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It's Not About the Coffee: Queer Temporalities at a Community Coffeehouse

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Abstract

Long Beach California's "gay ghetto"¹ is a loosely defined neighborhood with bars, coffeehouses and businesses that cater to the LGBTQ community. The corner of Broadway and Junipero roughly marks the center of the gay ghetto and is home to Hot Java "The Community Coffeehouse". The customers there are loyal and through ethnographic inquiry this paper highlights the importance of Hot Java as a queer site of resistance and community building. Through interviews, observation, and exploration of queer theoretical models of space and time, this paper illustrates Hot Java as a queer temporal space marked by trauma, resistance, and community building.

The city, a densely populated urban location, is one that is marked by its shared geography among different populations with various cultural commitments and attachments. Neighborhoods, or small sections of cities are often created to house communities that share cultural ties with one another. "Gayborhoods", urban areas where "gay people are or appear to be the majority of visitors and residents" are found in many cities within the United States (Reuter 1). David Higgs explains, "Queer city histories attract a readership because gay men are intensely urban. Few live by choice in the country on a permanent basis since they usually feel that cities offer a much greater variety of ways in which to enjoy one's life" (Higgs 2). One such gayborhood is located in Long Beach California.

Long Beach California is located in southern Los Angeles County and is home to almost 500,000 people, making it among the 40 largest cities in the nation (U.S. Census). Long Beach is known for being a "gay friendly"² city and as such is home to a number of LGBTQ³ residents, many of whom call Long Beach's "gay ghetto"⁴ home. The gay ghetto is a stretch of Broadway

¹ The Los Angeles Times refers to the "gay ghetto" as an "affectionately named neighborhood, less nightlife-oriented than West Hollywood."

² Websites like www.gaycities.com describe, "most of Long Beach is as gay-friendly as it is sunny."

³ LGBTQ, throughout this paper, refers to Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer.

⁴ "The gay ghetto" or less commonly "The Gayto" is a common name used to describe the neighborhood that is home to a number of LGBTQ residents. However, due to the stigma of the word "Ghetto" some residents have begun referring to the area as the "Gayborhood."

from Alamitos Avenue to just beyond Redondo Avenue including a few blocks north and south that features bars, coffee shops, and businesses that cater to the LGBTQ population. It is a densely populated area that includes a generous mix of single-family homes, small and large apartment buildings, businesses and a range of apartments that are, compared to nearby neighborhoods, “affordably” priced. Though there are no distinct lines drawn, the Gay and Lesbian center on 4th Street is said to mark the north border of the gay ghetto.

Contemporary understandings of space and time help to shape our social and political formation. Geographies are filled with “politics and ideology” and as such gayborhoods such as the gay ghetto are also established via politics (Keith & Pile 4). Feminist theorist bell hooks⁵ defines an alternative spaciality of “radical openness” (hooks 1991, 149). hooks explains:

Our living depends on our ability to conceptualize alternatives, often impoverished. Theorizing about this experience aesthetically, critically is an agenda for radical cultural practice. For me this space of radical openness is a margin- a profound edge. Locating oneself there is difficult yet necessary. It is not a ‘safe’ place. One is always at risk. One needs a community of resistance (149).

The gay ghetto is a “community of resistance” and is a visible marker highlighting the very real past, present and future of the LGBTQ community. As a neighborhood with a geographical boundary it establishes the LGBTQ community as a fixture of the larger city of Long Beach.

The corner of Broadway and Junipero Avenue roughly marks the center of the gay ghetto and is home to Hot Java “The Community Coffeehouse”.⁶ Two gay-identified men opened the coffeehouse in 1991, and although it has changed ownership over time, it has always been owned and operated by “out” LGBTQ people. The customers are loyal and through ethnographic inquiry I will highlight the importance of Hot Java as a queer site of resistance and community building. Through interviews, observation and explorations of queer theoretical models of space and time, I aim to highlight Hot Java as a queer temporal space that is marked by trauma, resistance and community building.

Site Description and Explanation of Methodology

Hot Java, “The Community Coffeehouse” serves as the site of interest in this ethnographic exploration. The coffeehouse is a two thousand square foot space that seats ninety-six customers inside and thirty-two outside. Hot Java currently occupies the corner of Broadway and Junipero, though it used to be positioned one store front down before it was remodeled and expanded. Located within the Broadway corridor, the site of most of the LGBTQ-owned and frequented businesses, Hot Java’s customer base is roughly 70% LGBTQ identified (Jeff, 7 Oct 2011). While there are a number of bars catering to the LGBTQ population there are only two

⁵ bell hooks is the pen name of author Bell Hooks.

⁶ “The Community Coffeehouse is part of the Hot Java brand name and as such it is written prominently on the awning outside of the storefront.

coffeehouses within the confines of the gay ghetto, consistently identified⁷ as “gay coffeehouses.”⁸ Hot Java is the only one, out of those two, that is owned by gay-identified people. While gay bars have historically been the focus of much research within LGBTQ populations as locations of resistance and community building, I chose to focus on Hot Java in order to examine a location that allowed for diversity in age, sex, gender, religion, and economic class.⁹ Since it is a coffeehouse it is open to anyone regardless of age and since it does not serve alcohol it allows for a different experience amongst its patrons. Coffee is more affordable than alcohol and can be refilled for fifty cents, meaning someone can spend hours at a coffeehouse for a fraction of the cost of spending time in a bar. Alternatively, coffeehouses serve as a location for those that have had issues with alcohol as a place to congregate and socialize without the temptation or presence of alcohol. Personally, as a queer-identified woman, I was interested to understand what drew other people to the “gay coffeehouse.” In my own life, it was gay coffeehouses, not bars that played an important role in my coming out experience as well as in the formation of the queer social circles I now frequent. Gay coffeehouses were places I could go at eighteen years old and meet other LGBTQ identified people. It was at a gay coffeehouse that I met my partner of nearly ten years and met and/or got to know better most of the close friends I have in my life.

This research was conducted across a three-month span in the fall of 2011. The majority of my work involved participant observation and interviews. I conducted three one-on-one formal interviews with customers, one formal interview with an employee, and one formal interview with one of the owners of Hot Java. Due to the political climate surrounding sexual orientation I have decided to change all participants’ names in order to secure their safety and privacy. All participants were informed of the research I was doing and were recorded with their written consent.

My characterization, analysis, and choice of research sites is no doubt informed by my status as a queer-identified woman living in Long Beach. I have patronized Hot Java for about ten years and am on a first name basis with the owners and a number of the customers. While this directly affects the outcomes of my research, I think in large part it has a positive impact. First and foremost I was able to conduct in-depth participant observations without signaling to those within the site that I was doing so. Second, as a longtime patron of the coffeehouse, the owners were assured that my intentions were positive and were not intended to harm their business in any way. Third, as a queer woman I was able to conduct longer and more in-depth and personal interviews with my participants without eliciting fear that I would intentionally damage their stories in any way or reveal their identities. As an insider I was able to gain access to a more authentic version of the community within the “community coffeehouse.” For the sake of transparency, I have included myself in this project so as to highlight my involvement and the direct impact it has had on my research. While this is not a project based entirely on self-

⁷ Identified consistently throughout my interviews, they are Hot Java and The Library.

⁸ Language within the LGBTQ community changes depending on who you speak with. Sometimes “gay” is used as an encompassing term, sometimes “queer,” etc.

⁹ See articles published in the *Journal of the History of Sexuality*, *Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, *Journal of Modern Literature*, or any other major scholarly journal.

discovery and reflection, it would be difficult for any researcher to ignore the impact that their self has on their participants as well as their participants on them.



Figure 1: Hot Java, Photo Taken by Jodi Davis 30 April 2011 Long Beach, CA

Doing Queer History: The Past is Traumatic

Most historical projects based around the LGBTQ community are inspired by a desire to fill in the gaps of an undocumented history of marginalized voices. Lillian Faderman and Stuart Timmons explain this in their book *Gay L.A.: A History of Sexual Outlaws, Power Politics, and Lipstick Lesbians*, “As historians and lovers of that city, we wondered how such a history could have been discounted or left un-commemorated, and we grew determined to fill in what we considered a huge gap in the record of lesbian and gay America” (Faderman and Timmons 2009, 3). Recuperative historical methods set out to fill in the gaps of history for those left out of the archive in order to gesture toward a more positive future of inclusion. It is precisely this fear of forgetting that Andreas Huyssen addresses in his book *Twilight Memories: Marking Time in a Culture of Amnesia*. Huyssen explains, “As we approach the end of the twentieth century and with it the end of the millennium, our gaze turns backwards ever more frequently in an attempt to take stock and to assess where we stand in the course of time” (Huyssen 1995, 1). Huyssen’s book highlights the obsession with memory as illustrated by the popularity of museums and

monuments. However, this crisis over forgetting can also be applied to the history of those in the margins. Sitting outside of Hot Java one warm fall afternoon, I discussed the history of the area surrounding Hot Java with Daniel, a 33-year-old gay man who visits Hot Java daily. He explained that he knew there was a history to the area, but that he did not know the specifics:

I mean, I know there were a lot of arrests in this area, and probably still are. I heard once that the reason that there are so many gays in this neighborhood is because of the port and the Navy. Those navy men were kicked out for being gay and they settled here because this is just where they were. I don't know if I believe that, but it is kind of a cool story. I wish I knew more about the area and how we all ended up here. I guess it would make me feel better to know how far we've come." (Daniel, 3 October 2011)

Daniel seeks solace in the progress narrative. That is, Daniel's desire is to learn the trauma of the past so that the present as well as the future seem more positive.

Daniel's desire to uncover the trauma of the past in order to march toward a more positive future is similar to what Elizabeth Freeman describes as "homogenous empty time." Freeman explains that homogeneous empty time is that which takes its meaning "from, and contributes to, a vision of time as seamless, unified, and moving forward" (Freeman 2010, xxii). Homogeneous empty time describes that which functions based around progressive and forward dawning markers of time (*e.g.* development, domesticity, marriage, reproduction, etc.). Similar to homogeneous empty time, Freeman introduces the concept of "chronormativity" or "the interlocking temporal schemes necessary for genealogies of descent" (Freeman 2010, xxii). This would mean that in order to write the history of the gay ghetto within Long Beach, one would need to start with the past and show progress into the present to imagine a more positive future. However, this model requires a vision of time that is "seamless, unified, and forward moving" (xxii). The idea of "forward moving" time requires a commonly held understanding of what progress means. This is troubling in that it measures progress based on a unitary version of identity and it assumes that the present is always better than the past. This excludes allowance for differences in race, class, gender or sexuality. For LGBTQ populations, progress is generally defined based on legal rights, laws and visibility. One of my participants, Jack a twenty-six year old butch¹⁰ explains that this version of progress does not always work:

I guess for most of the world progress for gays and lesbians would mean access to marriage rights, adoption rights, greater acceptance in general society, less violence and just generally more tolerance. But for me, I guess, I don't really see myself getting married or playing that whole game. So I'm not sure how you'd measure progress for me. (Jack, 30 September 2011)

Jack's narrative does not fit neatly in a uniform definition of progress.

¹⁰ Jack is female-bodied and identifies his gender as 'butch.' He prefers male pronouns and performs a queer version of masculinity.

Looking back on the history of Long Beach it would be easy to construct a chrononormative archive of the gay ghetto. That is to look for the trauma of the past and mark “progress” into the present. In 1914 Long Beach began campaigning to rid itself of “social vagrants” who had infiltrated the city. This included the arrests of thirty men and the publishing of their photos and names in all of the newspapers in California. Lilian Faderman explains, “the arrests of these men unleashed a tsunami of homophobia in the newspapers that described the relationships among them as ‘a holocaust of vice’ and the men themselves as ‘social vagrants’ (Faderman and Timmons 2009, 30). Long Beach wanted to do what it could to rid itself of any social deviance. The November 15, 1914 Los Angeles Times article titled “Takes His Life Through Shame,” details the suicide of John A. Lamb. They explain that the, “banker and prominent churchman [...] ended his life [...] on the rocks near Point Firmin as a result of the expose of a clique of “social vagrants” that has shaken this city of its very foundations” (“Takes His Life”). The article further details the temporary ban on the “sale of all poisons as the result of an attempt by another citizen implicated to buy carbolic acid” (“Takes His Life”). Lamb’s suicide note details the trauma experienced by men accused of “social vagrancy” in Long Beach at the time. He writes: “My darling sister: God knows, and will have mercy, through Christ. I am crazed by reading the paper this morning. I never knew of such a place, or of such orgies. I am innocent but the victim of a situation. I could not endure this publicity as I had not a chance to deny it” [*sic*] (“Takes His Life”). Lamb served as a reminder that Long Beach wanted to do what it could to rid the city of any “social deviance”.

However, looking to the present moment, in 2011, Long Beach just hosted its annual “Long Beach Lesbian and Gay Pride” event. The event drew 80,000 participants making it the third largest gay pride celebration in the United States (LBLGP). Looking back to 1914 from the present moment one could argue that progress has been achieved. From the pain of the past comes more acceptance and visibility; the past has helped to shape the future. Sitting at Hot Java on any given day one is bound to see the rainbow flags decorating the windows, two men embracing in a public kiss, or a group of lesbians playing a game of cards on a very busy street. In this linear model, the past becomes something that has already happened, something that is no longer a part of the present. However, Hot Java is a location that relies upon simultaneous histories and interweaving spaces. While Hot Java is a “community coffeehouse” that has been a presence in the neighborhood for twenty years, it stands in the exact location at which men including Herbert N. Lowe were arrested for “having unnatural tendencies” which caused them to “make advances to other men” (“LB Uncovers “Social Vagrant” Clan”). Thirty men were arrested in 1914, but of course, they were not the last to be arrested in this location. Jeff, one of the owners of Hot Java, explains some other arrests that have happened in the area:

Some of the guys that hang out here in the morning used to be a part of the flower brigade. When the guys would get arrested in the park for cruising, they’d show up to the jail with flowers for them when they got out. There’s been a long history of arrests in this neighborhood. Thankfully not as much anymore (Jeff, 7 Oct 2011).

The customers of Hot Java are deeply imbedded in the trauma of the past and the present. From the flower brigade to protests and marches, the trauma serves as a painful reminder of the importance of a space such as Hot Java.

Judith Halberstam describes queer temporality as that which “disrupts the normative narratives of time” (Halberstam 2005, 152). She explains that queer uses of time and space develop, at least in part, in opposition to the institutions of family, heterosexuality, and reproduction. They also develop according to logics of location, movement, and identification (152). For my participants, Hot Java stands as a location that resists normative institutions of heterosexuality, family, gender, sex, etc. Hot Java is an escape from those normative institutions. Daniel explains, “For me it’s nice to be able to not talk about straight relationships all the time. I mean that’s all that’s all over the media, so it’s nice to get to talk to other gay couples and hear what their lives are like. I find it very refreshing” (Daniel, 7 Oct 2011). Hot Java disrupts the normative narratives of time and allows for a discussion that challenges dominant ideologies. For Daniel that exists in the alternate conversations he sees possible only in a location such as Hot Java.

Jeff explains the current status of Hot Java as “welcoming and inclusive,” though he admits that “even in the Gayborhood we still have our issues” (Jeff, 7 October 2011). I asked Jeff if anything had ever happened at Hot Java to leave him feeling unsettled. He explained,

Of course, we’ve had eggs thrown at customers, vandalism on the walls: Someone spray painted, “Don’t Eat Here, Jeff has AIDS” and I’m not HIV positive, but even still it was a horrible thing to have spray painted on the building. We have incidences of eggs being thrown, a lot of drive-bys of people being called faggots or other derogatory names just by being associated here. I think it’s also that we are pushing people’s comfortability. The fact that gay marriage is moving forward and DADT¹¹ has been over turned is causing people to react. But in some ways it’s a good thing. It’s still not Nirvana, we still have work to do. [*sic*] (Jeff, 7 October 2011)

For Jeff, the trauma of the present is an important part of community building. The screaming that comes from cars and the eggs that are thrown bond the patrons of Hot Java together and remind them that the trauma of the past is alive in the present moment. Jeff illuminates this: “In some way, I hate to say this, I think sometimes the screams that come from the cars, and the eggs that get thrown remind us [the LGBTQ community] that we have to keep fighting” (Jeff, 7 October 2011). While legislative gains are being made, the trauma brought on by vandalism and shouting reminds the patrons of Hot Java that they are still living on the margins.

While Hot Java builds a visible presence of LGBTQ bodies it does so in opposition to dominant ideologies that might allow for a more permissive view of homosexuality, provided it stay hidden and not quite as visible. Aaron Betsky explains:

¹¹ DADT stands in here for “Don’t Ask Don’t Tell.” Jeff referred to the policy by its acronym.

Queers are supposed to be in the closet. You might say that queer space is born in the closet. What is the closet? It is the ultimate interior, the place where interiority starts. It is a dark space at the heart of the home. It is not a place where you live, but where you store the clothes in which you appear. It contains the building blocks of your social constructions, such as your clothes. The closet contains the disused pieces of your past. It is a place to hide, to create worlds for yourself out of the past and for the future in a secure environment [...] Being in the closet means that you surround yourself with the emblems of your past and with the clothes you can wear, while covering yourself in darkness. (Betsky 1997, 16-17)

Hot Java challenges the concept of the closet. It provides a socially visible setting that allows customers to gather based on sexual orientation and to create a sense of social life and cultural capital. The visibility of queer bodies at Hot Java challenges normative ideologies of gender and sexuality. Although some of the customers at Hot Java might live “in the closet” while at work or school, while they are at Hot Java they are “out” by association. As such, while sitting at Hot Java studying or conversing with friends, it is probable that one will hear someone shout something derogatory from a car window sometime throughout the evening. While most of the time customers ignore it, on rare occasions the tension is addressed head on. Daniel explains what happens when that challenge is most visible:

Just, like, a week ago these guys drove by in this big van and screamed “FAGGOTS” really loud. And, you know, we all usually just sit back and shake our heads or something. Well, one of the guys who works here, apparently just wasn’t having it that night. He hopped on his motorcycle and road up the street and chased after them. He pulled the guy out of his van and pushed him against the wall. Everyone down here at the coffeehouse could hear him screaming like a little girl [the man in the van]. He didn’t hit him or anything, but I bet that guy will never do that again. The guy who works here came back and shook his head and just said ‘I shouldn’t have pulled him out of the van’. It was pretty great. (Daniel, 21 Oct 2011)

While this type of resistance might be rare at Hot Java, a different type of resistance emerges daily.

Resistance Through Coffee

Though the slurs keep getting shouted and the eggs are continually thrown, each day more LGBTQ identified people return to Hot Java. The solidarity felt amongst the customers of Hot Java seems to drive the feeling of safety that most participants described while being at Hot Java. This feeling of solidarity and community allows customers to continue sitting at Hot Java, despite the stigmatization being pushed via the larger community. Hot Java serves as a visible site of resistance for the LGBTQ community. Unlike the gay bars in the neighborhood, the nature of Hot Java allows its patrons to remain extremely visible, even while inside. The corner

on which Hot Java is located on is a very busy one, and often during my interviews we had to pause to wait for the sound of the traffic to quiet. The front of Hot Java is made up of giant windows that open in the summer time to allow a breeze to enter the space. The tables outside allow patrons to sit in the fresh air and interact with the community outside of the coffeehouse. The store hours, 6 a.m. – 10 p.m. during the week and 6 a.m. – 11 p.m. on the weekends mean that there is a queer presence even in the daylight, as opposed to gay bars, which are only open at night. This is quite different than most of the windowless gay bars in the neighborhood, Hot Java is alive all day long.

Hot Java serves a diverse population of people, though Jeff, one of the owners of Hot Java identifies approximately that 70% of their business comes directly from LGBTQ identified people (Jeff, 7 Oct 2011). Another participant puts the percentage at closer to 85%. Daniel, a 33-year-old gay man explains:

I would definitely classify this as a gay coffeehouse. It used to be that all of the employees and the owners were gay. Then 85 percent of the clientele are gay and if they're not they're extremely comfortable with gay people or prefer gay people, so it's pretty much geared for that. (Daniel, 3 Oct 2011)

While there is not a sign outside signaling that Hot Java is a gay coffeehouse, patrons of the shop have no problem identifying it as such. Daniel explains, "I mean straight people come here, it's not as if they aren't welcome, but this place is definitely gay" (Daniel, 3 October 2011). Jeff, the owner of Hot Java explains that the space is coded, though unintentionally, so that LGBTQ identified people know they are in a welcoming establishment. He explains, "We have the small rainbow flags in the windows, we have the gay rags [magazines] out and we have the equality board with news from the community. But a straight couple coming in off the street might not notice. I think there is insider knowledge that codes this space" (Jeff, 7 Oct 2011). During the summer a big rainbow flag flies outside of the coffeehouse, and Jeff explains that it would fly all year if it were not so expensive to maintain.

Hot Java is a political site of resistance in a number of ways. From political organizing, community building, sharing news and discussing ideas pertinent to the queer community, Hot Java serves a lot more than coffee. Jeff explains that Hot Java is:

Political because of the ideas and the conversations that are shared. We have the articles posted on the "Equality Board" which is a way we can get things out that are important to the community. It started organically from my employees surrounding Prop 8¹². The Prop 8 rally that happened originated here with a text message. It was a rally after the vote that approved Prop 8; it was a way to direct the anger at the results of Prop 8. Right after that we were all sitting out here and we said 'let's get together and have a candle light vigil'. Then it went viral, from text messages to Facebook. I mean my sister called me and said, 'I see the top of Hot Java from Cairo Egypt on CNN,' and it all started here. (Jeff, 7 Oct 2011)

¹² Proposition 8 "Eliminates Rights of Same-Sex Couples to Marry" was a ballot initiative in the November 2008 California Election. It passed, overturning the rights of same-sex couples to marry.

All of my correspondents discussed Proposition 8 in regards to Hot Java being a political site. They all remembered sitting at Hot Java throughout the campaign and discussing the election. Most of them had been approached by “No on 8”¹³ organizers while at Hot Java to volunteer for the campaign. After the 2008 election and the victory for “Yes on 8,” all of my participants remembered the organizing of the march/rally to protest the election results. Molly, a thirty-six-year-old queer identified woman explains:

I don’t even want to get married, but I knew it was important to get involved in the protest movement after the vote came down. We marched from Hot Java through downtown and back again. That was the organized part of the march that started here. But after everyone got back here, people weren’t done yet. They took over the streets and moved the march even further. Hot Java was the place that all that was organized at. (Molly, 9 Oct 2011).

One of my participants, Jack, was an organizer for the No-on-8 campaign and explained that Hot Java was one of the known locations they could always count on to find supportive volunteers. Jack explains, “Hot Java is always the go-to place for anything LGBTQ related in Long Beach. If you need volunteers for something, signatures, etc. Hot Java is a consistent gold mine” (Jack, 30 September 2011). While Hot Java is traditionally political in that it is an organizing ground for LGBTQ related legislation, awareness, and support, it also serves an alternate political purpose as well. Molly explains:

Just having this many queer bodies together in one place is a political act. I mean there’s something really powerful about the transgression of heteronormativity going on in a site like this. It’s not like a bar where the music is turned up too loud for people to talk. Instead, at Hot Java, it’s set up for people to talk. I have had some of the best political conversations here, discussing queer theory, gender theory, politics, etc. There’s something very powerful in occupying a space that transgresses gender norms like that (Molly, 9 Oct 2011).

Such power comes from the feeling of possibility of political action, social interaction and shared experience. Hot Java is a place to shed feelings of isolation, make a friend, find a date, or even take one.

Queering Community: It’s Not About the Coffee

In a day and age where there is a Starbucks on every corner and independent businesses are having a difficult time competing with larger corporations, Hot Java stands out as a local business. All of my participants began their introduction to the LGBTQ social scene through the gay coffeehouse The Library, located just one mile from Hot Java on Broadway. Jeff, the owner of Hot Java explains that when he first moved to Long Beach in 1991 he went to The Library every night. In fact, it was The Library that kept him in Long Beach and made it his home. He explains:

¹³ “No on 8” was the side in support of same-sex marriage.

The weather, the community, actually Hot Java. Well, at first it was The Library. I was there every night with my partner at the time. I knew everybody there, I'd get off work and go there and sit down and talk to people. It was the place to be back in the nineties, it was just a great place to be. The Library, and eventually Hot Java made Long Beach my home. (Jeff, 7 Oct 2011)

All of my participants made the transition from The Library to Hot Java for political reasons. The Library went through a series of owner changes, but the biggest change was back in the early nineties when one of the original gay owners of The Library died due to complications from AIDS. Jeff marks this as the turning point for him and explains why he could no longer go to The Library:

I know exactly why I stopped going there. When one of the original owners died, an out gay man died of HIV/AIDS. His family told people that he died of cancer. I felt very betrayed by them that they couldn't tell people that he passed away from HIV/AIDS and I couldn't support it anymore. I thought it was beneath him, I thought they cared more about the business and what it might mean to people to hear that he died of AIDS. I stopped going and started coming here to Hot Java. (Jeff, 7 Oct 2011)

All of my participants explained that it was not the coffee that drew them to Hot Java. Much like Jeff's transition from The Library to Hot Java, all of my participants explained that the openly gay owners of Hot Java are the number one reason they support the business. Jack transitioned from The Library to Hot Java because he "wanted to support local gay businesses," and "knew a lot of people who spent time at Hot Java" (Jack, 30 Sept 2011). Jack spends at least three nights a week at Hot Java but does not actually enjoy the coffee. Jack explains, "I do not like the coffee at Hot Java. I've spent time at another coffee shop but I never felt as comfortable there. It's a community coffeehouse too, but more like a Long Beach community thing. They have better coffee for sure, and are very LGBT friendly but it is definitely not a primarily gay space. I feel more comfortable around a lot of gays (Jack, 30 Sept 2011). The sense of community that the loyal customers of Hot Java feel is the thing that seems to drive them back to Hot Java again and again. None of my participants view Hot Java as a place to stop in and grab a coffee to go. They all cite the experience of being at Hot Java as the reason for being there. Daniel, who lives a short walking distance from Hot Java, explains his reasons for going to Hot Java:

I almost never grab a cup of coffee and go. I could make it at home; I have a Keurig [coffee maker]. So if I was going to do that, I'd just make it at home. When I come here in the morning I come down and I chat with the older guys who hang out here. In the evening I usually come because I've been working all day at home and need an escape. I always know that I will run into someone I know. Sometimes I bring work here, or will come down here if I am stuck on something I am working on. I know if I am stuck one of my coffee shop friends

will stop by, and every time they inspire me to the point I need to get to. Every time I am here I run into people I know. I love it. (Daniel, 3 Oct 2011)

All of my participants believe that Hot Java lives up to its “Community Coffeehouse” signage. The sign came from a previous owner of Hot Java, but was purposeful in its use. Under previous ownership, Hot Java was simply known as “The Community Coffeehouse” at least in print. Customers referred to it as Hot Java, but the cups and signs stated otherwise. The current owners kept the name because they felt it was important to mark Hot Java as a place for community building and engagement. I asked Jeff if he thought that, as business owners, they lived up to the name and to describe what he thinks a community coffeehouse is. He answered:

I hope so, I think there’s a lot of things: Being very out and open as the owners as being gay identified, gives it a sense of legitimacy in the queer community. We volunteer and give our time to the community and people see that. Our employees are a mixture of gay and straight but everyone is open minded and welcoming. My customers know that my employees are accepting of everybody and have no issues or hang-ups. But yes, I think we do live up to our name. (Jeff, 7 Oct 2011)

Throughout my interviews it seemed that the definition of “community” went even deeper than Jeff would admit. Daniel passionately defended the community status of Hot Java and explained:

The owners are so involved in the PRIDE festival and that makes this sort of the hub of everything. You have people coming in who don’t necessarily live right here, meetings and all that. The owners do a lot in the community. The other thing is, if you tell the owner Jeff ‘I am doing x, y and z’ he will pull out the rolodex and pull out the numbers to get things done. He can literally help you with anything and he will. I can’t tell you how many times he gave me a number to help me with something. (Daniel, 3 October 2011)

The customers of Hot Java are passionate about their relationships with one another and with the owners of Hot Java. They are particularly fond of Jeff and no one had anything negative to say about his involvement in the LGBTQ community. Every participant mentioned a relationship (or two) that had been formed at a ‘gay coffeehouse.’ Daniel met his best friend at a gay coffeehouse and finds the coffeehouse to be a much bigger driving force toward community building:

I met my best friend at The Library coffeehouse. I went up to her because I thought she was someone else. As I got close I realized I didn’t know her so I walked away. The next day she came up to me and said ‘You’re an asshole.’ I said ‘I thought you were someone else.’ We’ve been best friends ever since and we’ll be friends for life. I have made so many connections here [at Hot Java]. It’s so nice to go to a place where people know you and it isn’t all about straight people and their issues. Here we can talk about politics, it’s really neat. You can be around people that are like-minded, there’s no time pressure and you can see

people you know at any moment...even more so than being at a bar. (Daniel, 3 Oct 2011)

Aaron Betsky in his book *Queer Space: Architecture and Same-Sex Desire* examines the importance of queer space. He explains, "Queers continue to queer our cities, our suburbs, and now our exurbs because they must, as they continue to redefine who we are as individuals, as bodies, as part of a society. They continue to restage the promise that we can make ourselves by making a place for ourselves" (Betsky 1997, 14). Hot Java is an example of this queer space. Through the work of the customers, as well as the owners (previous and current), Hot Java has become an important aspect of community building.

I asked each of my participants what the awning outside of Hot Java marking it as "A Community Coffeehouse" meant to them. While everyone believed it directly related to the LGBTQ community, some thought it might also have to do with the Long Beach community in general. However, one point that continually came up was the idea of family. "I mean, community to me means an extended family," Mark explained (Mark, 7 Oct 2011). The idea and role of family is a long-standing one within the LGBTQ community. In fact, "family" has long been a term that LGBTQ people would identify one another. One might say, "She's family" to signal that the other person was also a lesbian. However, the feeling of family seems to come to the forefront of Hot Java's community. Jeff explains this:

For a lot of people, when they come out [of the closet], their families betray them and they're isolated. I want Hot Java to be the place that those folks can go. That's why we've always been open on the holidays. It works on a volunteer system, I always allow my employees to have the choice to work or not. I always work it though, that's a given. But, I keep the doors open for those customers that don't have a family to go to. For a lot of us, this is our family. All of my closest friends I have I met here, they are my family. (Jeff, 7 Oct 2011)

The relationships built and maintained at Hot Java go deeper than relationships amongst casual acquaintances, and according to Mark, that's purposeful: "We have to create relationships like that, family type relationships. Who else is going to have our back? Who else understands what it is like to live like we do?" (Mark, 7 Oct 2011). For Mark, the family relationships he has built at Hot Java help to negotiate life on the margins.

Discussion of Results

While sitting at Hot Java one evening, I began talking to another customer, a young woman in her early twenties. We were discussing the closure of a neighborhood lesbian bar and what it meant for the community. She was adamant that it closed because lesbians did not need spaces like that anymore, that we had made enough legal strides and places like the gay ghetto were just not as needed. My research proves otherwise. Hot Java is a "community of resistance" that builds itself through acknowledgement of the trauma of the past (and present), through resistance to dominant ideologies and retaliation, as well as through the building of familial relationships.

It should be apparent that for the customers of Hot Java, the desire to spend time and money at Hot Java is quite clearly “not about the coffee,” and instead is an important extension of their being. As a part of the gay ghetto, a neighborhood with a geographical boundary, Hot Java establishes the LGBTQ community as a fixture within the larger city of Long Beach. In the words of Daniel, “Of course places like this are still important. I live in this city because of places like this; I love being able to surround myself with other gay people. It’s powerful, now that I really stop to think about it, it’s revolutionary” (Daniel, 7 Oct 2011).

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