Small-City Gay Bars, Big-City Urbanism*

Greggor Mattson

Associate Professor of Sociology

Oberlin College

Accepted, City & Community.

Keywords: small cities, urbanism, LGBT placemaking

Despite the widely hailed importance of gay bars, what we know about them in the U.S. comes from outliers: gay neighborhoods in four big cities. This essay explores the similarities of 52 small-city gay bars to each other, and their differences from big-city gayborhood bars. Small-city gay bars are surprisingly integrated with straight people in their often red-state communities and are as racially diverse than the counties in which they reside. They are subcultural amenities not just for LGBT people but for straights as well, fostering cosmopolitan lifestyles for large geographical regions.

I conclude with an argument for the importance of small cities to understand urbanism generally. Small cities are a key analytic object to disentangle urban effects from modern life generally. They reveal the way in which contemporary urban scholars often implicitly define urbanism in terms of commercial diversity at the expense of the reasons why many people prefer to live in small cities: proximity to kin or nature, and the fact that most big-city pleasures can be found everywhere. Studying small cities provides one way of integrating studies along the urban-rural interface and developing a more holistic, empirically rich, and theoretically sound sociology of place.

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* Communication to gmattson@oberlin.edu or 10 N. Professor Street King 305, Oberlin, OH 44074, USA. Thanks go to lead research assistant Tory Sparks, research assistants Jack Spector Bishop and Wren Fiocco, and research support from Oberlin College.

Commercial Heterogeneity in the Small City

Urban theorizing has implicitly prioritized commercial choice in defining the urban, whether part of scenes (Silver and Clark 2016), urban amenities (Clark 2003), or boutique consumerism (Zukin et. al. 2009). Commercial choice is helpful for understanding gentrification and the return to the city in those places that are experiencing those processes (Zukin 2016), such as the “great cities” that comprise the bulk of American scholarship on the city (Norman 2013), but less helpful for understanding the experience of shrinking cities, small cities, or the role lone consumption opportunities can play in fostering cosmopolitan, “urban” lifeways for most of the United States (e.g. Billingham 2017). Small cities provide analytic purchase to compare and integrate these studies (Bell and Jayne 2009).

Yet small cities hardly figure in urban sociology specifically or scholarship generally (Bell and Jayne 2009, Norman 2013). When they do, they are often treated as anomalously dense nodes in a sea of rurality (e.g. Sherman 2009, Lichter, Parisi, and Taquino 2018), or as contemporary updates of classic community studies like Middletown (Lynd and Lynd, 1929) or Yankee City (Warner 1941) (e.g. Bell and Jayne 2006, Lorentzen and van Heur 2012). It is as if urban scholars had taken to heart lesbian anthropologist Kath Weston’s (1995) critique to “get thee to a big city” and ignored the places where half of Americans live, including LGBT people (Norman 2013, Stone 2018).

In scholarship on LGBT life, too, there is little place for small cities or the gay bars I call outposts—lone gay bars more than an hour’s drive from another (or 40 minutes in New England). Yet there were 132 municipalities in the United States with only one gay bar in 2017 (see Figure 1), making them the modal manifestation of these institutions that together total as many as in Los Angeles, Chicago, and San Francisco *combined*. When they appear, outpost bars

are footnotes in descriptions of rural LGBT life (e.g. Gray 2009, Herring 2010) or are portrayed as a “Small Town Gay Bar,” as a well-regarded documentary called them (Ingram 2006). That film featured one bar in a town of 1,753 (Shannon, MS) that all can agree is a small town, but the other is located in the core of Meridian, MS, a micropolitan statistical area of 107,449 people (Meridian, MS) and the sixth-largest city in the state (Census Bureau 2010).

This paper considers the gay bar as a place, and how its small-city manifestations challenge scholarly assumptions about “urban” or “cosmopolitan” places by revealing how those categorizations implicitly prioritize diverse commercial choices. Small-city commercial institutions such as lone gay bars are neither as differentiated nor as specialized as those in great cities, and thus offer different possibilities than those described in contemporary scholarship. I describe their contexts and the cosmopolitan lifeways they provide that are usually described as “urban” yet exist in quite small places that are neither rural nor theorized as urban. Commercial choice itself is less important than it is implicitly theorized; the mere existence of lone commercial institutions can foster diverse scenes that shape the cosmopolitanism of small cities—which raises questions about what role they perform in great city neighborhoods as well. I conclude with a discussion of the analytic possibilities of small cities for making comparisons across different contexts.

Small City, Big Fun: Dothan, Alabama

Sociologists know little about Dothan Alabama, for example. It is the capital of the wiregrass region and its Census Bureau Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA) of 145,659 people (as of 2010). In its region, however, this municipality of 65,496 souls is “where Southern Tradition Meets Today’s Fun,” and it is marketed by its Convention & Visitor’s Bureau, more

concisely, as “Small City, Big Fun” (DACVB 2016). The MSA has a low-for-Alabama poverty rate of 17%, in part due to the jobs provided by the Tesla motors plant and a nuclear power facility (ACS 1-Year Estimate for 2010). This buckle of the Bible Belt also has two mosques and a synagogue. You might have joined me for an oak-aged Manhattan and a flatbread with fig, goat cheese and arugula drizzled with aged balsamic while we considered our choices: the Opera House on the National Historic Registry, the Wiregrass Museum of Art, the Southeast Alabama Dance Company, the Patti Rutland Jazz Theater, or the Botanical Garden (DACVB 2017). Each of these institutions was the only one of its type for hours around, as was the reason for my visit: Cabaret Club Dothan, the only gay bar for a 105-minute drive.

Owner Ron Devane has operated the licensed private club inside his ballroom dance studio since 2005, making it the longest-operating gay bar in the county and drawing patrons from “the tri-state area” of Southeastern Alabama, Southwestern Georgia, and the Florida Panhandle. The bars’ members are drawn from this region, including, as Ron explained, from “Fort Rucker—there’s lots of gays in the military, there just is—people there will move into the area and come out. Lots of members from the smaller towns. We’re kinda the hub, the largest city in this area.” The bar began by hosting drag shows, but more recently hosted a Pulse memorial service for the massacre of LGBT clubgoers in Orlando FL, and another to mark the death of one of Mr. Devane’s dearest friends and patrons. Cabaret Club participated in Dothan’s CowParade-style public art campaign (see Huston-McCrea 2017), sponsoring one of Dothan’s forty-plus anthropomorphic peanut sculptures that celebrate the region as the Peanut Capital of the World. It also restarted the region’s only pride celebration after a 15-year hiatus, adding a cosmopolitan flair to a 12-county region.

As this brief introduction intimates, Dothan is urban and cosmopolitan by any definition, including Mr. Devane's own, despite serving as the hub for a vast agricultural region that produces one-third of the peanuts in North America. Dothan thus provides an example of the cosmopolitan heterogeneity provided by outpost bars, the limitations of using an urban-rural continuum to understand contemporary lifeways, and the importance that lone commercial institutions can provide to vast swathes of the country.

Small Cities, Wirthian Urbanism and the Urban-Rural Interface

This paper takes up David Bell and Mark Jayne's (2009) call for research on small cities and Tiffany Myrdahl's 2013 call for research on small-city LGBTQ lives. I use outpost gay bars, those that are an hour's drive from another, as a lens through which to view small cities' cosmopolitanism and to compare them to what we know about gay bars in great cities. Sociological focus on a limited number of large cities has led to generalizations from exceptions or outliers—such as gay neighborhoods—ignoring the most common settlement forms, urban lifeways, and LGBT placemaking practices (Brown 2008, Doan 2011, Stone 2018). Small cities and their suburbs constitute half the population of the United States, including many of the swing-state counties on which Presidential elections depend (Norman, 2013), and their LGBT residents have unique relationships to the city and their suburban neighbors (Brekhus, 2003).

Urbanists' near-abandonment of small cities is surprising because of the famous definition of urbanism provided by Louis Wirth in 1938. In his radically relativistic formulation, cities can be understood across time and culture by their settlement size, population density, and demographic and cultural heterogeneity. The "highly differentiated population" of the city is created by the urbanite's "premium upon eccentricity, novelty, efficient performance, and

inventiveness,” whether this meant opera singers in 17th century Milan, socialists in 19th century London—or drag queens in 21st century Dothan (ibid p. 17). Herbert Gans (1962, 2011) updated Wirth’s framework for the suburban era, outlining a four-part continuum of cities, suburbs, towns and rural areas that still guide much research.

While this urban-rural continuum has been influential in organizing research, it has found little empirical support. Cultural factors and not geographic density create not only deviance but conformity, despite an increase in the division of labor (Dewey 1960). Rural and small city residents report levels of happiness and well-being similar to residents of large cities (Perry 1984), and indeed are generally indistinguishable from suburban and large city residents (Tittle and Stafford 1992). By studying cultural forms in only the largest and most dense urban settlements, sociologists run the risk of reproducing the errors of Robert Redfield’s folk society concept so criticized in the post-war period for romanticizing small settlements and ignoring the technological developments in transportation and communications that have made American lifeways similar across space (e.g. Miner 1952; Stewart 1958; see also Fischer 1984).

Daniel Lichter and David Brown (2011) have also critiqued the continuum model, arguing that mass media and transportation technology have given way to a rural-urban *interface*, rather than continuum. As they conclude, “placing behaviors or organizational forms along a rural-urban continuum (or even within a metropolitan hierarchy of places) or drawing sharp rural-urban distinctions seems increasingly obsolete or even problematic” (p. 566). Some small cities are precisely this interface, though only if small cities are seen in their diversity that encompasses their metropolitan, suburban, and multi-nodal urban forms.

Similarly, Cary Wu (2016) has argued that urban sociology should give way to the sociology of the city, treating settlements as “autonomous social units” because “modern society

is now de facto an urbanized society” (p. 110). Rural sociologists would no doubt disagree (e.g. Tickamyer, Sherman and Warlick 2017, McGlynn 2018), but the “ordinary city approach” he proposes, building on Jennifer Robinson’s (2013) work, also begs for comparisons across different types of cities: “old cities are different from those that are young, and big cities are different from small ones” (p. 111). A sociology of the city thus advocates for comparisons among small cities and between small and large, as I do below.

Small cities are more diverse than the major metropolitan regions and “great cities” from which urban sociology generally theorizes (Bell and Jayne 2009, Norman 2013). These large coastal cities, with major roles in international finance, 19th-century legacy infrastructures, and dual-city gentrification struggles only rarely reflect the development trajectories and contemporary struggles of Sun-Belt cities, small cities, or shrinking Rust Belt cities, most of which have been doing so differently than Detroit, the only one to receive much scholarly attention (e.g. Sugrue 1996, Kinder 2016). A small cities approach would allow for comparison across intriguing case studies that exist but are not often put into conversation with each other. These include the burgeoning research on “shrinking cities” (e.g. Silverman 2018), Josh Pacewicz’s 2016 comparative study of small-city civic life in Iowa, and Japonica Brown-Saracino’s research that has long examined sexual orientation in the contexts of small cities (2010, 2018).

Another surprising facet of small city scholarship is that the Federal government laid out a framework for their study nearly 20 years ago that has not been much utilized. In 2000 the Office of Management and Budget announced the adoption of new set of geographic labels, laying the groundwork for a more nuanced analysis of burgeoning data available through geographic information systems (GIS). This included a revision to the existing core-based

metropolitan statistical areas, and the creation of a new *micropolitan* statistical designation. This the OMB defined as those settlements between 10,000 and 50,000 residents “containing a recognized population nucleus and adjacent communities that have a high degree of integration” (2000, p. 82229). Some of these 550 (in 2017) micropolitan areas are part of larger MSAs (383 in total in 2017), but many are the urban cores of their regions and reflect Wirthian principles of relative size, density, and heterogeneity. These standards were modified further in 2010 to account for the particular urbanism in New England with the creation of so-called NECTAs (New England City and Town Areas) (Census Bureau 2018). We know little about micropolitanism as a way of life, however, and such studies are still overwhelmingly classified as “rural” (e.g. Lichter, Parisi and Taquino 2018; Tickamyer, Sherman, and Warlick. 2017)

Similarly, we know little about LGBT life in these NECTAs, micropolises, or the much-larger “small cities” that are the focus of this journal issue (Myrdahl 2013, Stone 2018). These small-city statistical areas host gay bars, though. Eight of the 21 NECTAs in 2010 have more than one gay bar, for example (including Bridgeport-Stamford-Norwalk, CT; Barnstable Town, MA; Providence-Fall River-Warwick, RI-MA; Manchester, NH; Portland-South Portland-Biddeford, ME); an additional four have one. Diverse micropolitan areas do, too, including McAlester OK, Hilo, HI (in Kona), Traverse City, MI, or Athens, TX (in Gun Barrel City). Eureka Springs, Arkansas is so small (2,073 in 2010) that it is not even micropolitan, but the small regional resort town hosts a lively LGBT scene, according to documentary film *The Gospel of Eureka* (Palmieri and Mosher 2019).

The Big-City Bias of Gay Bar Research

The majority of scholarship about LGBT life in the United States comes from studies of gay neighborhoods in four large metropolitan areas—San Francisco, Los Angeles, Chicago, and New York (Stone 2018). As Amy Stone notes, “most studies disproportionately focus on gay life in small sections of these cities with an emphasis on gay enclaves, ‘gayborhoods,’ commercial, and bar areas” (Stone 2018, p. 7; see also Nash 2006). This focus on areas of commercial choice in four MSAs that contain only 14.7% of the U.S. population abandons LGBT life in some of the largest cities in the country and ignores the vibrant albeit different gay neighborhoods in such cities as Seattle, WA; Oklahoma City, OK; Milwaukee, WI; Providence, RI, or Wilton Manors, FL (see also Ghaziani 2018).

Small cities offer a framework for understanding and comparing LGBT life in settlements of many sizes and with the hyperlocal “sexual identity cultures” they foster—indeed, Japonica Brown-Saracino (2018) found that the four small cities in her sample had very different conceptions of lesbian identity. A small cities approach that incorporates her research expands Gavin Brown’s (2012) argument that urban gays and lesbians are “too frequently extrapolated from, globalized, and presented as the universal gay experience” by problematizing which cities, and in what relationship to the rural, such people live (p. 1068).

Urban scholarship on gay bars has a similar “great cities” bias, but paints a relatively consistent picture of them. Gay bars are dominated by men (e.g. Castells 1983; Wolfe 1992; Orne 2017, Mattson 2015a), are racially segregated (Hunter 2010, Greene 2014, Mattson 2015a), face unwelcome invasions of straight people (Orne 2017, Hartless 2018, Brodyn and Ghaziani 2018), are harbingers of gentrification (Doan and Higgins 2011, Lewis 2017), and only a small subset feature drag performance (e.g. Newton 1972; Taylor and Rupp 2003; Berkowitz, Belgrave

and Halberstein 2007). As I show below, such findings are challenged by lone “outpost” gay bars in small cities.

Researchers also posit that LGBT spatial life is undergoing a transformation in the face of recent increases in LGBT social acceptance. Describing this change variously as “post closet” (Seidman 2002, Dean 2014), “post-‘mo” (Nash 2014) or “post gay” (Ghaziani 2011), researchers describe the ways in which LGBT people increasingly do not seek out specific LGBT places (Seidman 2002, Brekhus 2003, Brown-Saracino 2011, Ghaziani 2014). LGBT people nevertheless express anxiety over the recent “invasions” of straight people into formerly LGBT places made possible by LGBT social acceptance (Ruting 2008, Reynolds 2009, Doan & Higgins 2011, Ghaziani 2015, Mattson 2015b, Orne 2017, Hartless 2018, Brodyn and Ghaziani 2018). This has led to recent calls to examine the spatial unevenness of LGBT equality (see review in Podmore 2013, Mattson 2015a, Ghaziani 2018). As I show below, the integration of straight people has a long and deliberate history in most small-city gay bars, many of which are woman-owned, as racially diverse as their counties, and nearly all of which host drag performances.

Sexualities scholarship, meanwhile, often relegates small city gay bars to the rural. There they appear not as a lack, but as occasionally undesirable compared to rural pursuits (Herring 2010 pp. 65, 90; Browne 2011) or as desirable but distant objects of reference (Kramer 1995, Annes and Redlin 2012). For example, Mary L. Gray writes of her field site that:

these youth can (and regularly do) travel to gay enclaves in Louisville [Kentucky], Lexington, and Nashville [Tennessee]. But they cannot produce in their rural daily lives the sustained infrastructure of visibility that defines urban LGBT communities. Instead, they travel to each other’s houses and caravan roundtrip to a larger city with a gay bar (2009, p. 89).

We have no studies of these Appalachian-Southern “gay enclaves,” nor the relative urbanity of the places from which these youths travel. Sometimes studies depict gay bars as part of the fabric of regional rural gay life even as they are also described as being “downtown,” (Kirkey and Forsyth 2001, Hopkins 2004, Forstie 2017, McGlynn 2018). This suggests that a small cities approach would usefully allow the comparison of places along the urban-rural interface rather than collapsing them all to “rural.”

As I show in this paper, gay bars are significant regional indicators of the demographic and cultural heterogeneity by which Louis Wirth defined urbanism and which underlay many current understandings of cosmopolitanism. Almost all gay bars are thus urban and not rural or of small towns. Rather, small city gay bars and outpost bars are significant “subcultural amenities” (Mattson 2015b) that create and sustain ties, organizations, and regional events not just for LGBT people, but for straight people as well. Understanding their similarities in their diverse settings requires us to rethink the ways that we understand urbanism and cosmopolitanism, especially the degree to which existing scholarship implicitly defines them in terms of commercial choice. That is to say, many theories of gentrification or consumerism are built around places with multiple businesses of the same type without providing evidence or theorizing about whether such multiplicity is essential for or ancillary to urban processes.

Methods

Data are drawn from 104 interviews with gay bar owners and managers and site visits to 96 establishments in 36 states and the District of Columbia conducted between 2016 and 2018. Fifty-four of these are what I call “outpost bars,” gay bars that are at least an hour’s drive from another (or 40 minutes in NECTAs), all of which are in small cities that are the core to their

regions (see Table 1). These interviews focused on the role of the bar in the local LGBT community, changes in patronage over the last 10 years, and current business challenges and opportunities. Interviews were conducted by me, my research assistant Tory Sparks, or by both of us. Questions asked about how stakeholders defined their business or how it was defined by others, and many reflected on comparisons both to nearby straight bars and faraway gay ones. Most interviewees called their businesses “gay bars” and I use this as a term for the general category, though some also called their businesses “everybody bars,” “alternative bars,” or occasionally, “queer” or “LGBT” bars. As interviewees reflect below, an “everybody bar” in a place that is often hostile to LGBT people is quite different from a gay bar in a big city that is overrun with straight people.

I conducted interviews on site and live transcribed them because of the noisiness of the settings; they ranged from approximately 40 minutes to 160 minutes long. I coded these transcripts according to themes that emerged within each question type and for comparisons among gay bars and places. Not all site visits yielded interviews, and these sites represent at best a convenience sample of those interviewees who responded to my inquiries via e-mail, Facebook, and telephone—convenience being defined relative to the sheer distance of the road trips necessary to visit such far-flung places (see Table 1 in Appendix).

Descriptive statistics of small-city gay bars are drawn from my original database (N=13,882) of gay bar listings in the U.S. using the Damron Guides, national travel guidebooks of gay establishments that have been published annually since 1964 under only three editors, and since 1992 by current editor Gina Gatta. This continuity allows for remarkable consistency in coding and editorial practices in what is the only source for a national census of gay bar *listings*,

if not bars themselves. Gay bar is operationalized for Damron codes for bars that are at least “gay and straight” in their patronage, excluding the “gay friendly” bars.

For additional accuracy in the field, I supplemented these listings with Yelp, a crowdsourced business ratings website. This allows patrons to identify establishments that are LGBT with remarkable speed, in part because owners encourage friends to review them, although it provides an overcount of establishments because patrons occasionally slur bad service or burgers as “gay” or a surly bartender as a “humorless lesbian.”

One caveat to this study is that the bars that I visited and owners I interviewed are the survivors of massive changes in gay bars over the last twenty years, including the dramatic rise of LGBT social acceptance and social media technologies, including mobile phone dating apps such as Grindr and Tinder (see Mattson 2019, Renninger 2018). They thus do not represent the historical diversity of small city gay bars. Because my data are from bar owners, they must be considered cheerleaders for their businesses and my lone visits cannot corroborate their claims with, for example, ethnographic data. That gay bars thrive in such diverse locations, however, and bear such striking internal similarities, is evidence that they provide cosmopolitan experiences to small cities in vast swathes of middle America little understood by either LGBT scholars or urbanists alike.

Small-City Gay Bars

Of 328 municipalities with at least one gay bar, the 2017 Damron Guide lists 132 municipalities with only one (see Figure 1):

[INSERT FIGURE 1]

Most of these are in small cities, ranging from Montgomery, AL (MSA of 374,536) down to Ogunquit, ME (population 892, part of the Portland-South Portland-Biddeford NECTA, and 45 minutes from the nearest gay bar). These small-city gay bars are notable both for the diversity of their location and the kinds of small cities in which they are located.

College towns are as likely to host no gay bars as more than one. Raleigh-Durham, NC in 2018 lists six; Syracuse, NY, four; South Bend, IN and Hattiesburg, MS each had two. There were lone bars listed in, among many others, such small cities as Bellingham, WA; Pocatello, ID; Ann Arbor, MI; Charlottesville, VA; and State College, PA. As notable are the college towns with zero gay bars, including Athens, GA and Amherst, MA; (there are no gay bars at all listed in the 2017 Damron Guide in Montana, Vermont, and North Dakota).

There are small regional resort towns with gay tourists that have more than one gay bar (Guerneville, CA; Rehoboth, DE; Kona, HI; Fire Island, NY; Provincetown, MA) and others that make do with one (Saugatuck, MI; New Hope, PA; Ogunquit, ME). Some outpost bar cities rely for employment upon substantial state or federal prisons, military bases, or federal installations

(Pasco, WA; McAlester, OK; Alexandria, VA). Other outposts are in struggling manufacturing towns (Pueblo CO; Ft. Wayne, IN; Erie, PA; Roanoke, VA).

Bars that are not outposts but are the lone gay bar in their municipality vary in their relationship to the cores of larger MSAs. Some are in suburban areas of large MSAs, such as Club 1220 in Walnut Creek (in the San Jose-San Francisco-Oakland MSA), or Quench Lounge in Largo, FL (in the Tampa-St. Petersburg-Clearwater MSA). Some are alone in their MSA but within an hour's drive of a gay bar in an adjacent MSA, as is Jake's on 4th in Olympia, WA (40 minutes from Tacoma's The Mix). Others are in non-core urban nodes of multi-nodal metropolitan areas, such as Freddy's Beach Bar in Arlington, VA (in the Washington-Arlington-Alexandria MSA); the World Famous Turf Club in Hayward, CA (in the San Jose-San Francisco-Oakland MSA); or the gay and lesbian enclave and bar district of Wilton Manors, FL (in the Miami-Fort Lauderdale-West Palm Beach MSA—see Udell 2011).

A few gay bars are in exurban areas of quite large MSAs. The Middletown Cabaret in the municipality of that name, for example, (2010 population: 28,086) is part of the New York-Newark-Jersey City MSA despite being a 1-hour-and-20-minute drive from the nearest gay bar (in upper Manhattan). Middletown's place on the urban-rural interface was cemented, for me, by seeing a black bear down the road from the bar near a giant alligator snapping turtle blocking the road (called by my Georgia-born co-pilot a "snappy-tailed cooter"). While small-city gay bars represent considerable diversity of urban forms, the sub-type of outpost bars bear remarkable similarities, as I detail below.

Outpost bars

This paper analyzes a subset of small-city gay bars: those that are more than an hour's drive from another (or 40 minutes within NECTAs), which I call outposts. Despite the diversity of the small cities in which they reside, outpost bars were notably similar across cities and regions, as I discuss here. These included their long-time, deliberate integration with straight people; the degree to which drag is an important part of their entertainment offerings for patrons of all sexual identities; the diversity they reflect and create for their regions; and their owners' preferences for, and ties to, small-city living. As Tony Boswell of Splash Bar (Panama City Beach, Florida) described being an outpost, "when you're the only gay bar for 350 miles around, all those people who are not out, and they may not be able to download Grindr because it's a work phone or on a family plan, gay bars have a really important place. They're not a thing of the past in the rural South, or even on the outskirts of every big city. They're necessary."

We're a straight friendly place

While big-city gay bars have expressed concerns over an influx of straight people into their bars caused by the rise of LGBT social acceptance, many small-city gay bars were designed to be integrated. "We've always had a lot of straight people here," explains Joe Totleben of Erie, Pennsylvania's The Zone Nightclub. Similarly, Aut Bar co-owner Keith Orr describes his bar in Ann Arbor, Michigan as "straight friendly": "we make it clear we're not a [merely] gay-friendly place. We're a straight friendly place. And I say that all the time: as long as they recognize we're a safe space for the LGBTQ community they're absolutely welcome." Pretty Belle, the drag alter ego of Andy Harrison, explains that 90% of the clientele at his Cedar Rapids, Iowa weekend drag shows are heterosexual but that only recently had his patrons objected: "Some people don't like that so they stop coming in because there's too many straight people in here, and I'm like, 'well,

bring your gay friends in and they'll be more gay people in here!' That's the way it's always been!" This characterization of the majority of the crowd at gay bars as being straight during drag shows was not uncommon, and suggests that it is not a "post-gay" attitude that had recently spread to his younger patrons, but a "gay" attitude that only recently prized or demanded gay-only space.

I was surprised to learn that many small-city gay bar owners did not view this embrace of straight patrons as a compromise caused by business necessity but as a longtime political strategy. As Keith Orr, co-owner of Ann Arbor, Michigan's Aut Bar, described it, "It was part of what we envisioned as sort of a modern-day gay bar. Not just a men's bar, or a lesbian bar, or a suit bar, or a leather bar. Big cities have those, they have a huge community and can subdivide like that. We're just a little town and this is the gathering place for everybody." Gay bars only for LGBT people are a big city phenomenon, according to Keith, and those that are LGBT-friendly safe spaces that welcome their straight friends, family members and colleagues are their goal in their "little town." For the manager of the Cabaret of Hickory, North Carolina, "we have straight people, gay people, lesbians, and that's what we love. We love the difference. Everybody here gets along so well... most of the straight people here who I know, they've been coming here for years"

Mary Green has owned Sneakers in Jamestown, New York for thirty years and reports always wanting a mixed clientele:

We didn't like the other [gay or lesbian bars]. They were segregated. They were boy bars, you know what I mean? They weren't real thrilled about us [lesbians], and we had a lot of straight friends. This has always been an okie-dokie place for everyone, so you can bring your friends and family, and it's still like that. It always was and it always will be."

I frequently encountered family members in small-city gay bars: David Such's parents dining at his SouthSide Speakeasy in Salem, Oregon; Casey Fitzpatrick's mother in Norwalk, Connecticut's Troupe 429; Shawn Perryon's son in Hattiesburg, Mississippi's Club Xclusive.

This integration was also spatial in the number of gay bars that are located in the downtown core. The roadhouse on the edge of town as gay bar does exist, such as Denton, Texas' Good Time Lounge or Spartanburg, South Carolina's Club South 29, but many outpost bars are "on the main drag," as "Pretty Belle" Andy Harrison described his Cedar Rapids bar's location. For many of these bars, this was the first to be so located, such as the Wayward Lamb in Eugene Oregon, but for others, a gay bar had long been in the middle of things, as in Pasco, Washington; Muncie, Indiana; Morgantown, West Virginia; Lake Charles, Louisiana; or State College, Pennsylvania. Michael Trivette of New Beginnings (Johnson City, Tennessee) posed integration with straights as a long time coming "business, it's down significantly. It's one of the blessings of our equality... this is what I always wanted, it's the rest of the country that caught up."

Incubators of Diversity

If small-city gay bars were integrated with straight people, outposts were also integrated demographically. Gay bars are usually white spaces and nightlife is notoriously racially segregated (May 2014), so I was surprised the degree to which small-city gay bars were at least as demographically diverse than the counties in which they were located. For example, at least one-quarter of the patrons were visibly people of color when I visited the gay bars in Denison, Texas (76% White alone, not Hispanic or Latino), Fort Wayne, IN (74%) New London, CT (76%), and Portland, ME (90%). Spaces are still white-dominated, but it is notable because

alcohol consumption is often a segregated activity, problems surrounding which often lead to interracial conflict (May 2014). Sometimes this demographic diversity reflected change in the cities themselves; the majority-Latinx patronage in Pasco, Washington's Out and About was a function of recent migration to the city, while Latin night at Chez Est in Hartford, Connecticut was one way for owner Jon Pepe to serve the diverse communities in his bar's region.

Meanwhile Hattiesburg, Mississippi's Club Xclusive struggled to appeal to groups beyond the black women who primarily patronized the space despite owner Shawn Perryon's deliberate strategies to reach out to white LGBT people, Black GBQ men, and straight Black folks.

Small municipalities are not necessarily conservative, even in red states. Diva Dee of Denton, Texas' Good Time Lounge noted: "we haven't had any troubles from the city at all." As Jamie Wilson of C4 praised, "Fayetteville [Arkansas] loves the gays! We don't get singled out." As Jason Zeman describes Iowa City, Iowa, the locating of his bar Studio 13: "Iowa City has always been extremely liberal. I think the college is a big part of it. We have the second oldest gay pride in the country, it started a year after Stonewall, because a group of lesbians marched that next year with the university... Iowa City is very unique for the Midwest in this area, at least." Jason raises the prospect of a blue-island archipelago of higher education institutions, a type of small cities on which scholarship might focus.

Outpost gay bars often create diversity for their regions through sponsoring pride parades and celebrations, events of public LGBT visibility that have spread to nearly every state and most cities in the United States (Bruce 2016). The Station House of Springfield, IL put the first LGBT float in the Illinois State Fair's parade, for example. Upon opening in 2014, Sami's Bar in Mansfield, Ohio, part of the Cleveland-Akron-Elyria MSA, catalyzed that reliably Republican county's first pride parade and celebration in 2015. As a local high school student told

journalists, “This seems like something that would only happen in a bigger city, but it’s here and it’s awesome” (Schock 2017). Erie, PA’s Club Zone is the starting point for that city’s pride parade, billed by journalists as “the world’s smallest gay pride parade” and “small town, big pride” (Fernós 2011, Christof 2017). 2017 marked the first pride celebration in 15 years in Dothan, organized out of Club Cabaret. “I’m proud of it and I’m proud of our community and we’ll continue to grow. We’re going to celebrate pride here in the club in August. I started looking—the larger cities celebrate it year ‘round and people will come. Our [existing] pageant will blossom into something bigger: a city-wide pride,” said Ron Devane.

Gay bars often serve as diverse community institutions for wider regions. When the emcee called seven women celebrating their birthdays onto the stage of Fort Worth, Indiana’s Babylon, four of them named hometowns more than an hour’s drive away; three of them thanked their boyfriends in the audience. Maine Street in the resort town of Ogunquit, Maine uses their large screens to show movies and the Super Bowl to the wider community in the winter. The Cabaret [Club] of Hickory, North Carolina partnered with the community theater to provide their drag stage and lighting for a production of Rent right in the bar; Trevi Lounge in Fairfield, Connecticut did something similar for a production of Xanadu. Vice Versa of Morganton, West Virginia reports that it offers the only LGBT-friendly HIV-testing and transgender health services in the region, inviting them down from Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania—90 minutes away. Belle’s Basix is one of the only places to get late-night HIV testing in Cedar Rapids, Iowa, as is Splash in Panama City Beach, FL. As owner Tony Boswell reported, “the guys who are living up these roads, these highways in the middle of nowhere... when they begin to worry about [their sero-status] or to know about it they can’t get tested in their home town because of the stigma there, so we find that we get a lot of people from the rural areas who come here to get their

testing done. It's a very important part of what gay bars serve." Blanche DuBois of Independence Place in Cape Girardeau, Missouri noted the good fortunes of being from a small city that had a bar to provide such community: "that saddens me a little bit that you never get to see [in the media] what the small towns bring at all. It's sad to say that when I was in New York I met a bunch of people who came to the big cities because there wasn't community [back home]." Ms. DuBois thus attributes migration to the great cities due to the lack of a community in small towns without bars, which "saddens" her; Lady LaTweet Weldon of Columbus Georgia similarly noted that when the gay bar closed, many patrons moved away to Atlanta.

Bars also served as hubs for unconventionality beyond just LGBT people. The Southside Speakeasy of Salem, WA was home to a mixed gay-straight BDSM organization, while a swingers club made their regular visits to New Beginnings in Johnson City, Tennessee. Pasco, Washington's Out and About sponsored the Atomic City Rollerderby team, while Club Xclusive (Hattiesburg, Mississippi) hosts several competing step teams from local African American sororities, sponsoring their uniforms. Even just offering live singing added to some areas: "karaoke in a small town is like Hollywood!" exclaimed TK Habdemariam, AKA Summer Solstice, of Columbus, Georgia.

Charity fundraising for non-LGBT causes is common to all these bars and is one of the points of pride for Michael Slingerland of Garlow's in Gun Barrell City, Texas: "This bar gave \$57,000 to charity last year. Anyone who knows us knows we're the number one charity in the county. Toys for Tots, ASPCA, the Resource Center—we do shows so they can give money to help people with their rent or for the electric." The manager of Club Icon in Kenosha Wisconsin similarly rattled off a list of charities and teams his bar supports: "volleyball, bowling, football, Kenosha just developed a Pride [festival], they're in their 5th year, we sponsor that. Salvation

Army, Toys for Tots, [and] the Holton Street Clinic [for sexual health].” Colin Graham of the Wayward Lamb of Eugene, Oregon reported working closely with Trans*Ponder, the local transgender services organization, while Jo Strong of Squiggy’s in Binghamton, New York reflected on her haul for Toys for Tots. The Park of Roanoke, Virginia funds the largest youth homelessness charity in the county through its operations, while the Aut Bar in Ann Arbor, Michigan long subsidized the only LGBT bookstore for hundreds of miles around, which only closed in 2019. And when a mother wanted advice after her son’s coming out, she called not a social service agency but Sipp’s Bar in Gulfport, Mississippi and got advice from bartender Kara Coley (Coley 2018).

Little Bitty Pissant Country Places are a Drag

Drag performances are a mainstay of outpost bars, and may be a key to their survival. I’ve seen more than a couple drag shows in my gay bar career, but I’d never seen so many renditions of Dolly Parton’s song from the musical Best Little Whorehouse in Texas, “Little Bitty Pissant Country Place.” Drag and a mix of country music and pop hits are key components of many outpost bars. As Blanche DuBois of Independence Place in Cape Girardeau, Missouri described her club’s jukebox: “Whitney [Houston] and Country are fighting right now.” Other bars noted that theirs was the only bar in the area, gay or straight, that played anything *other* than country music, including Gun Barrel City, Texas and Johnstown, Pennsylvania.

Drag queens bring fans into bars, in part because they are consummate practitioners of social media promotion. As manager Michael Henry of Club Cabaret in Hickory, North Carolina describes his “best in the Southeast” community of drag queens, what brings people in is not any marker on the building, but their online outreach. In response to the question what brings people

in? “Social media. We’re getting ready to get a sign, an actual physical lighted sign.” In other words, the 30-year-old bar was just thinking about investing in street signage but had already long been engaged in social media outreach—including by encouraging employees to log on to Grindr to reach passersby on the local Interstate. The Lady LaTweet Weldon of the Columbus, Georgia’s Velvet Room averred that getting the word out “it’s easier now, back then we didn’t have social media, we had only word of mouth,” an opinion shared by Jessica Blue, owner of the Q in Greensboro, North Carolina. As “Pretty Belle” of Cedar Rapids’ Belle’s Basix noted, “With social media I can tell exactly where everybody’s at.”

Drag queens also travel among bars, transmitting new ideas and successful business practices. As Matthew Heath-Fitzgerald of McAlester Oklahoma’s Fat Mary’s described the travels of his entertainers, he sketched their travels from three states: “I bring ‘em in from Oklahoma City, Tulsa, Fort Smith [Arkansas]. I [myself] came out in the Good Times Lounge, [Texas].” Small bars also send performers out. As Blanche DuBois said of her former castmates at Cape Girardeau, Missouri’s Independence Place, “A lot of them start out here, queens, in this bar, and then they’ll go to Saint Louis or Kansas City or New York or Chicago and they’ll make a big name so you won’t ever seem them back here. It’s normal.” Jay Chavez of Out and About (Pasco Washington) similarly sketched the wide range of queens and patrons his bar attracted. “whenever we put on those shows people come from everywhere. I would say Boise [Idaho], Spokane, Seattle, Portland [Oregon], Yakima. We’ve kind of expanded our reach, being so far out of those big cities we have a great opportunity to introduce people to the Tri-Cities” (of which Pasco, WA is one).

While drag artistry has been experiencing a national renaissance of late, driven or reflected by the rise of the popular reality show RuPaul’s Drag Race (RPDR), this may be less a

reflection of some resurgence in regional hinterlands than the fact that drag performance is what helps small-city gay bars survive. A list of RPDR stars' hometowns is a litany of small-city outpost bars: Alaska Thunderfuck's Erie, PA (The Zone); Eureka O'Hara's Johnson City, TN (New Beginnings); Sasha Belle's Cedar Rapids, IA (Belle's Basix); or Pandora Boxx's Jamestown, NY (Sneakers). And the bar in America that hosts the most RPDR performers isn't in New York or Los Angeles, but Splash Bar of Panama City Beach, Florida: "last year we booked more Rupaul girls than anyplace in the country. Per year, we do the most... [tomorrow] we're flying Nina Bonina Brown from New York during the finale. It's live, and she's there, and then they're flying her straight to the stage here," claimed owner Tony Boswell.

Many outposts are venerable "show bars," with competitive drag casts that host local pageants and that are renowned for sending their queens off to regional or national titles. As a man at the bar of Pasco, Washington's Out and About explained why he wasn't competing to be the bar's local queen, "Because I'm with the Court of Washington, and because of my title, I have to wait until I step down... you can have one state title or one bar title." Enya Salad, the show director of Roanoke Virginia's The Park, rattled off a litany of famous queens who'd gotten their start at the 30-plus-year-old bar: "We've had five Miss Gay Americas in this bar, two Miss U.S. of A. at large national pageants out of this bar. It's huge. We've always had big name entertainers." The drag performers from Rockford Illinois' The Office Niteclub bar claim to represent nearby Beloit, Wisconsin because, as manager Brad explained, "then we can go into Miss Wisconsin for our state. Literally if we go to [Miss] Illinois a Chicago bar is going to win it. They've got the money, they've got the backing, they've got the people just on sheer volume, the Chicago performers would always win. So we figured out a way to get into Miss Wisconsin."

If outpost girls can't compete against big-city performers, some find venues across the state lines whose regions they also serve.

Matthew Heath-Fitzgerald, the owner of McAlester, Oklahoma's Fat Mary's, founded the bar with his husband specifically to host drag performances in his municipality of 18,363, laughing "this is the least-gay gay bar" because 90% of his patrons are straight. Part of the attraction for performers is a room built specifically to cater to entertainers' needs while dressing: a hand-written sign above the dual air conditioners reads: "DO NOT touch thermostat. If you are skinny, move away, eat a chicken leg & get a coat. Thanks!" The other draw for the queens is tipping: Matthew or his husband (in his drag alter ego Mister Bunny Lamar) teaches his crowd at the beginning of each show to show appreciation not by screaming, but with \$1 bills. As for his patrons, he is also teaching them how to enjoy attending his shows "people from town never saw themselves ever going to a gay club. They come in and they realized they won't be maimed—unless I have a crazy queen on that week, and then it's in jest, then [my customers] *love* the attention!" As show manager Mikey of Lucy's Place in Johnstown, Pennsylvania averred, "a lot of the straight clientele pick up on the advertisements via social media... they come in with mostly partners, you see a lot of girls who drag their boyfriends, but by the end of the night those guys can't wait to come back because they had a blast."

While Ron Devane's Cabaret Club Dothan was also founded specifically to provide drag shows, other outpost bars have added drag to their repertoire more recently. "Diva Dee" of Denison's Good Time Lounge only in 2017 started an annual pageant and encourages her girls to sing live instead of lip synching: "you wanna stay a step ahead: you need to sing!" Deb Barnett of Pueblo, Colorado's Pirate's Cove attributed her bar's survival to the once-monthly drag pageants organized by Denver entertainer Lamar: "he's the only thing keeping this bar alive"

(the bar closed in 2018 before reopening in 2019). Relative newcomer Wayward Lamb (Eugene, Oregon) had added drag kings to its lineup with weekly performances by the Kings of Eugene (the bar closed in 2018; a queer bar reopened on site subsequently). And at Portland Maine's Blackstone's, this formerly leather bar for mainly men just hosted its first Miss Blackstone's drag pageant in 2018, reflecting the undifferentiated, unsegregated role that outpost bars play in their small cities.

Small-City Living: "You WON'T tear it down!"

Interviews with bar owners and managers illustrated one of the reasons why so many preferred to live in small cities: caring for kin. Matthew Heath-Fitzgerald is part of McAlester, Oklahoma because he couldn't imagine living anywhere else: near his siblings, his husband's cattle ranch, and near his former business partner's 12 brothers and sisters who helped get the business going. Jo Strong of Squiggy's in Binghamton, New York was helping her sister in her ill health. Ron Devane of the Club Cabaret Dothan described how he'd been involved in the theater scene in Tennessee before his mother fell ill and founded the bar when he returned to care for her: "We are caregivers. That's one off the reasons God put us gays on this Earth." This carework for kin is consistent with what urbanists know about "boomerang" residents of "legacy cities" (Harrison 2017) or the poverty that has thus far been categorized as rural but might be more productively theorized around the rural-urban interface of small cities (e.g. Sherman 2009).

Many outpost bar stakeholders expressed a preference for "small town" life. As the manager Michael Henry of Hickory, North Carolina's Cabaret described his husband's love of the place: "It wasn't a big city place, it was still small-town people and that's what he wanted." When I asked if that was what he too wanted, he quickly replied: "I love it. It's actually amazing.

I grew up here and Hickory was small and as I'm growing up I kept watching it grow." Keisha Wright and "DJ MattyFNmac" of Crystal's in Lake Charles, Louisiana similarly described liking their "small town" where "they're your friends, that the kind of place it is here—that's the kind of town this is, a very friendly town."

Some of the amenities of small-city life lie exactly along that urban-rural interface. Bar owners routinely describe their biggest summer competition for business not as some other gay bar or heterosexual nightlife establishments, but the inexpensive outdoor activities that took patrons away from the bar in good weather: "the lake," "the woods," and "the water," were cited as the primary competition by bars from places as diverse as Eugene, Oregon (Wayward Lamb); Joplin, Missouri (Equality Rocks); and Gun Barrel City, Texas (Garlow's).

The smaller scale of business in these markets makes business more difficult, avers Jason Gilmore of the Park in Roanoke, Virginia: "Big cities will always have a few [gay bars]... I think midsize cities are the ones that have the hardest time because you only have so many people to draw from so it becomes more and more difficult to stay viable." As bartender Damien of Cedar Rapids, IA explained the survival of his workplace, Belle's Basix: "We're the right-sized city to continue to support it. We're a small enough community where the gay community is exactly that: it's a community. For the most part if you're gay in Cedar Rapids, you know most of the people in the community—that's not the case in New York or Chicago. Not so small that it's closed-minded." Although Cedar Rapids had two gay bars as recently as 2007 it remains the "right size" to support its remaining one, as Damian explained to Tory his preference for life there: "You'd never vacation here—nobody comes to Iowa for vacation. But it's a great city. You *won't* tear it down! But Iowa is wonderful: it's cheap, it's safe, it's quiet. For the asshole of America, it's kind of progressive."

Small-City Urbanism as a Way of Life

Outpost gay bars present surprises to both sexualities research and urban studies. In both, gay bars mostly appear in the plural as part of gay neighborhoods, only very rarely differentiated from clusters of gay bars. In other words, it is unclear to what degree the special characteristics of gay neighborhoods accrue from LGBT residential density (e.g. Hayslett and Kane 2011), a critical mass of LGBT institutions (e.g. Armstrong 2002), or of businesses providing nightlife and leisure opportunities (Mattson 2015b). Hayslett and Kane (2011) demonstrated that neighborhoods with a high density of lesbian and gay couples were not organized around gay bars in Columbus Ohio, though we have no replications of this study from other ordinary cities or comparisons between ordinary cities and great ones.

Similarly, we have no studies of LGBT bar districts in the absence of residential density, however, though such exist in Oklahoma City, OK and Providence, RI. Similarly, the resort community of Ogunquit, ME has only one gay bar and a winter population of 892, but it has a density of LGBT-owned businesses: “there’s over 50 gay-owned businesses in a town of four square miles so you know it really is a special place,” said co-owner Jim Shepard. By only studying great city gay neighborhoods where LGBT residential density, commercial density, and nightlife coexist we study outliers that do not describe the spatial characteristics where the majority of LGBT Americans live and play.

For sexualities studies, LGBT institutions that are integrated with straight allies are a recent and problematic phenomenon explained as an outcome of recent LGBT social acceptance and not as a longtime deliberate strategy in states and regions where LGBT social acceptance are still elusive, such as Indiana and Mississippi. This may mean one of several possibilities: that the

“post-gay” phenomenon started in the 1980s in places like Johnson City, TN; that “post-gay” is primarily a great-cities or gay neighborhood phenomenon, or that sexual identity is as hyper-local as Brown-Saracino’s (2018) research finds, and thus geographic generalizations are hypotheses to be tested rather than facts to be assumed. In any case, sexualities scholarship has not attended to place and this provides an opening for urban sociologists to make important contributions.

For urban sociology, one would think that only great cities feature amenity-driven development, boutique consumerism, or LGBT communities where these things exist in agglomerations that provide vast consumer choice. Yet in each of the small cities I visited, I bought cold-brew coffee and artisanal kombucha, went to dog parks, listened to NPR, ordered craft cocktails and food-truck fusion cuisine, browsed indie bookstores, got my hair cut by hipster barbers and visited gay bars, albeit at the only such business for miles around. These organizations and small businesses represent the cultural and commercial heterogeneity of urban life in red-state and even red-county regions, providing cosmopolitan lifestyles to residents of cities classified by the U.S. Census Bureau, if not by sociologists, as metropolitan. For residents these *may* be havens of blue-state lifestyles in a sea of red (see Bayne 2018), but they are just as likely to be non-contradictory parts of everyday life in Middle America for residents who prize options other than the vast commercial choices available in great cities: proximity to kin or nature, friend networks, a low cost of living, slower pace of life, or the business opportunities made possible by a combination of all of these.

While some small-city amenities are related to rurality, the options provided by small cities are decidedly urban if we take Wirth at his word: small-city gay bars are almost always in the largest, most dense, and most heterogeneous settlements in multi-county regions. Some small

cities are on the front lines of the urban-rural interface, but even those that are heavily dependent on agribusiness or natural resource extraction feature enough jobs in secondary services, logistics, and processing to support enough business to provide legible cosmopolitan lifestyles for those so inclined. In Wirthian terms, there are heterogeneous institutions but not a number or density of them, at least in small cities that serve as hubs for their regions. A small cities approach to sexuality helps compare LGBT life among other similar places rather than always as inferior versions of life in great cities gayborhoods.

Where small-city consumption opportunities differ from their big-city cousins is in number and scale, the other two dimensions of Wirthian urbanism. Outpost bars are often the only institution of their kind in entire regions, and yet they allow people access to the lifestyles described in the *New Yorker Magazine* or on view on national television—while still allowing residents to maintain close connections to kin, their businesses, and/or their regions of birth. It may be that these barbershops, gay bars, yoga studios, upscale restaurants and Democratic ward offices delineate a “scene” of shared urbane lifeways (Silver and Clark 2016) in small cities, but this too remains a hypothesis to be tested.

The evidence that small cities are playing the urban game is all around, if we choose to see it. The list of the 238 cities that bid for Amazon’s second headquarters included Anchorage, AK; Scarborough, ME; Des Moines, IA; Grand Rapids, MI; Knoxville, TN; Frisco, TX; and El Paso, NM (Griswold, 2017). Cities that paid “guru preacher” (Wetherell, 2017) Richard Florida’s Creative Class Group to learn “how smaller cities can attract (and keep) Millennials” (Pedigo and Bendix, 2017) included Dayton, Ohio; Ann Arbor, MI; Tulsa, OK; Sarasota, FL; Roanoke, VA; Anaheim, CA; and Erie PA. There are few studies that compare the results of these efforts to translate the creative cities approach in small cities, however (Jayne et. al. 2010). And it was

back in 2000, of course, that the OMB recognized that even settlements of fewer than 50,000 residents functioned as regional centers of relatively large size, density, and heterogeneity. Social scientists have yet to grapple with this micropolitanism or its ways of life.

Implicitly, rather, urban sociologists have prioritized urban markets where there is a high degree of choice without theorizing the agglomeration effects of this diversity. We don't know, for example, what whether the urban institution of neo-bohemias (Florida 2002, Lloyd 2017) are identically present in small-city urbanisms, nor whether their members are more or less segregated from other scenes in either city type. We have no studies of the differential impacts of having only one nightlife establishment in which young people find romance (Grazian 2008), only one high-end craft cocktail bar in a city where there is a taste for consuming or working in them (e.g. Ocejio 2017), or the practical differences in small-city vs. big-city lifestyles between having only one high-end boutique versus whole districts devoted to such shopping (e.g. Zukin et. al. 2009). Only recently have such agglomeration effects been specifically theorized in the case of nightlife entertainment zones (Campo and Ryan, 2008) bar districts (Mattson 2015b), or between cities with and without LGBT space (Moran et. al. 2003); this paper is the first to describe the effects of having only one such establishment in a small city, at least only one that openly and explicitly serves LGBT clientele. Comparisons of such institutions among small cities, and between small cities and large ones, would inform us about their effects in great city neighborhoods as well and allow us to integrate studies across city size.

When it comes to small cities, metropolitan heterogeneity by lifestyle and consumer choice can be fostered and sustained by a single establishment in the region—just ask any professor whose work has taken them from the coasts where they trained for their PhD to the small inland college towns where they make their life. Since the 2016 election, coastal journalists

and sociologists alike have rushed to make sense of the American interior (e.g. Gans 2017). Given their geographic and ecological diversity, a small cities approach helps answer this call.

Small-city gay bars serve as the hubs of regional LGBT communities, provide social services, organize regional pride parades, retain residents, and provide modest but consistent economic benefits. As Ron Devane says of his Cabaret Club Dothan in that small city: “We don’t have an LGBT organization, we are it. Hopefully we will someday, that’s why I think the bar’s important. We need a place to meet and greet, and we need a presence in our community. We’re here, we’re queer, and we ain’t going nowhere.” Small cities are similarly not going anywhere, and it is up to urban sociologists to make them an analytic object that recuperates cities as comparative objects of study, developing a more holistic, empirical rich, and theoretically sound sociology of place.

Appendix

[INSERT TABLE 1]

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Table 1. Outpost bar site visits 2016-2018 (* indicates subsequent closure)

Cabaret Dothan Dance Club	Dothan	AL
C4	Fayetteville	AL
Kinhead's	Fort Smith	AR
Eureka Live Underground	Eureka Springs	AR
Q Bar	Colorado Springs	CO
Pirate's Cove*	Pueblo	CO
Chez Est	Hartford	CT
O'Neill's Brass Rail	New London	CT
Crimson Moon	Wilmington	DE
Splash	Panama City Beach	FL
Velvet Room*	Columbus	GA
Belle's Basix	Cedar Rapids	IA
Kings & Queens	Waterloo	IA
Studio 13	Iowa City	IA
The Office Niteclub	Rockford	IL
Mark III Tap Room	Muncie	IN
Babylon	Fort Wayne	IN
Bolt	Lafayette	LA
Crystal's	Lake Charles	LA
Le Place	New Bedford	MA
The Lodge	Boonsboro	MD
Maine Street	Ogunquit	ME
Blackstone's	Portland	ME
Aut Bar†	Ann Arbor	MI
Equality Rocks	Joplin	MO
Independence Place	Cape Girardeau	MO
Club Xclusiv	Hattiesburg	MS
Black Sheep's Cafe*	Hattiesburg	MS
Club Cabaret	Hickory	NC
O'Henry's	Asheville	NC
Georgie's	Asbury Park	NJ
Squiggy's	Binghamton	NY
Sneakers	Jamestown	NY
That Place*	Utica	NY
Middletown Cabaret	Middletown	NY
Somewhere	Lima	OH
Fat Mary's	Macalester	OK
Wayward Lamb*	Eugene	OR
Southside Speakeasy	Salem	OR
The Zone Dance Club	Erie	PA
Lucy's Place	Johnstown	PA
Tally Ho Tavern	Lancaster	PA
Brownstone	Harrisburg	PA

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† Located a 46-minute drive from the nearest gay bar in Detroit, MI.

Club South 29*	Spartanburg	SC
New Beginnings	Johnson	TN
Garlow's	Gun Barrel City	TX
Good Time Lounge	Denison	TX
Mable Peabody's	Denton	TX
Rainbow Member's Club	Longview	TX
Escape*	Charlottesville	VA
The Park	Roanoke	VA
Out and About	Pasco	WA
Club Icon	Kenosha	WI
The Blue Lite	Sheboygan	WI
Vice Versa	Morgantown	WV