were strictly gay. I ended up becoming the first lesbian to speak at that convention in Washington.

I had to go downtown and interview. I walked into this room at the Unitarian Church. They asked me why I wanted to be a delegate at the convention. I told them I'm a lesbian and that gays and lesbians needed to be represented at this convention. We've (gays and lesbians) not been heard for way too long and we want our rights too along with everybody else. Within moments I was "hired" and had to get signatures for a petition to get on the ballot. The gay community really rallied and supported me and I won a place on the ballot and a place at the Democratic National Convention.

When I got there, there were two delegates that were gay - a gay man from San Francisco and myself from Buffalo. He represented gay men and then I represented lesbians. At two or three in the morning I finally spoke. I do have an audio recording of my speech and Walter Cronkite commenting on the speeches and introducing me. I don't think I slept for five days. We lobbied and that's when we found out that the McGovern camp was not as liberal as we had thought. That is, those that were really running the show. My plank of the platform was voted down but we got lots of applause. I remember I actually spoke after Shirley McClain who spoke about women's rights.

And I remember after I spoke this huge tall, kinda Hispanic looking man came up to me and gave me the biggest bear hug and said. You did such a wonderful job and my people know about struggle and we're with you

all the way. He gave me a thunderbird pin and it turned out that it was Cesar Chavez's¹ first cousin!

When I got back to Buffalo I got calls from some very interesting people all interested about the movement. One man followed me down the expressway on my way back to work. He was in a delivery truck and he made me pull over to the side. I thought there was something wrong with my lights, the turn signals or something. He asked me who I was and then said that he saw me on TV at the Democratic National Convention. He said that he was married but that he thought he might be gay. He wanted to know if there was anyone he could talk to. This type of thing kept happening to me after that. It was really astounding.

The Split: Feminism and the Gay Community

Following the events of Stonewall the 1970s proved to be a time of relative separation between lesbians and gay men (Levay 1995, p.60). The interaction between the Women's Lib movement and Gay Lib movements were intense and complex. It is interesting that both movements were in response to oppression by heterosexual males. In the end, most lesbians decided to move away from a common gay culture and gay rights movement in favor of joining their heterosexual sisters in the Women's Lib movement. Contacts were

¹ Cesar Chavez was a Mexican-American immigrant farm worker. He led a movement to unite farm workers into a labor union demanding higher wages and better working conditions.

maintained to some extent within the gay political organizations, but much less in the cultural and social spheres.

Sherry recalls this experience in Buffalo:

When we (The Mattachine Society of the Niagara Frontier) first formed, and I'd like to make this point, we were one of the few organizations where both men and women were part of the grass root formation of an organization. That lasted for a long time and many people were very impressed that the men and women got along as well as we did for as long as we did. The split started happening in the late 1970s. Women were having troubles deciding whether their loyalty should be with the gay community or with the women's community. It was when feminism reared its ugly head that the differences really became apparent and the split between the men and women took place.

Sex, Drugs & AIDS

In addition to a split of the gay men and lesbian communities, the 1970s and 1980s saw gay male culture becoming dominated by sex. Public resistance to bathhouses, gay bars and sex clubs had decreased greatly, especially in cities with the largest gay populations. By 1969/1970 Alan Bell and Martin Weinberg had completed a survey of gay men and lesbians in the San Francisco Bay area. The statistics showed that 43% of gay men had had over five hundred different homosexual partners, and 28% said they had had a thousand partners or more (LeVay p.62). As the decade progressed the quantity of organized gay sex

increased. Anonymous group sex, S/M scenes, and drug use became common place in bathhouses and clubs across major American cities such as New York, Los Angeles and San Francisco while also infiltrating, although usually to a much lesser extent, to the culture of “middle-American” cities.

Scott frequented the many gay bars of Buffalo during this time of lessened sexual scrutiny, drug use and grand parties. In Buffalo, however, the police and local governments were still sharply aligned against the gay community:

Back in the 1980's the police still raided a lot of the Bars in Buffalo. The owner of one major bar was a friend of mine and his name and address were printed in the paper when word of the raids came out. People would come by and harass him at his house. So, I eventually came up with the idea to change his house number. I mean, the mailman already knew where his house was and where the mail went so it wasn't a problem. So we switched his house number and the harassment calmed down.

We ended up throwing a raid party at City Lights. It was kind of a fun protest for us. All the bartenders and staff dressed up as policemen with the keystone hats and all. City Lights really was the big gay club and it was right on Main Street downtown. I guess you could say it was like Buffalo's version of New York City's Studio 54. I mean, it wasn't as grandiose and extravagant, but it was still just a wild party. Lots of drugs, sex and fun!

But before Scott came out of the closet and became part of this wild party he first visited other cities with thriving gay neighborhoods and communities. After seeing that gay men could be happy and accepted elsewhere he decided to venture into the Buffalo gay scene:

I remember before I came out I was curious about the gay scene. I went to other cities with larger gay communities like Toronto and eventually found that Buffalo had a large underground gay community. It was a hot summer night (when I came out) and I didn't really know the place was a gay bar. I finally found a bar on Main Street and Allen called the Villa Capri. I was nineteen but looked twelve. I walked in the place and right away I knew, oh yeah, this was a gay bar! At first I was really shy but then I met one person and then another and so on. I ended up becoming a bar back and eventually a bartender and branched out to other bars like City Lights. City Lights was just incredible - it had the big lines to get in and was a mixed club with the punk rock, bi-glam movement of the 1980's. Straight people came to the club too.

Thomas remembered the wild times of his gay youth:

When I came out everything was centered on partying, fun and drugs. Everything was associated with the clubs and you'd go out three or four times a week. You'd go out and start on Tuesday, to the Villa Capri on Main and Allen. It was a nasty ass great bar! Then on Wednesday nights you'd go to City Lights that later became Mean Alice's. I would

sleep on Thursdays, but others went to the old Lakeside at Delaware and Allen; it's now Colter Bay. On Friday it (the party) would start all over again. I think the community has done a total 360. It's not as party-oriented as it was back then and there aren't as many bars as there used to be. There was also a lot more freedom then too.

Not all gay men found community solely at the bars. Thomas remembered other connections, such as local churches, as a major part of his gay community experiences:

There was this group called "Just Us" and it was around between 1980 and 1982. It was an all Black group and was influenced by the black "gay" churches of the time. There was also the Black Gay Choir, which was a community choir. That was like the core of the black-gay community I guess. It took members from the churches, gay men and lesbians too. It's funny how the churches brought us together.

For me the real connection was always the church as far as being gay was concerned. It was ironic because you'd listen to your preacher say how bad gays were but then you'd look at your choir and entertainers and they were all gay and we definitely all knew that these people were gay. A lot of them were very flamboyant and although the preacher was talking against them, they were still with him, ya know? The black Baptist church still has problems with us and they're down on us and

preaching against us, yet they know that they need us to keep the churches together. I mean church is all about music!

Directly resulting from this period of gay “free love” came the AIDS epidemic that began to raise its head in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Gay men in New York, San Francisco and Los Angeles began to come down with bizarre assortments of ailments. Already in the early 1980s gay men began to ponder the reasons for and connections of this mystery disease and their community. By 1982, however, the disease was officially given a name: the acquired immune deficiency syndrome, or AIDS. The story of the gay community in the 1980s is centered on their gradual engagement and battle with HIV/AIDS. Individual experiences with the disease pushed the development of organizations within the community to deal with the epidemic. The gay community organized food pantries, hospices, support groups, political action committees and sexual education groups to help combat their new enemy. Gradually, community service centers in the large cities became corporations with multimillion-dollar budgets, employees and thousands of volunteers (LeVay 1995, p.71). The AIDS epidemic forced gay men out of the closet. The most obvious were the famous gay men, starting with Rock Hudson in 1985, whose homosexuality became public knowledge upon illness and/or death.

Thomas summed up how the gay community in Buffalo first dealt with the AIDS epidemic and how the changes that AIDS brought in the community came slowly and have not been as well organized as in other cities:

Even in this area, when AIDS did come, it took us a little longer to adjust and get with it. In New York City everyone was just sick all at once in huge numbers. It took much longer for AIDS to get to Buffalo. Here, all of the sudden it hit us and everyone got sick at once. I think a lot of the changes in the gay community in Buffalo has come because of AIDS and I think that other communities, even like Rochester, is leaps and bounds ahead of us as far as organizing and such. It's mostly because of the type of town that Buffalo is. It's a stale old blue-collar town. Rochester's gay film festival and our gay film festival are like night and day. There's just more happening there.

Chapter 4: The '90s: Buffalo's Gay Community Reemerges

For the national gay community the 1990s were largely a decade of political assertion. In 1992 the national community focused its attention on the issue of gays and lesbians in the military. During the presidential campaign of that year then Democratic candidate Bill Clinton courted the gay and lesbian vote by promising to lift the ban on gays and lesbians in the military. Instead, as President, Clinton allowed for the policy of discharge for homosexuality to stand with one exception, recruits were no longer to be questioned about their sexual orientation and investigations into their sexual orientation should take place only if there was credible evidence that they were gay. The military's policy of "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" is still in effect today.

The AIDS epidemic, recent policies dealing with the homosexual lifestyle and the more recent Mathew Shepard Case² has shown that the gay and lesbian community has the ability to effectively form socially and politically active organizations. The size of these organizations, however, is still relatively small when compared with their counter groups, such as the Christian Coalition which boasts between 600,000 and 1 million members as compared to the largest national gay and lesbian organization, the Human Rights Campaign Fund, with only 80,000 members.

² Matthew Shepard died in the early morning of Monday, October 12, from severe injuries due to a brutal beating and torture in Laramie, WY by two young-adults for being gay. The Matthew Shepard case served as a gay rights wake up call for America and helped push Hate Crimes legislation through the United States Legislature.

In Buffalo, however, the main focus of the gay community during the 1990s was to re-ignite gay political agendas while developing a stronger sense of community pride and social activities. Patrick, a local gay bar owner, sees the first gay pride parade in 1993 as a major source of Buffalo's renewed community:

The first gay pride parade in Buffalo was about a block long, on Elmwood Avenue. People were out but we never had a parade before and Buffalo is a blue-collar town where a lot of people know each other. So yes, I think it was a turning point where the gay community came together in a public parade with the news media reporting on it for everyone to see.

There might have been some protestors actually. Over the years the protestors show up. They haven't really in the last few years. Maybe last year there was one. There was a minister from South Buffalo that would protest all the time. He'd be at the parades with a sign that said we were all going to hell. He was also on radio talk shows denouncing homosexuality.

We did go to the march on Washington and we all marched in a Buffalo / WNY contingent and I think that is what got the parade going here and led to the development of all of these new gay groups. Buddies (a gay bar) itself had a lot to do with it. The bars than were totally different than. Really it was just an ad hoc group of people that got together and started planning for the parade and gay pride events. Its funny, I opened

Buddies in Boston and they had a pride parade since 1979. It was a culture shock to come back and have no parade. Sure, ours was only a block long at first, but now we're blocks and blocks long. You have to start somewhere.

That first Pride Parade started with one block and it did grow. Additional gay oriented groups and community action organizations sprouted up in the community shortly after the parade in 1993. Kevin, the gay community activist, lists several of the groups that are now active in the Buffalo region:

I'm currently the chair of Stonewall Democrats. A political action group made up of Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender (GLBT) people who are interested in holding our elected officials accountable in issues that affect us. We interview and endorse candidates for office. For example, we just held a forum on regional issues. It was cosponsored with The New Millennium Group, Grass Roots, and the League of Women Voters. We've been around for about 8 years.

LAMDA is the gay business group and it's been around for about 5 years or so. It's a group of GLBT people from the professional world who find that getting together socially and sponsoring events such as the Queer Quiz is an important way for our community to come together and support each other in our professional endeavors. There's been two Queer Quizzes. We've held the event at Hallwalls during last pride and the second was held a few months ago. The evening is a fun-filled

evening of gay trivia because we think the brain is the sexiest part of the body. The next Queer Quiz will probably be coming up for Gay Pride this year.

Pride is an annual event and the organization is used to put on the parade and events during the month of June. There are other events throughout the year that are used to raise money for pride. During pride there are workshops too. The workshops deal with all types of issues that are pertinent to the gay community. Health issues, financial and legal issues, we have it all.

The Anti Discrimination Coalition of WNY is fairly new. It was brought together because of two incidents of anti-gay propaganda. One of which concerned a county legislature. The other dealt with a former local talk show radio personality that the community had issues with for years. We actually got an apology from intercom radio regarding the anti-gay statements made on their station. Clip Smith was later fired and our group continues to try to promote change in the public realm.

Rainbow Spirit Rising is a spiritual group. We put on solstice events and we just put on our fourth-annual winter solstice. We had 800 people at this event alone. We pray and dance and sing, its really like spiritual Broadway! It's just a lot of fun. There's also another religious group called Dignity Buffalo.

The Gay Men's Chorus is another group. There was a year of planning and originally there were only 17 people that had signed up. It's not as diverse as it could be, but there's always room to grow.

We need to recognize the fact that our whole community will not grow unless we grow too. I just want to point out to you how diverse our community is. Team Vaccine is another group I'm involved in. There's also the Empire State Pride Agenda that advocates for gay rights statewide. The Gay Men's Film Crew, the Gay Book Clubs, and informal and formal Oscar Night Parties. There are just so many groups exploding onto the scene in Buffalo now.

Shades and MOCHA are two groups that focus on the African-American community. Log Cabin Republicans, although there aren't many members, are here too. There are also important links with the Hispanic community that then serve as an important link to our gay community. It's just so important to show that our community in Buffalo and throughout the nation has minorities within our minority.

Cody, the youngest interviewee shares his involvement in the gay community along with how his involvement has helped or hindered his growth as a person:

I'm involved with Buffalo United Artists (BUA), which is a theatre organization that deals with the gay community. Gay men and women

heavily follow the BUA. Also the Gay Men's Choir is another thing that I do within the gay community. I also work out a lot, not at a gay gym but it takes up a big part of my life. Lately I've been trying to get into school so that I can become a Social Worker.

The Gay Men's Choir just started. It began last summer and we had a couple of potlucks and picnics and we had our first rehearsal on September 11th. I didn't go but others did and I guess that showed that people needed to take their minds off of things and found comfort in their community. The membership is mostly older and white. There are only a few younger guys in the group. Out of about seventy men there are maybe ten to eleven in my age bracket but our first concert definitely attracted younger people to the group.

The choir has been very well accepted. The first concert sold out right away which surprised me. Some people wanted to go but couldn't because it was sold out. I heard tons of people actually talk about the choir. On a personal level, I hung out with my sister and some of our mutual friends from high school just a little while ago. These were people that weren't open minded in the past but now they are a bit more. I haven't talked to them in a while but I brought up the fact that I was singing again and it opened up the door that I sang in this group, the Buffalo Gay Men's Choir. By association I was gay of course so it helped me come out to old friends. Even at work I mentioned that I was in an all-male choir and it clued coworkers into the fact that I was gay

and again, it was a type of icebreaker and there weren't really any bad reactions.

Overall I think it had a good impact on the gay community and I've heard such great feedback. It's pretty intense to call it the Buffalo Gay Men's Choir when its taking beautiful music regardless of its sexual content; you know, everyone can enjoy this music. Meanwhile the BUA doesn't call itself the Buffalo Gay Theatre even though its shows have very major gay content.

I've done many shows for BUA including "BENT" which was about gay men during the Holocaust. It's about gay men and the holocaust from the gay experience. The pink triangles and all of that. It's a wonderful experience to take different slants on the gay community. They're taking off-Broadway shows and bringing it to Buffalo and that's wonderful because Buffalo is a very conservative city. It's a wonderful venue but I do find the theatre trying to stick sex in everywhere. It does, however, seem like everything is sex to them. I don't really find it to be very representative of the gay community.

I'm upset that I don't get exposed to all of the other wonderful theatre that Buffalo has to offer like the Irish Classical Theatre and Studio Arena. I don't really know why I don't do these things which touches on the point of going out and how much money and time I've spent at the clubs. I should really just give a check directly to the club owner!

Both Kevin and Cody have their own ideas of how to get more young people involved in the gay social and political organizations. Kevin feels:

There are opportunities for young people to get involved in the gay community. The question is how can we create an awareness of these opportunities so that younger people and older closeted people have this awareness to become involved. Artvoice has a Gay directory but it doesn't nearly go far enough. Outcome, VOICES, and Pathways, put out by gay community services, helps spread the word about our organizations. There's also the Gay Yellow Pages, which is a great asset to resources and organizations as well.

Cody sees the need to first strengthen the gay youth organization before trying to deal with the lack of involvement of twenty-something men in the gay community:

I think that the age factor might be part of why you don't see a lot of younger gay men in these organizations. Some younger guys now might not be comfortable with the larger number of older men already in the organizations. Gay and Lesbian Youth Services (GLYS) might be a good way to get the community to interact if that somehow got more powerful. You could build other younger organizations from that. I think when you're younger you need more support and interaction with other people like you. It's really hard being gay because it's hard growing up in general, but being gay and growing up, it's even tougher.

There's bound to be so many painful experiences when you grow up but I'd rather go thru those experiences at a younger age like most heterosexual kids rather than go through my adolescence at age twenty-one because I'm gay and haven't dealt with my true adolescence until now. In the mean time, I've had a lot of fun finding myself but I haven't really done much or gone anywhere, but I don't regret anything. I really feel its because I was gay and came out at nineteen and then it was as if I was thirteen all over again. I really think making GLYS strong would be a good way to create a better gay community in Buffalo.

Chapter 5: Concluding Remarks & The Future for Gay Buffalo

The most visible focal point of gay life in the United States is the urban districts where gays and lesbians live or congregate – the gay ghettos of America. One well-known gay ghetto is located in West Hollywood, California. Also known as We Ho. It is important to state that various gay ghettos are not all alike. In some places like West Hollywood and the Castro District of San Francisco, the gay area is residential as well as a center of social life. In other cities, the gay district is mostly defined by the location of gay bars and other nightspots, and gay people themselves may actually reside at dispersed locations throughout the region. In yet another format, the gay and straight bars and restaurants are largely intermixed to form a single social focus to the city; this is the case in New Orleans's French Quarter (LeVay 1995, p.120).

Historically, the gay ghettos were centered on the bar scene, and partly for that reason were dominated by gay men. Bars are still very important, but over the last ten or twenty years many other institutions have taken root in the ghettos: coffeehouses and restaurants, gay-owned businesses of all descriptions, churches and temples, service organizations, political groups, and even local governments (West Hollywood, for example, became self-governing in 1984). Some of the ghettos are mini-cities where one can work, play, pray and socialize without ever leaving the neighborhood (LeVay 1995, p.120).

Those I interviewed gave Buffalo's gay ghetto mixed reviews. Cody felt very strongly about the need for improved development within Buffalo's gay ghetto. In Cody's eyes, the decision of staying in Buffalo or leaving for another

more progressive city has a lot to do with his comfort level. In other cities, such as Toronto or New York City, Cody could walk the street and meet new friends without the fear of harassment. Others, usually older gay men, questioned if Buffalo has or needs a stronger gay ghetto while also dismissing its importance as a social integrator and community builder.

Cody:

Buffalo's Gay Ghetto now is pretty weak. I think that Buffalo should have something like Toronto. When I first went there I was so amazed. Seeing gay guys holding hands and kissing each other in the streets was the most amazing thing I've ever seen in my life. If Buffalo could become more like Toronto it would mean that the city had become so much larger and stronger economically.

I like how the major gay club here is near Chippewa. Maybe if we took Pearl Street and turned that into a gay ghetto? You know, focus things downtown. Rochester's gay ghetto is very spread apart like here in Buffalo. It would be cool to have a gay Chippewa and then from there spread into other things for the gay community.

I went to Rochester Pride and it was bigger and better than in Buffalo. Rochester has had a gay choir for something like 19 years. So why not here, we're bigger than them? I just don't understand why it took so long for Buffalo to get on the boat. I guess it just seems like progress

here is so much slower. It's heart wrenching to think of 1901³ the peak and exposition and then it just crumbled. I do love it here and I don't think I ever could find as many wonderful people in another city. It's a shame that there aren't more economic opportunities here. And honestly, I want to be able to hold hands with someone on the street. Toronto is so amazing, again, because I could meet someone outside of a bar there and hold their hand in the street.

To me, the correlation is that if the city is successful and prosperous more people and more races and gay people will come to this city. Instead of everyone moving out of Buffalo. I love Toronto because there are so many different races there. You can almost equate the number of races in a city with if gays are accepted there. This city is so white in one area and black in another area. Toronto is so intermeshed and I think that helps the gay community there.

People here are still hidden and think that a lot of people, for example, were probably upset with that picture taken of the gay men's choir and published in the Buffalo News without their knowledge. I guess if they're happy with Buffalo as a closeted town then they're happy with Buffalo. I just think that a gay ghetto would be very beneficial to the community.

³ Many historians regard the 1901 Pan American Exposition held in Buffalo, N.Y. as Buffalo's crowning moment in history.

It just seems like it would be so easy to create a gay ghetto here. Gay people are for themselves and don't have to worry about bringing up a family. Not to say that we're selfish but we can't have kids and such.

The economics of marketing to gay people in general is just a wise move.

Thomas doesn't see Buffalo's gay ghetto in as negative a light as Cody. This might be because Thomas is at a point in his life where "being gay" and socializing with other gay men is not as important as it was in his youth. Thomas is now happily coupled and living with Chris in a safe and well-off neighborhood of Buffalo.

Thomas adds:

The Gay Ghetto is important, now that I think about it. When I was coming out my first apartment was right on Elmwood because I wanted to be safe and comfortable. You know, convenience and access. I think it is important for the younger crowd. The older you get the less it matters. The older you get the more you look at homes for the home and neighborhood. When you get down and look at it there may be more gay people here in Parkside than in Allentown. I think it's good that the bars are centrally located. You can go from one bar to another. You kind of do a downtown circuit.

Chris feels that the development of Buffalo's gay ghetto is based on economics and not on social integration. He uses the lesbian community as an example of this.

Chris:

Gay business clustering is more of a business decision than a community decision. Look at the lesbian clubs on Niagara and Tonawanda Street, I mean, they're way out there but they're still in business. But when you get down to it, the services like GLYS and AIDS Community Services are downtown because that's where the bars are. If the bars were in Williamsville that's where the services would be. We're not New York City, we're Buffalo and there aren't as many gays here so I don't think we'll ever have a truly thriving Gay Ghetto.

Discussing Buffalo's gay ghetto helped focus the concept of community development in a physical context. Some of those interviewed feel that Buffalo needs to improve its gay ghetto while others don't see the need or practicality. This thesis has strived to show the development and existence of a gay community in Buffalo, New York. Despite individual feelings regarding the physical community (the gay ghetto) all of those interviewed agreed that Buffalo has a history of gay social community development.

Scott:

Yeah, there is a gay community in Buffalo. The owners of this bar (Buddies) put on Buddies Fest every year. It's an event where we have festivities in the street on North Johnson Park downtown. We have "drag racing and other types of fun activities. Oh, for thanksgiving Buddies would open the place up for the elders of the community. Those

people who would have been alone. I volunteered to help serve and we also sent dinners out to those that couldn't make it. I just remember so many of the people that came saying that this was great and that they would have otherwise been alone for the holiday. It eventually got too large, maybe people got burned out I don't know but it stopped.

I don't think that today's gay community could be as together as we used to be in the past. Back then we had a common enemy. I mean, the mayor, the police, just about everyone was against you and you didn't have all this gay stuff on TV and in the news. I guess there was more solidarity then. The young kids today know about being gay from such an early age. When they come out to the bars it isn't as much to discover, about themselves and what it means to be gay and have gay friends many of them already have that. The bars used to be more than a bar they were like a "Gay Men's Club". You had your group of friends and they were supportive of you and you of them yet you always were willing to let others into the group. Things weren't as clicky back then. Today the young gay community isn't as close. One part of City Lights, the bar I frequented and later worked at, was that we had our own place at the bar where we always met up, my group of friends that is. But like I said, if someone else just happened to end up at our corner we'd invite them into our circle too. It just seemed like people were more willing to become friends back then. Now we have the Marcella type bars where its very clicky. I know if I walked into that club no one would probably talk to me. It's like now for these younger guys their life is all about being gay.

Responding to each other's input on the presence of a gay community in Buffalo, Chuck, Sherry and Frank give the following responses:

Chuck:

I think it it's a fractured community

Sherry:

I would say it's a fragmented community and not put a negative spin on it. It's just the way that it evolved.

Frank:

I think one of the reasons the community is fragmented is not because there's so much tension now as it used to be but because we were successful in what we wanted to do.

Sherry:

We wanted to put ourselves out of business and in a lot of ways we did.

Frank:

Now we can live our lives and who the hell cares that she's a lesbian and I'm a gay man.

Sherry:

There are still struggles, kids have a hard time coming out to their parents. But if a Mathew Shepard kinda thing happened here, we'd rally as a community. But right now we've gotten through the first early hurdles as a gay and lesbian community. We now have more focused groups to take care of our needs.

Patrick believes that the community is very diverse and quickly becoming more accepted by members of the larger Buffalo-Niagara community.

Patrick:

I think our community is really a very diverse community. We have baseball teams, softball teams, political organizations, Buffalo Bears, Country Western groups and the people that attend are of all ages.

I think there has been a fast acceptance in the larger Buffalo community as well, the media has been very good to us. The politicians have been good, past County Executives, the Mayor, they all come here to our events like Buddies Fest.

Kevin also pointed out the diversity and strides that the gay community has made in recent years. He also speaks of his hopes for the future of the gay community within the region while pointing to our strengths as a gay and lesbian community:

Yes there definitely is a gay community here in Buffalo and it's growing rapidly. I'd like to see a gay mayor and county executive. A gay community center and gay senior citizen home. Am I being provincial, am I being xenophobic in my expectations or hopes? In other words am I being ruled by my self-identification by hoping for these things? No, I just believe that it seems like if you look at the kind of leaders we have, the corporate leaders, other top of the line leaders in our community we have the talent, the resources and the time. So the rest of the community needs to acknowledge that their family will benefit by welcoming our family.

That the community as it is exists now will grow and improve in as much as they (the larger Buffalo community) welcome what we have to give. And so where will we be, we may not have a gay mayor or county executive but we might have a community that is open to that and that's all you need to create change. I consider myself to be someone who tries to keep that theme of inclusion ringing in my ears and in my actions and I don't think it was until a half an hour into our discussion that we started to talk about other communities outside of the gay community.

This, our community within other communities, has come up in the discrimination coalition. We are in every other community, we are the glue and cement of the larger community and that's why we are the most productive. If you look at the civil rights movement back in the 1960's, Martin Luther King's right hand man was gay!

Two months ago a retired gay professor gave \$2 million dollars to Buffalo State College. People will tell you that there is opportunity and all we need is the energy, talent and will to do it. Even in the midst of all the activity there is still time to play. There's time to socialize and do what we do best, beauty! We do beauty real well. You have to remember about the positives, cooking, decorating, eating, dressing and going out. There's this constant cycle of celebrating our life.

I'm not saying there isn't romance outside of the gay community but I don't see it that much. Why do we have to see a romantic comedy with a woman and a man from three centuries ago. There's something about the newness of the gay community that reminds us of our highest quest for human love. Children are beautiful and our young members of the community are the children and what they give birth to will be given to those below them. In the style that we have, in the tradition and lifestyle, in the practices that we pursue, it's almost like every level of pursuit is expressed.

Cody feels that while a gay community does exist in Buffalo it is separated along the lines of male and female:

I've been realizing that I'm pretty much only exposed to gay men. I need to expose myself to more, and not have such a narrow aspect of the community. In that way, we can be as narrow minded as the straight community I guess.

Patrick, on the other hand, sees Buffalo's gay community as a united body with both gay men and lesbian women taking an active role in building the community:

My bar is known as the Gay and Lesbian bar. Shades (A Lesbian Women of Color Group) meets here, we have lesbians that work here. The Gay Pride committee consists of gay men and lesbians and transgender groups. I think we work together.

In other cities gay community centers serve as a bridge between the bar scene, social activities, the physical environment, young and old and male and female members of the gay community. Gay community centers help serve all aspects of the gay community. Sherry, Frank and Chuck remember the Buffalo Gay Community Centers that they created in the past with the help of the Mattachine Society of the Niagara Frontier:

In 1972 we opened a counseling center on the corner of Elmwood and Utica above a bank. Then there was a big fire there. Then we moved over to Allen Street. Prior to us opening the center there we had been asked to help train the counselors at Crisis Services. After we had the training for them we worked it out so that the counseling services people would train us in peer counseling. We really became a very influential group in terms of gay health. We made various inroads with the Erie

County Health Department. They weren't very happy to do this but they did.

There was another place on Main and Utica that we moved to in 1973. That's when all the men and women were still getting together well. We would have dances and parties. We were the only gay and lesbian community center that was self-supported in the country. We raised our own money and put out newsletters and things. We had a counseling center. We put on plays and such. It was an amazing place.

Patrick adds that the need for a gay community center in Buffalo still exists today:

I think we should have a gay community center and there has been a lot of talk about it. I think the Gay Pride committee and Stonewall democrats should and could get it together. Right now the bars serve as community centers, this bar in particular. There are so many gay groups in this city and most of those came up after 1993 and the first pride parade. They meet where they can but a community center with facilities would be great for them to utilize.

Unlike other minority groups in Buffalo and throughout the nation the gay community doesn't, for the most part, have children. In the instance where gay men and women do have children there is no guarantee that these children are gay or lesbian. If Buffalo's gay community is strengthening and becoming more

accepted throughout the region, how than do we keep the momentum of gay community development growing? Other minority communities have a constant influx of young leaders through natural procreation.

Patrick has his own insights on how to get gay youth involved in the community:

I think that people in their twenties feel safe and might not see a need to get involved. Its scary to think there might not be activists in the community. It scares me cause I don't see a lot of real young kids around trying to get involved in Pride. So many kids don't think about it now or are moving away. I guess its kind of a generational thing. I think we could do a much better job being involved with the gay organizations at UB and the other colleges. I don't know how much any of the gay organizations pay attention to the kids out there. We gotta get you kids involved. It is crazy, and I'd bend over backward for you guys.

I wish we did have a community center and archives. I have an attic full of this stuff, and I'm sure others do too. It might be helpful for the kids to learn their history as gay men in Buffalo? There's been talk about doing it, but that's one thing that just doesn't seem to get done. People connected with gay pride and stonewall democrats have all talked about putting together a gay archives for years.

This thesis has shown that Buffalo's gay community followed a national model of community development while illustrating the numerous levels of social

interaction within the community. The type and setting of social interaction between the gay community has changed over the years and will likely change in the future. There is a gay community in Buffalo and it is much more than a cluster of bars. There are numerous clubs, organizations, and social activities created for various ethnic groups, lifestyles and religions. Buffalo's gay community had its struggle for equal rights and freedom from oppression. The voice of Buffalo was heard at the national level thanks to Sherry and other members of the Mattachine Society. Sherry believes that, "Buffalo and the people in it have done some really amazing things in terms of the gay community. I like to think that the three of us had something to do with this but there were countless others as well."

Perceptions, however, differ from each interviewee and within the community. Many of the older interviewees feel that Buffalo is a progressive place where it's easy to be gay and live a satisfying life. Younger members of the community, such as Cody, would disagree. A stronger Gay Ghetto and increased outreach to youth would improve the conditions of the gay community here. At the same time we need to do a better job at reuniting the community. The prospect of a more united gay and lesbian community would be greater numbers and with that, greater strength in shaping the social, physical and political environment in Buffalo.

The events of the past have shaped Buffalo's gay community today and will certainly help shape the community in the future. Post World War II settlement, police harassment, political will, the Mattachine Society, Women's

Lib, drugs, increased sex and AIDS all influenced the character of the next generation of gay men and women in the Niagara Frontier. Today's concerns of improving the gay ghetto, creating a gay community center, increasing involvement by youth and reconnecting the gay and lesbian community's may very well become the triumphs of our future.

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