Spring 2013

Gentrification, Social Capital, and the Emergence of a Lesbian Neighborhood: A Case Study of Park Slope, Brooklyn

Carolyn R. Senn
urban1@fordham.edu

Follow this and additional works at: https://fordham.bepress.com/urban_studies_masters

Part of the Urban Studies and Planning Commons

Recommended Citation
https://fordham.bepress.com/urban_studies_masters/7

This is brought to you for free and open access by the Urban Studies at DigitalResearch@Fordham. It has been accepted for inclusion in Urban Studies Masters Theses by an authorized administrator of DigitalResearch@Fordham. For more information, please contact considine@fordham.edu.
GENTRIFICATION, SOCIAL CAPITAL, AND THE EMERGENCE OF A LESBIAN NEIGHBORHOOD: A CASE STUDY OF PARK SLOPE, BROOKLYN, NYC

By

Carolyn R. Senn
B.A. Centenary College, 2011

THESIS
SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF ARTS IN URBAN STUDIES AT FORDHAM UNIVERSITY

NEW YORK
MAY 2013
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank anyone who has offered me help, professional and emotional, in the completion of this master’s thesis. I would especially like to thank Dr. E. Doyle McCarthy who worked with me over the course of two years with the editing, formatting, and overall completion, serving as mentor and overseer of this thesis. I would also like to recognize the professional and emotional support given from Professor David Katz at Mohawk Valley Community College and Dr. Marilyn Murphy, who read every word of this thesis and helped to edit and transform it into a better body of work.

I would also like to thank my other half, Erin Katz, the only person who has heard every thought in my head about this thesis, worked with me through its entirety, listened, encouraged, and let me bounce ideas off of. Without you I probably could not have written anything at all.

Lastly I would like to thank my life mentor Dr. Linda Nagel who has helped in every regard develop my emotional and personal growth. For me, this thesis has represented more than an academic achievement. Over the last two years I have grown personally and emotionally and the achievement of this thesis represents an important milestone in my life.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Title Page...............................................................................................1

Acknowledgements.........................................................................................2

Table of Contents ............................................................................................3

List of Figures and Tables..................................................................................4

Chapter 1: Introduction .....................................................................................5

  Theoretical Framework....................................................................................9

  Interdisciplinary Approach..........................................................................17

  Methodology.................................................................................................17

Literature Review.............................................................................................19

Chapter 2: History and Background.................................................................23

Chapter 3: Emergence of a Lesbian Neighborhood.........................................48

Chapter 4: Analysis..........................................................................................59

Conclusion.......................................................................................................65

Bibliography.................................................................................................67

Appendix.........................................................................................................70

Abstract..........................................................................................................
LIST OF FIGURES AND TABLES

Figure 1.1: Social Capital Features.................................................................12
Figure 1.2: Dimensions of Social Capital.......................................................16
Figure 1.3: Map of Park Slope, Brooklyn.......................................................23
Figure 1.4: Photo of Park Slope, Brooklyn Brownstones...............................24
Figure 1.5: Park Slope Civic Council House Tour Flyer.................................36
Figure 1.6: Map of Park Slope Landmark District.........................................39
Figure 1.7: Map of South Park Slope............................................................50
Figure 1.8: Photos of South Park Slope Houses............................................56
Table 1.1: Racial Population of South Park Slope........................................52
Table 1.2: Percentage of Renter and Owner-Occupied Homes for South Park Slope.......54
Table 1.3: Percentage of Renter and Owner-Occupied Homes for North Park Slope........54
Table 1.4: Gross Rent Amounts for South Park Slope...................................55
Table 1.5: Gross Rent Amount for North Park Slope.....................................55
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

For decades academics have been exploring the phenomenon of gentrification, defined as “the transformation of a residential working-class area or vacant area of the central city into a middle-class residential and/or commercial use.”¹ It is a process that has attracted the attention of journalists, sociologists, political scientists, economists, architects and planners, real-estate developers, political activists, boosters, anthropologists, and political scientists. The reasons for gentrification are vast: commercial and real-estate developers sight a chance for redevelopment, the gentry are drawn to up and coming neighborhoods due to their cultural and architectural appeal, or simply the neighborhoods’ general economic attractiveness. To some gentrification might seem like a positive adjustment to neglected poorer neighborhoods, bringing revitalization, new stores and boutiques, higher property values and sales tax revenues. But, gentrification still comes with negative effects, and one of the consequences has been the subsequent displacement of residents that once inhabited the neighborhood. Many of these residents feel that they can no longer afford the rising rent prices and therefore end up moving out of their long-established neighborhoods completely.

Gentrification has also long been associated with the urban pioneer frontier mentality in which urban gentrifiers see themselves as 19th century pioneers on the plains frontier taking space and bringing revivalist visions with them to their designated neighborhood of choice. Some scholars have taken issues with seeing gentrification this way. Scholar Neil Smith sums up the problem of seeing the middle class gentrifiers as fearless voyagers on the frontier, “the idea of ‘urban pioneers’ is as insulting applied to contemporary cities as the original idea of ‘pioneers’ in the U.S. West. Now, as then, it implies that no one lives in the areas being

pioneered...no one worthy of notice at least.”\(^2\) Indeed, scholars sometimes describe urban pioneering gentrifiers as the saviors of the neighborhood that was there before them. They essentially have very little regard for the community that was established before their arrival and overtake of the neighborhood. As Brown-Saracino acknowledges, “accounts suggest that the prospect of transformation still entrances gentrifiers, and that urban pioneer gentrifiers particularly celebrate the reclamation of space from certain longtime residents.”\(^3\) This reclamation of space is a highlighting feature of the urban pioneer ideology that is much discussed through the gentrification literature. But, considerable prominence has been placed on the urban pioneer ideology without careful consideration of other explanations, specifically the \textit{processes} that come with gentrification.

In addition, while there have been many detailed studies done by sociologists, planners, academics, and scholars on the urban pioneering outcomes and effects of gentrification, there has been less research done “about contemporary gentrifiers’ motivations, beliefs, and daily practices”\(^4\). One such ground breaking study was done by Japonica Brown-Saracino who sought to document how “gentrifiers think, feel, and behave,” offering an astute departure from the gentrification literature in regards to the urban pioneer ideology, and specifically placing emphasis on the \textit{processes} of gentrification.\(^5\)

She goes on to say that “to date no one has chosen to publish an article in \textit{City and Community}, the urban studies subfield journal, that takes as its primary subject a neighborhood

\(^4\) Ibid, p. 19  
\(^5\) Ibid, p. 19
or town with a large queer population” labeling this oversight “a serious consequence for our subfield for at least two reasons. First, we risk painting a portrait of cities and towns that largely omits those who are not heterosexual or attends to them only in the context of gentrification or “gay ghettos.”6 And secondly, studies of gay and lesbian communities conducted beyond parameters of community and urban sociology have not had the benefit of the set of analytic and methodological tools that are at the heart of our subfield.”7 Thus, it is extremely important to include within the embodiment of academic literature on gentrification the inclusion of different social groups. By not doing so we omit a population that is contributing to urban change and development. David Bell describes this lack of scholarly literature on sexuality and the city as marginalized and obscure, “it will not attract career and status minded individuals. This squeamishness regarding sexual issues is partly homophobic and partly a justifiable fear of never being cited except in a list of interesting, albeit peripheral work.”8

A variety of different groups have been studied in reference to gentrification, including gay men (Castells 1980), artists (Clay 1979), the “creative class” and young hip professionals (Florida 2002), and even loft dwellers (Zukin 1982, 1989) but lesbians have largely been left out of the gentrification literature. Indeed, settlement by gay men has often been linked to the emergence of a gentrifying neighborhood (Castells 1980, Gates & Ost, 2004), so why have the processes of lesbian gentrification been left out of academia? What about the lesbians? Can lesbians transform a neighborhood and gentrify it the way gay men have in the past in San Francisco and New York City?

7 Ibid. p. 4.
There has been almost no in-depth analysis of the role that the lesbian community might play in the processes of urban neighborhood transformation. Thus, in this study I seek to combine two neglected elements in the research to date: (1) the study of the processes of gentrification and, (2) the possible role a lesbian community in urban gentrification.

Using an interdisciplinary approach consisting of urban history, geography and sociology I investigate how members of South Slope, Brooklyn\(^9\) reason, feel, conduct themselves, and overall contribute to urban neighborhood\(^10\) transformation using social capital theory as my theoretical framework of analysis. Chapter 2 will serve to explain the history of Park Slope in relation to South Slope. It is important to understand the history of this nearby neighborhood because it offers not only a sharp comparison model, but has helped to formulate the inspiration for this thesis. This chapter incorporates the explanation of the stages of gentrification using Clay’s (1979) model theory of gentrification and the role of the lesbian community in the initial stages of Park Slope’s gentrification in the 1980s.

Chapter 3 will discuss the “why” or “push” factors surrounding lesbian movements to South Slope. In addition, the stage of gentrification in South Slope will be hypothesized using Clay’s model; the relevance of the lesbian community will be discussed in relation to the current stage of South Slope’s gentrification.

Lastly, Chapter 4 will discuss the “how” aspects of South Slope’s lesbian gentrification. This is where social capital theory will be largely explained in relevance to my thesis.

---

\(^9\) see map in Chapter 3 showing the exact location of South Slope, Brooklyn.

\(^10\) The words neighborhood and community will be used throughout this thesis. A neighborhood is defined as: a geographically located community within a city or town. Neighborhoods consist of face-to-face interactions between its members. It is defined with a spatial component. On the other hand, a community has less of a geographical limitation. A community shares something in common, be it interests, values, beliefs, etc. In this instance I will be focusing on a community of identity in which all members identify as lesbian.
Social Capital Theory

Various institutional theorists since the 1990s have defined “social capital” in an assortment of different ways in an attempt to mold and stretch the definition to fit their analysis. The commonalities of most definitions of social capital are that they focus on social networks that have productive benefits. The variety of definitions identified in the literature stem from the highly context specific nature of social capital and the complexity of its conceptualization and operationalization. The value of social capital was first identified by Jane Jacobs (1961), and later given a clear theoretical framework by Coleman (1988, 1990), and then brought into full attention by Robert Putnam (1993, 1995).

Starting with theorist Robert Putnam, early attempts to define social capital focused on the gradation to which social capital as a reserve should be used for public good or for individual benefit. Putnam defined social capital as “trust, norms, and networks” that facilitate social coordination and cooperation for mutually supportive relations in communities. According to Putnam, social capital refers to the cooperative value of all “social networks.” Putnam’s work on social capital also places a large emphasis on its ability to contribute to the process of democratization. Through his focus on patterns of trust and informal institutions (informal rules of behavior, norms, and conventions), Putnam asserts that social capital is a fundamental constituent in the establishment and maintenance of a democracy, especially in the developing world. In order to measure social capital (another controversial issue) Putnam places prominence on the level of trust and reciprocity between the community/group. His first work on social

---

11 See social capital chart, showing a relatively simple way that social capital is understood presently.
capital *Making Democracy Work: Civic Traditions in Modern Italy* argues that, in large part, the success of a democracy depends on the success of the bonds of social capital within a community. Drawing great academic attention, Putnam’s definition of social capital has been highly controversial and criticized by theorists such as James Putzel, who argue that social capital is particularly not good for democracy and has an inherent “dark side.”

James Putzel, critiquing Putnam in his work, argues that “the corpus of James Putnam’s work on social capital and democratization suffers from a combination of inconsistency and conceptual stretching and an overly ambitious drive, which he shares with other institutional theorists, to identify a single explanatory framework to account for the entire gamut of political and economic performance.”¹⁴ Indeed, Putzel would give social capital no credit in the formation of a democracy, arguing that “while examining divergent patterns of social capital may shed light on both patterns of economic development and political performance, the mere existence of networks and norms that facilitate economic exchange says little about whether such networks will “make a democracy work.”¹⁵ Putzel backs up his critique by providing examples of Chinese communities and their responses to social capital and democracy.¹⁶ Putzel continues his critique on Putnam’s definition of social capital elaborating on the fact that social capital idealizes the family as the most productive site and consequently a pillar of civic integrity and democracy. In his writing on the United States, Putnam identifies the family as the most important situate of social capital materialization:

> The most fundamental form of social capital is the family, and the massive evidence of the loosening of bonds within the family (both

---

¹⁵ Ibid., 943.
¹⁶ Ibid., 942-943.
extended and nuclear) is well known. This trend, of course, is quite consistent with- and may help to explain-our theme of social decapitalization.\textsuperscript{17}

Rightly so, Putzel has issues with Putnam identifying the family as the most important source of social capital. While the family is certainly a foremost place of socialization in most societies, if a civil society is to have any meaning at all it must incorporate public space and not just family space. Putzel highlights this fact noting, “to be sure there is a kind of trust, of predictability, that is associated with the intimacy of the family, but it is not by any means democratic in essence.”\textsuperscript{18}

Going off of this statement, it is important to note that not every group, functioning as social capital groups, are intrinsically democratic. This is a point that seems to have been muddled in the social capital literature. Just because a group functions as a network of connection it does not translate into a purveyor of democracy. This is another important point noted by Putzel who calls this the “dark side” of social capital. Think mafia, gangs, the Ku Klux Klan, even football clubs. Football clubs, bowling clubs, any “social” club may establish lasting social networks, but it is important to analyze if these groups are truly democratic, or if they are spreading negative civic ideals.

As Putzel sums up, “clearly it is the articulation of goals, the power of ideas, and the efficacy of organization that will determine the political purpose, if any, that such networks serve. Thus, the type of network and the type of socialization, connectedness, and relations the group is engaging in is also important to evaluate, in addition to the goals and power of ideas.

\textsuperscript{18} Ibid., 945.
Based on the existing literature, the following figure represents a multi-faceted framework for describing social capital. It contains the key features of social capital most discussed and supported in the literature (for example: Trust, networks, diversity, norms and values).

**Figure 1.1** - This diagram depicts key features of social capital most supported by research literature.\(^ {19}\)

**Groups with Higher Levels of Social Capital Perform Better**

Michael Woolcock, in a more straightforward way, describes social capital as “the basic idea that one’s family, friends, and associates constitute an important asset, one that can be called upon in a crisis, enjoyed for its own sake, and/or leveraged for material gain.”\(^ {20}\) In a communal environment, strong social capital inflows “will be in a stronger position to confront poverty and vulnerability, resolve dispute, and/or take advantage of new opportunities.” In a sense, Woolcock, and other theorists before him, are saying that communities with higher levels of


social capital perform better in every way shape and form, be it economics, political engagement, happiness, education, etc. This definition, democracy aside, breaks social capital down into a form where it can be applicable to issues such as environmental degradation and poverty,\textsuperscript{21} and for purposes of this thesis: gentrification.

Another body of literature surrounding social capital identifies the positive implications it has for reducing poverty for example, or expanding sustainable environment programs. These studies surrounding social capital seem to offer the most beneficial and positive research outcomes. For example, Jules Pretty and Hugh Ward in their paper \textit{Social Capital and the Environment} show how social and human capital, embedded in participatory groups within rural communities has been central to equitable and sustainable solutions to local development problems. What is interesting about this study is that Pretty and Ward use a definition of social capital very similar to Putnam’s but without the democracy evaluation.

Pretty and Ward identify four key aspects for their social capital definition: relations of trust; reciprocity and exchanges; common rules, norms and sanctions; connectedness; networks and groups. They go on to distinguish the social capital they are talking about from the social capital previously discussed (bowling groups, football clubs, etc.). “It is important, therefore, to distinguish between social capital embodied in such groups as sport clubs, denominational churches, parent-school associations and even bowling leagues, and that is resource-orientated groups concerned with watershed management, microfinance, irrigation management, pest-management, and farmer research.”\textsuperscript{22} They go on to say that the CPN (1999) focuses on types of

\textsuperscript{21} Woolcock’s definition of social capital is inherently “individual.” Woolcock breaks down social capital to be applicable to other issues. I expand upon his definition to include gentrification as an issue.

social capital that “enhance capabilities to solve public problems and empower communities” rather than just focus on the quantitative increases or decreases measured in social capital. This is a very important distinction in the type of research (sustainable development) that Pretty and Ward analyze.

Pretty and Ward extend the definition of social capital and ask whether it can be enhanced to incorporate innovative ideas. “In the face of growing uncertainty (e.g., economies, climates, political processes), the capacity of people both to innovate and to adapt technologies and practices becomes vital.”23 Their findings included measurable beneficial advances in social capital creation in five areas: watershed and catchment management groups; irrigation and water users’ groups; microfinance institutions; joint and participatory forest management; integrated pest management and farmer fields schools; and farmers’ groups for co-learning and research.24 The authors then go on to offer interesting policy implications and pose interesting questions for further research.25

One could look at the simple, straightforward definition of social capital and see words such as “participation,” “trust,” and “citizen power.” But, in essence, the definitional formation of social capital is much more complex. Social capital is studied, analyzed, and theorized in many contexts, making it almost incomprehensible to digest and understand what it means exactly, in what context, and what the outputs of context are. Social capital can be studied economically, politically, and sociologically just to name a few. But, the most beneficial studies that I have seen so far come from a sociological definition in which social capital is labeled as: the norm and networks that facilitate collective action for positive communal benefit. Michael

23 Ibid., 214.
24 See chart page 213 Pretty and Ward showing some benefits of social capital manifested in groups.
25 See page 221 in Pretty and Ward.
Woolcock supports this notion by stating: There is an emerging consensus on the definition of social capital, one built on an increasingly solid empirical foundation and it is as follows: social capital refers to norms and networks that facilitate collective action.²⁶

Figure 1.2 below is a summary of the dimensions of social capital. I devised my interview questions in an effort to measure social capital qualitatively from the lesbian community within South Slope, Brooklyn. I organized a series of interview questions for my participants that aimed at recording descriptive social capital qualities (embedded network resources). I hypothesize that an individual’s social capital is linked to the processes of gentrification. In essence, the stronger an individual’s social capital and investment in relationships, the more likely they are to sustain a positive presence within the community ultimately leading to neighborhood revitalization and transformation. An in-depth analysis on social capital and my research findings are found in Chapter 4.

Figure 1.2 – The dimensions of social capital. Source: Narayan and Cassidy (2001).
Interdisciplinary Approach

Urban areas are like ecosystems. Without an encompassing view of what makes up the sum of all its parts, it is impossible to analyze an ecosystem. No single academic discipline is able to encapsulate the complexities of urban areas. Complex occurrences require the use of varied disciplines and approaches. There is not one discipline that can be used to tell the story of urban areas, their development, and phenomena. The urban sphere needs to be approached from the social science correspondent of a microscope and a telescope.

To analyze lesbian gentrification in South Slope I have incorporated the academic disciplines of history, sociology, and geography. The history and geography of South Slope will help put the area into context. South Slope has a historical significance as it has long been a maritime neighborhood settled by immigrants. In order to get a complete view of the emergence of South Slope as an “up and coming” neighborhood, I will delve into the history of gentrification in South Slope’s “sister” neighborhood, Park Slope. Without this history, it is impossible to truly understand the factors making South Slope an emerging neighborhood. Geography will help to decipher the exact location of the neighborhood and the space, place, and community within. It will also describe the location of South Slope in relation to Park Slope, and finally, sociology will apply theory analyze lesbian gentrification.

Methodology

To understand into the role that lesbians play in an urban neighborhood and to suggest how lesbians impact social capital within a community I interviewed 11 South Park Slope lesbian residents. I recruited lesbian residents by placing a request for interviews with local
establishments on Craigslist, and on Facebook group pages. The announcement asked for South Park Slope lesbian residents who identified as lesbian and would be willing to take part in my study. It also stated that their interview would be confidential. The majority of participants (9) were recruited through snowball sampling and on the Facebook group pages. However, two individuals were recruited through word-of-mouth from local establishments.

That my recruitment materials specifically asked for individuals who identified as “lesbian” states a possible limitation of my research. I did not interview anyone who might engage in same sex interactions with a partner and not identify herself as lesbian. The study sample, in other words, was limited to women who explicitly defined themselves as “lesbian.” It is possible that the study results may have been different with a broader range of women from the community.

I conducted all of the interviews. Of the 11 interviews, 7 were tape-recorded in-person and 4 were phone interviews. For face-to-face interviews I traveled to a public location of the participant’s choosing for their comfort and convenience. Before starting the interview, I read the participant an Informed Consent letter detailing the study, the questions to be asked, and whether or not they agreed to have the interview recorded. If the participant answered “Yes” then the interview moved forward. All participants were given a copy of the Informed Consent letter. The interviews were semi-structured and followed an interview schedule that asked questions about the participants background’s, how long they had lived in the neighborhood, their experiences in the neighborhood, and their community and day-to-day involvement. Since I was the most interested in the participants’ self-understanding’s of the neighborhood and community

27 These included Pages: South, Toby’s Public House, Park Slope, Brooklyn, and South Slope.
28 These included: Babeland and Ginger’s Bar.
29 The majority of interviews were conducted in public places that included: coffee shops and restaurants. But two interviews were conducted in the participants’ homes.
and particularly their social actions, I often asked follow-up supplemental questions that were exclusive to the individual in order to get a better sense of how they defined their neighborhood and social interactions.30

Profile of the Participants

The participants interviewed came from diverse backgrounds, including a retired woman, a nanny, a bartender, a student, an artist, an actress, a media executive, a freelance photographer, a film producer, a business owner, and a full-time masters student. The ages of the participants ranged from twenty-two to eighty-nine. The racial composition of participants included nine white and two black women. That nearly most all of the participants identified as white is another limitation of this work, especially given that there has always been a large immigrant and racial minority population in South Slope.

Literature Review

Manuel Castells studied the impact of a large homosexual population of gay men in 1983. He specifically argues that the Castro District, a gay neighborhood in San Francisco, California was established through a gay social movement. The key to the establishment of this neighborhood was “spatial formation” by which a gay political culture and power was able to transform the neighborhood. Castell’s reference of “gays” throughout his study only refers to gay men: “We can hardly speak of a lesbian territory in San Francisco as we can with gay men, and there is little influence by lesbians on the space of a city”31 He explains that the lack of lesbian

30 That being said, I often asked interviewees where they lived before and how they came to live in South Slope. I also asked interviewees to compare South Slope to an area they had lived before and the positives of negatives associated with such.
territory is due to large income differences between gay men and lesbians: gay men are typically (at the time of this study) upper middle class; lesbians tend to be represented in the middle class sectors or below. Castell’s study concludes by assuming that lesbians are “placeless” and do not concentrate geographically. Scholars White and Winchester (1988), and Knopp (1990) also acknowledge that socioeconomic factors make it difficult for lesbians to concentrate geographically, therefore making the development of a lesbian influenced neighborhood unlikely. Yet, before Castells analysis of the Castro District, Wolf (1980) was able to ascertain a lesbian neighborhood in a low-income rental area, though she highlights the fact that this neighborhood is held loosely together by social networks and contains no geographical boundaries. Thus, Castells has not been the only academic to assert that lesbians do not concentrate geographically.

In Tamar Rothenberg’s study, “And She Told Two Friends: lesbians creating urban social space in Mapping Desires, lesbians concentrate and organize spatially within a city. Her 1993 study, in the Park Slope neighborhood of Brooklyn gives a good starting point for understanding lesbian spatial formation. Park Slope is considered to house perhaps the highest volume of lesbians in the entire United States, second only to that of San Francisco. Rothenberg uncovered a large lesbian population who had played a great part in the gentrification of the Park Slope neighborhood. While literature on geographical gay communities has claimed that lesbians neither concentrate residentially nor demonstrate any connection to gentrification (Castells 1983; Lauria and Knopp 1985, Wolf 1980), Rothenberg used the example of Park Slope to demonstrate otherwise. She asserts that in the process of creating a lesbian space, or perhaps more precisely a “semi-lesbian” or “lesbian-amiable-space,” lesbians were active contributors in the gentrification

---

of this neighborhood. They set up local community groups: Social Activities for Lesbians (SAL), Brooklyn Women’s Martial Arts (BWMA), The Prospect Park Women’s Softball League, a short-lived lesbian owned bookstore, and another short lived New York Women’s School which offered several classes to women struggling with the issue of coming out and dealing with their sexuality. In addition, the Lesbian Herstory Archives, once located on the Upper West Side, decided to relocate to Park Slope in 1974. All of these changes, Rothenberg came to find, were key indicators that a lesbian community did exist and that lesbians had carved out a space for themselves within the urban city. Like Castells, Rothenberg attributed the formation of the lesbian community in Park Slope to the women’s social movement that was taking place during the 1970s, citing “cultural feminism and radical feminism” as her main theory for the formation of the lesbian community in Park Slope. Both Castell’s study and Rothenberg’s study cite social movements as key to the gentrification of gay neighborhoods. Rothenberg states “I believe that the timing of Park Slope’s gentrification and the women’s movement, particularly the directions of lesbian-feminism, cultural feminism, and radical-feminism, was essential in creating Park Slope as the center of lesbian population in New York.” The feminist culture undeniably had something to do with the spatial formation of the lesbian population in Park Slope, but I do not think the feminist movement is entirely sufficient for explaining the formation of lesbian spaces. What are lacking in Rothenberg’s study are the sociocultural processes that lesbians were involved in during their move into Park Slope, their specific reasons for moving into Park Slope, how they got there and how their movement influenced the neighborhood economically.

Taking all of this into consideration, these studies took place over 20 years ago, and the

33 Ibid., 175.
34 Ibid., 175.
study of contemporary lesbian neighborhoods is quite limited. The current study is inspired, in large part, by a void in the literature on present-day lesbian neighborhoods.
Chapter 2: History and Background

Park Slope is an area located in western Brooklyn, the most populated borough of New York City. The area is considered to be one of New York City’s most desirable neighborhoods to live in. The region is highly residential and was one of the first residential suburbs in New York City to surface. Park Slope experienced considerable growth in the last two decades of the nineteenth century due to high levels of settlement from professionals who were able to commute into Manhattan after the completion of the Brooklyn Bridge in 1883. Park Slope soon became a residential neighborhood of elites in Brooklyn status, “a magnet for Brooklyn’s well to do, a retreat for those who wished to live lavishly.” 35 This location was seen as a refuge from the hustle and bustle of Manhattan for the rich and well off, and in some instances it still is.

![Figure 1.3 - Map of Park Slope, Brooklyn](image_url)

Figure 1.3- Map of Park Slope, Brooklyn 36

---

36 Image showing the location of Park Slope, Brooklyn. Source: Google Maps.
The upper slope sections have always contained the more expensive housing, which tended to attract this new elite class of professionals. Mainly comprised of large, distinctive, historical brownstones, Queen Anne and Romanesque Revival housing, these homes are some of the most historically ascetic and beautiful homes in the entire United States (see Figure 1.3 below).

![Image of brownstones](http://www.globalphoto.org)

**Figure 1.4**- Large brownstones such as these were bought by pioneer gentrifiers who renovated and remodeled them. Today, these brownstones are being sold for over 1 million dollars.

The further south areas of the slope offer more modest housing including brick-fronted apartments, more modest looking brownstones, and 2-3-story wood framed row houses, once
occupied by storeowners, dockworkers, and the Eastern European and Irish servant community. In addition, these more modest housing units once housed workers who worked at the Ansonia Clock Factory on 7th Avenue, once a large and famous clock making facility. Although Park Slope became seen as an elite residential neighborhood, it went through some rough periods of decline, disinvestment, and economic uncertainty, leading it to become a neighborhood slum area and an undesirable place to reside and live in.

After World War II, construction of bridges and new infrastructure in the New York City area lead to a new wave of suburbanization. With the construction of the Long Island Expressway (built 1940-1972) and the Verrazano Bridge (built 1959-1969), people were able to move away from the city and suburbanize. Federal mortgage programs also provided incentive for many young families to move out of the city. Mortgage programs made it easy for families to afford suburban homes with little to no down payment. Thus, these incentives increased white flight away from Park Slope and the area became run down, crime ridden, and gang infested.

In the late 1960s, during a low period of crime, violence, and disinvestment in the neighborhood, a certain class of liberal thinking people, often called pioneer gentrifiers, or brownstoners, began gentrifying into the area, changing the community, housing, and general demographics of Park Slope. What brought about the changes of the area? More specifically, why were people choosing Park Slope as an area to move back into and thus gentrify, and what effect did this have on the housing and economic standing of Park Slope, Brooklyn? A specific consumption-side theory of gentrification, best described by the urban-geographer David Ley.

---

37 Gentrification is defined as the transformation of a working-class or vacant area of the central city into a middle-class residential and/or commercial use region. Gentrify will be used to assert the action by which a neighborhood changes under processes of gentrification.

38 "Ethnic Fragmentation in Canada." Annenberg Media. www.learner.org. David Ley is an urban geographer at the University of British Columbia in Vancouver, Canada. He is widely regarded...
can be applied in order to understand why gentrification occurred in Park Slope, who the gentrifying agents were, causes and effects, and the specific institutions contributing to the gentrification processes. This theory will help to analyze the processes of gentrification in the Park Slope area starting in the mid to late 1960s. It is important to understand the changing demographic of Park Slope in a historical framework in order to apply this specific theory. Thus, in order to address how the process of gentrification started in Park Slope, events leading up to gentrification, contributors, and causes and effects, will all be discussed in order to provide a better overall framework for analysis. In addition, the model for explaining the phases of gentrification as defined by Clay (1979) will be applied in order to understand each phase of gentrification that Park Slope experienced.

In the first decade of the 20th century, suburbanization affected Park Slope very early on. Suburbanization started to take place when the middle class decided to move to the then suburb of Flatbush, leaving behind many roomy brownstones and later on, with the coming of the Great Depression in the 1930s, lower class housing that was mainly occupied by the Italian and Irish communities. Over time Park Slope began to be called a slum area due to the decline of the housing that many landlords let their buildings fall into. By the 1940s and the 1950s, over seventy percent of Park Slope housing was rooming houses with landlords who were absent.\(^{39}\) Scores of landlords seeking insurance, along with some frustrated residents, deliberately started to burn down buildings. While individual buildings were overcrowded and packed, much of Park Slope was deserted. On streets such as Fifth Avenue in Park Slope, many storefronts were empty and left abandoned, as businesses were packing up and leaving for more stable areas. On other

---

\(^{39}\) Lees, *Gentrification*, 21.
blocks children played in trashy, rubble-strewn empty lots. The sections near Prospect Park preserved their high rent status, yet this area felt the largest amount of sectioning. Park Slope almost started to resemble the looks of a bombed-out city, leaving many whites to want to move out of the area that they had once inhabited as an elite residential neighborhood.

Between 1940 and 1970 there was an extreme case of white flight away from Brooklyn due to these conditions, which contributed to its devalorization and disinvestment. There was a white flight from Brooklyn of some 682,000 whites between 1940 and 1970. This period of white flight away from Brooklyn, due to the allure of the suburbs, was taking place during an increase of black and Hispanic settlement into Park Slope. In 1950, approximately 99 percent of Park Slope was white. By 1990 it was around 52 percent white. Due to this case of white flight away from Park Slope, it became known as “the run down area of Brooklyn,” reaching a peak of disinvestment, decline, devalorization, physical deterioration, and residential abandonment in the mid to late 1960s. White flight played a large role in Park Slopes deterioration; it also contributed to a less than positive race relation within the neighborhood.

Nonwhite migrants began competing for housing and scarce manufacturing jobs with white natives, contributing to negative race relations within the area. “[The area] is now in a state of deterioration because of the influx of Puerto Rican and negro Welfare Department families overcrowding houses, scattering garbage, holding drinking parties from Friday night to Sunday morning, and otherwise making living impossible for old time white families still there,”

42 Watkins, R. “Quality of Life" crimes have been a fact of life here for over 2 decades,” in *The Phoenix* (12, 1984), 7-9.
complained an angry white Park Slope resident to a local precinct captain in 1963. Aggressive spectators and blockbusters only added to the increase of negative race relations and white flight from Park Slope. After saturating the area with postcards offering “quick cash sales with no commissions,” blockbusters called or knocked on the doors of Park Slope families, hoping to spark white flight with ominous predictions of imminent racial decline. “Negroes are moving in nearby,” said one “you had better sell before it’s too late.” After buying the property from scared white families, these blockbusters would rent the buildings to poor desperate Puerto Rican and blacks at exorbitant prices. Others would purchase several building and become absent landlords, dividing up the building into small rooming houses and apartments. The Puerto Ricans and blacks of Park Slope eventually began fighting over territory and forming large gangs that lasted for at least 10 years before the revalorization of Park Slope began.

Gang wars were a common occurrence during this turbulent time in Park Slope’s history, which also contributed to white flight away from Park Slope. In October of 1964, gang violence turned ugly when three police precincts had to come and squash a series of violent gang wars in the neighborhood. Hundreds of black and white students fighting with baseball bats, car antennas, and broken bottles outside of John Jay High school had to be broken up by the authorities as they stormed subways and assaulted bystanders.

In another instance during the summer of 1972, vicious gang warfare took place between the

---


44 Blockbusters are involved in blockbusting: The practice of persuading white homeowners to sell quickly and usually at a loss by appealing to the fear that minority groups and especially Black people will move into the neighborhood, causing property values to decline. The property is then resold at inflated prices.

Italian Golden Guineas and the Puerto Ricans who started up drug circles. During that summer, drug dealing took place all over Park Slope, squatters moved into abandoned buildings, police cars were being blown up, an eighteen year old had his legs blown off, people were being assaulted, and businesses were hiding behind bulletproof shields. A resident of this time sums up what he remembers in this account:

Right across the street from where I live, I watched them sell, shoot up, keel over from overdoses, and there were shootings, everybody diving under cars. We were prisoners in our houses and we started fighting (Lew Smith of Berkeley Place).

Clashes between Irish working-class residents and Italians and newly migrating Puerto Ricans and blacks became extremely violent. These gangs were organized along racially ethnic lines and the gang culture in Park Slope was fundamentally interracial. The cityscape of Park Slope throughout the 1950s to the 1970s was that of a devastated neighborhood suffering from white flight, absent landlords, gang wars, and disinvestment as stores closed and moved. Yet, while all these negative happenings were taking place, people were starting to move back into Park Slope.

The Revitalization of Park Slope

 Whilst Park Slope was in the throes of disinvestment, gang wars, and residential abandonment, pioneer gentrifiers, or “brownstoners” as they are aptly called sometimes, started to move in and change the area, thus gentrifying Park Slope. It is ironic that people started to reinvest in Park Slope during the neighborhoods’ highest crime and gang violence years, yet this is what was going on. Pioneer gentrifiers came into the neighborhood and wanted to “Save the

---

46 The Golden Guineas were an Italian-American gang formed in 1955 from Buhre Avenue. They attended St. Michael's High School in the Bronx. Their main rival was the Navajos gang, another large gang from the Bronx.

Slope” during its worst years.

These pioneer gentrifying agents initially undertook brownstoning in Park Slope without financial assistance. Indeed, in the 1960s and the 1970s there was a significant amount of redlining within the area. The fact that these people reinvesting in Park Slope called themselves pioneers is significant in itself and shows revealing information about the brownstone revitalization movement during its early phases.

First, the brownstoning of Park Slope was grassroots in its formation. Gentrification did not take place in city hall or in the rooms of corporate skyscrapers. Large bankers and developers eager to build in poor neighborhoods did not undertake reinvestment. Rather, these pioneers experienced backlash and hostility towards their reinvestment urban schemes. During the 1960s, banks refused to hand out loans and grant mortgages in the redlined areas. Real-estate agents despised advertising in areas that had a significant amount of black or Puerto Ricans, and city planners fought with brownstoners over their urban development ideas. Brownstoner L.J. Davis describes what was going on during this first pioneering phase:

In the absence of regular bank assistance, means of financing ranged from the peculiar to the bizarre, and improvements were almost always financed out of pocket. People discovered talents they had never suspected: one young banker developed into a competent plumber, a social worker became a skilled ornamental plasterer.

As Davis has described, brownstoners undertook all reinvestment in Park Slope themselves. This was known as sweat equity, a loan provided to finance a small amount of the rehabilitation costs of a property. Essentially, the owners do much of the work themselves

---

48 Redlining became known as such because lenders would draw a red line around a neighborhood on a map, often targeting areas with a high concentration of minorities, and then refusing to lend in those areas because they considered the risk too high. Even though it is now against the law, some lenders are still accused of redlining today.

without help from outside developers or companies.

In the early phase, or pioneer phase of gentrification, individuals were not undertaking brownstoning for financial gain or to make a significant amount of money. This early phase of revitalization represented a romantic urban ideal in which people saw themselves as essentially saving the neighborhood. Gentrifiers envisioned themselves as a sort of place missionary, moving into a poor, dilapidated neighborhood, and revitalizing it as if they were on a mission to rescue the neighborhood. Pioneer gentrifiers started new neighborhood groups or block associations, held street festivals, opened food co-ops (such as the Park Slope Food Co-op located on Union Street). These new places sprung up in order to help foster a sense of community, history, and place in a neighborhood that was once lacking in all three of these descriptions. Pioneer gentrifiers were searching for a sense of authenticity against the backdrop of a bureaucratic and estranging society. They saw themselves as “greening” their neighborhood and saving the city from economic disinvestment. Many pioneer gentrifiers planted trees and cleaned up the streets, often echoing the themes of an environmental social movement.

The book *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* was a pioneer gentrifiers bible. “We had all read Jane Jacobs,” explained one renovator. ⁵⁰ Many pioneer gentrifiers had read her book and used it as a reference in order to help and preserve the areas they were gentrifying. In order to spread the gospel that Jacobs wrote about, pioneers had to organize the neighborhood, and physically transform as well as creatively re-envision a landscape that had been long deprived and drained. A new sense of place had to be cultured.

Brownstoning in Park Slope was undertaken with the sense of community action and social justice being fostered. One young activist, Joe Ferris, a local schoolteacher born and raised

in Park Slope, had returned home from the army reserves in the late 1950s to see his neighborhood in a state of decline, being attacked by blockbusters and abandoned by his once working-class neighbors. He became active in the Young Christian Workers, traveling to Chicago to meet with Saul Alinsky\(^5\) he came back from his trip with the idea that community planning could save Park Slope and offer a potential remedy to its ills. He began to mobilize church leaders, local politicians, and residents to work together in order to stabilize the area. Meeting another idealistic schoolteacher named Bill Jesinkey, they worked together to buy a brownstone in 1961 in order to try and start a community cooperative to foster mobilization and reinvestment. They struggled to renovate the brownstone and begin a community tree-planning program. To raise money for their cooperative they lobbied churches such as Saint Francis in order to try and establish a mortgage fund to help other local neighbors who were trying to renovate their brownstone homes. Local churches and institutions were negative towards the area’s future during the 1960s and declined Ferris’s request for help.

Receiving no help from local dwellings, Ferris decided to look other places for support. In collaboration with Jesinkey, and Charles Monaghan, another Park Slope native and a writer for the *New York Times*, they turned to a bunch of white-collar renovators who had migrated and began renovating brownstones in the northeast section of Park Slope. Everett Ortner was one of these renovators who became involved with Ferris, and later became more involved with brownstone renovation. In 1966, the men decided to meet with the other white-collar brownstoners in the basement of a renovated brownstone. Through their meeting, they formed the Park Slope Betterment Committee (PSBC). Each member of the committee pledged and gave $250 to the mortgage fund in order to set up binders for dilapidated brownstones.

\(^5\) Saul David Alinsky (1909-1972) was a Jewish/American writer and community organizer. He is considered by most to be the father of modern community organizing and planning.
This new committee played a large role in the brownstoning of Park Slope. Established by pioneer gentrifiers, the PSBC collected funds from around the neighborhood in order to purchase and renovate brownstones before they became “snatched up” by blockbusters and “mutilated into small compartments.” Once renovated, the PSBC would hold an open house and try to sell the newly refurbished brownstone to a young family willing to purchase it.

The PSBC was extremely successful in encouraging reinvestment in brownstone housing around Park Slope. They attracted the attention of the Park Slope Civic Council, a non-profit organization that developed out of the South Brooklyn Board of Trade. The council was concerned with the civic issues of Park Slope and started to work in collaboration with the PSBC.

Once they really got started and started to receive more money, the committee began putting binders on derelict brownstones in larger numbers, and selling them to middle class families. In order to publicize the branded area, the PSBC began holding home tours in conjunction with the Park Slope Civic Council (which have taken place since 1959 till the current year). Charles Monahan began writing articles in the New York Times in the real estate section in order to bolster attention to Park Slope. Newspapers and magazines became important outlets for Park Slope pioneers to promote their neighborhood for investment. Many pioneer gentrifiers were journalists who used their talents to promote their cause through writing in magazines and newspapers. Newsletters, such as the Brownstoner and the Gaslight Gazette specifically focused on the brownstoning revitalization movement. Other writers including L.J. Davis and Paul Wilkes wrote and printed snazzy, colorful articles about Park Slope in the hopes

---

53 See current Park Slope Home Tour Flyer page 36.
of attracting a more broad audience. Their articles were featured in large new papers including the *New York Times* and *Daily News*.

Pioneers were still extremely important during this phase of gentrification. But, once the PSBC and the Council became involved in promotional activities this would suggest that Park Slope had moved into the second phase of gentrification. The second phase of gentrification as outlined in Clay’s 1979 Model of Gentrification, would indicate that gentrification began to spread more fluidly over Park Slope. Some displacement had occurred but the work on housing was still being undertaken by sweat equity. The neighborhood was still undergoing renovation by small-scale pioneer gentrifiers. A large-scale speculator had yet to invest in Park Slope during this time. Once large-scale investors became involved in the gentrification process, this would constitute the third phase of Park Slope gentrification.

The third phase of Park Slope’s gentrification began when larger institutions became interested in Park Slope’s rehabilitation. These included public utility companies, real estate developers, and banks. As mentioned earlier, it took awhile before larger institutions became interested in taking part in Park Slopes reinvestment. But once Park Slope began showing up in newspapers such as Monaghan’s *New York Times* articles, the neighborhood received a vast amount of attention from larger institutions. Once media attention had heightened, this secured an official interest in the reinvestment of the area.

Public utility companies took an official interest and became active in the gentrification process of Park Slope. Companies such as Brooklyn Union Gas were approached by residents and decided to get involved in the reinvestment of the neighborhood. Their attempts at reinvestment included ‘greenlining,’ which was intended to persuade banks to give out more

---

mortgages and loans to Park Slope residents. In 1965, Brooklyn Union Gas was approached by residents for help in restoring old buildings that were in extreme need of renovation. At the time, there was no aid from the government being given out for revitalization efforts, so residents had to turn elsewhere in order to reinvest on a larger scale. Their efforts of reaching out were successful; Brooklyn Union Gas successfully restored a large block of rundown, dilapidated brownstones on Prospect Place, between 6th Avenue and Flatbush Avenue. The company was heralded for ‘saving’ Prospect Place by turning three old buildings into one-story residences. They also renovated the exteriors of other buildings on the block, including the trompe l’oeil paintings on the sides of three of the buildings.55

Brooklyn Union Gas, amongst other public utility companies became successful in their persuasiveness towards banks to help finance the revalorization movement. The saving of Prospect Place was financed by Greater New York Savings Bank and the Federal Housing Association. These projects became known as “Cinderella Schemes.” These schemes attempted to establish change in threatened neighborhoods by stimulating private sector involvement in reinvestment. Brooklyn Union Gas also decided to open up the Brownstone Information Center, which was key to giving the public more information about rehabilitation of brownstones. In conjunction with the Park Slope Civic Councils annual house tours, the Brownstone Information Center held workshops dedicated to educating residents of brownstone revitalization.

55 Lees, Gentrification, 27.
Figure 1.5 – The Park Slope House Tours were designed as a way to advertise the Brownstone revitalization movement and persuade middle-class families to purchase them. The tours began in the 1950s and are still used as a promotional tool for brownstone renovators and buyers today. This flyer is from the House Tour that took place in the spring of 2011. Source: Park Slope Civic Council.
Between 1965 and 1988 private mortgages and cash were steadily used to finance property purchasing, but after 1975, due the efforts of pioneer gentrifiers to involve larger institutions (such as Brooklyn Union Gas), bank mortgages became important. This was most likely due to the fact that the 1977 Federal Community Reinvestment Act outlawed redlining which was used by many financial institutions and caused discrimination.

After 1978, local community banks began to initiate more liberal mortgage loan programs due to these changes. Chase Bank established an Urban Home Loan Program in order to help foster rehabilitation of vacant family homes; it offered acquisition, construction, and permanent financing in one package at a prime-lending rate.\textsuperscript{56} Citibank was another large bank, and the primary lender to residents looking for revitalization loans. The bank claimed it was “the bank that helped preserve Park Slope’s history.”\textsuperscript{57} Although there were a vast amount of federal programs offering money for rehabilitation, most of Park Slope’s reinvestment schemes occurred without public money.\textsuperscript{58}

Another company, following the example of Brooklyn Union Gas, decided to offer similar help to residents in the area. Con Edison, another public utility company, offered help in the form of its Renaissance housing programs. This program was designed to make more apartments affordable and available to the Park Slope community. The Renaissance program offered legal, financial, and architectural services to the neighborhood community.

It is important to note though, that without the pioneer gentrifiers lobbying these companies for help and pushing them to get involved in the rehabilitation process, the companies would have probably never taken any interest in the revalorization of the community. Through

\begin{footnotesize}\begin{enumerate}
\item Lees, Gentrification, 29.
\item Ibid., 29.
\item Ibid., 29.
\end{enumerate}\end{footnotesize}
the pioneer gentrifiers efforts, these larger institutions finally started offering an array of services
to help with revitalization and reinvestment.

Within New York City, and Park Slope, the state also became involved in the processes
of gentrification. With federal policies such as the 203 (k) Rehabilitation Mortgage Insurance
Program, the Community Development Block Grants, and New York City’s J-51 Program, these
programs contributed significantly to gentrification once it was well into effect in the 1970s. All
of these new developments anchored Park Slope into its 4th phase of gentrification in which
active displacement was taking place. More middle class residents starting moving into the
neighborhood and renovating brownstones due to the new programs and institutions providing
assistance and services, and the working class residents who could no longer afford to live in
Park Slope began to move out. Thus, from the mid-1980s to the 1990s Park Slope became
sufficiently gentrified and the pioneer phase of gentrification had well ended. In Clay’s model of
the gentrification processes, he notes that the middle class residents that are now coming in are
more from businesses and managerial classes than from the professional classes. During this
forth phase of gentrification, efforts may also be made to obtain a historic designation district.

Park Slope obtained landmark status in 1973 (see Figure 1.4). This was a large
achievement of the pioneer gentrifiers who had put a lot of effort into the revitalization of their
neighborhood. Landmark status was also secured due to the activities of the strong willed
gentrifiers Everett and Evelyn Ortner. She meticulously documented the history and architecture
of Park Slope and sent it to the Landmarks Preservation Committee. Achieving landmark status
also reinforced gentrification as the conservation group offered tax rebates and remissions on
certain building restoration project.59 Once Park Slope had been deemed a Historic Preservation

59 Ibid., 27.
Landmark District, it only made the area more attractive to prospective home and commercial buyers/renovators.

Figure 1.6- Park Slope Landmark District, designated in 1973. Source: The New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission, “Historic District Maps for Brooklyn.”
As discussed, Park Slope pioneer gentrifiers had a certain culture to their makeup. They were liberal thinking people, mainly middle class, and characterized by an unprejudiced, energetic, and adventurous attitude. So who were these people exactly? And why would they choose Park Slope to move to? People who had lived in Park Slope a long time such as the Ortners obviously had personal ties to the land and architecture, but who are the middle class gentrifiers that came to “save the slope?”

There were many different types of people who chose to gentrify Park Slope, but they were usually socially accepting, left-minded in their political orientations, and artsy type individuals. Inherently interesting is the large group of lesbians who chose to gentrify Park Slope. In 1990, lesbians started flocking to Park Slope due to its liberal, bohemian, edgy nature. They formed a large community with sports clubs, bars, even a historical archive aptly called The Lesbian Herstory Archives.

In stage one of Clay’s (1979) gentrification model it would suggest that it is this homosexual community that makes up the first phase of gentrification. The first groups of new comers are usually “artsy”, design professionals, and other bohemians who have time, skill, ability and the desire and will to do renovations on older buildings. Furthermore, the homosexual community seeks seclusion, privacy and intimacy. Park Slope allowed for these features. As quoted in the first phase of his model “Smart money will follow homosexuals in cities.” 60

Another such indicator of the lesbian community in Park Slope was the New York Women’s School which offered women classes on how to come out in the 1970s, support, and a place to go for activities and socializing. Though these two indicators were short-lived and both eventually ended up closing, they both assert Park Slope as having a strong central lesbian

60 Ibid., 31.
community in the 1970s. Rothenberg (1995) states that the “timing of Park Slope’s gentrification and the women’s’ movement, particularly the directions of lesbian-feminism, cultural feminism, and radical feminism, was essential in creating Park Slope as the center of lesbian population in New York.”

Park Slope continues to be a strong central area for the lesbian population today, but it has significantly diminished due to rising rent and an influx of upper-middle-class families.

Several theories exist to explain exactly how gentrification occurs. The two most prominent theories revolve around production-side theories and consumption-side theories developed by Neil Smith and David Ley. For purposes of this paper, both the consumption-side theory postured by David Ley and the production side theory will be discussed and applied to the case study of Park in order to fully encompass the nuances of gentrification from two different points of view.

As noted above, there were many different types of gentrifiers, but the largest percentage consisted of an undoubtedly liberal, open-minded, artsy, politically-active, free thinking type person. Because lesbians made up a significant portion of the gentrifiers in Park Slope, a theory used to explain gay gentrification (consumption-side theory) will be applied to the Park Slope case study in addition to the production-side theory that places more emphasis on the housing market and rent control.

The consumption-side theory of gentrification asserts socio-cultural characteristics and motives as the most important factors in understanding the causes of gentrification. As a comparison, the production side theory posits that economics are more important in understanding the causes of gentrification. Developed by Neil Smith (1986), he insisted that

---

61 Rothenberg, ‘And She Told Two Friends’ lesbians creating urban social space, 195.
gentrification is a “frontier on which fortunes are made.” Essentially we scrutinize the motivations and logic followed by aggressive developers, real estate developers, and buyers in the market for million dollar condos. Production-side explanations explain how the possibility of winning enormous fortunes provides powerful incentives that shape the behavior of individuals, groups, and institutions that have a stake in what happens on the urban frontier. Although individuals and organizations consider a variety of factors when making decisions that can affect a neighborhood, many of the constraints that narrow the field of attractive choices can be traced to the fundamental rules of economic production in market economies. Essentially, production-side explanations show how neighborhood change is connected to the underlying rules of the economic game.

The rent-gap schema was an essential part of the production-side theory posited by Neil Smith. The rent-gap suggests that gentrification provides one way to increase capitalized ground rent on plots that have been devalorized by obsolete land-uses and years of suburbanization. Over time, urban development and expansion create a tension between capitalized ground rent (the economic return from the right to use land, given its present use) and the potential ground rent (the return that could be earned if the land were put to its highest, most optimal use). As this gap widens, it provides a powerful incentive for land use change. Thus, residential gentrification becomes one way to close the rent gap.

If we apply the rent-gap schema to the Park Slope case study to establish the point at which disinvestment was followed by reinvestment, it was in the year of 1976, because this year had the highest rate of reinvestment totaling 7.1 percent. The following year, cooperative (co-ops) and condominium conversions began to take place throughout New York City. This cannot

---

be highlighted as a coincidence given that before 1977 there was almost no interest from developers in having part of these conversions. In Brooklyn, co-ops began to be seen in the central and North Slope sections of Park Slope in the early 1980s. Between the years of 1977 and 1984 applications were filed for over 130 conversions, making up 21 percent of the Borough of Brooklyn applications alone.\textsuperscript{63}

Neil Smith’s rent-gap schema is useful for identifying the economic causes of the gentrification process, but it fails to take into account the cultural makeup of the gentrifying agents themselves. For example their gender, family, sexual, and structural components as a body of gentrifiers are just as important when trying to identify a cause of gentrification in a certain neighborhood.

\textquoteleft\textquoteleft The crucial point…is that “gentrifiers” are not the mere bearers of a process determined independently of them. Their constitution, as certain types of workers and as people, is as crucial an element in the production of gentrification as in the production of the dwellings they occupy.\textquoteleft\textquoteright

\textsuperscript{Rose (1984:56)}

Rose was one of the first academics to assert that gentrifiers were a different type of group, and summed up her article by calling for an approach to gentrification, which explores the “actual processes through which those groups we now subsume under the category “gentrifiers” are produced and reproduced.”\textsuperscript{64} A later paper by Rose proclaimed that women who were single, professional, and independent were important to gentrification.

David Ley with his consumption-side theory took into consideration these elements when considering the causes of gentrification. Consumption-side theories explore the questions of class constitution such as “Who are the gentrifiers?” “Where do they come from?” and “What draws

\textsuperscript{Lees, Gentrification, 29.}

\textsuperscript{Rose, D. “Rethinking gentrification: Beyond the uneven development of Marxist urban theory,” in Environment and Planning D: Society and Space 1, (1984), 47-74.}
them to live in central-city neighborhoods?” An ever-expanding literature is starting to place more focus on these types of questions instead of a pure economic approach to gentrification (Saracino-Brown 2006, Florida 2002).

Ley asserts a revised post-industrial thesis in which he defines a “new middle class” containing a cultural sub-class denominated as a creative class of artists, teachers, and cultural administrators” has been created during the first phase of gentrification. Essentially, this “new middle class” becomes the first gentrifiers and the first ones to economically prepare the area for gentrification. Ley also describes gentrification as a result of a new professionalized class of people who work in the central business district and have a tendency to prefer city living. His theory would explain why a certain class of people tends to be associated with gentrification, specifically homosexuals.

Accordingly, lesbians were a component to the gentrification of Park Slope and consumption side theories offer a better explanation for gay gentrification progressions due to their focus on the makeup of the gentrification agents. In The City and the Grassroots (1983), Castells points out that it was the spatial concentration of gays that made gentrification possible. He argued that gentrification “has largely been, although not exclusively, triggered by gay people.” He found three ways in which gentrification involved the homosexual community.

1) Affluent gay professionals bought inexpensive properties and hired skilled renovators to improve their use and exchange value.

2) Gay realtors and interior decorators used their commercial and artistic skills and bought property in low-cost areas, and repaired and renovated the buildings in order to sell them at a profit.

65 Castells, The City and the Grassroots, 158-160.
3) Less affluent gays formed collectives to either rent or buy inexpensive buildings and fixed them up themselves (sweat-equity). This was the most common form of gentrification and is most applicable to Park Slope.

Larry Knopp has also contributed significantly to the gay gentrification literature context. In his discussion of gentrification in the 1960s and 1970s, Knopp described the earliest gentrifiers as predominantly gay middle class professionals that were leaders of the historic preservation movement in Marigny. The gentrifiers of this area accelerated the process and were mostly gay. Knopp identified a real estate firm that became vital to the community and specifically advertised and offered home financial assistance to the gay community.

This story of gay gentrification is closely linked to the gentrification of Park Slope. Not only did lesbians start to gentrify in the 1970s and contribute to the historic preservation process, but there were also a number of real estate firms that housed lesbians who advertised homes to other lesbians to speed up the gentrification process. Consequently, the gentrification process of Park Slope can better be described through a consumption-side theoretical lens, as it focuses on the structural collectives of gentrifying agents as a whole and takes into account more than just economic-market driven processes.

The gentrification of Park Slope was a process that had many factors, including economic and market driven policies, but it was the will and the efforts of the people themselves that made the gentrification of Park Slope the most profound. Gentrifiers such as the Ortners, and the small group that formed the Park Slope Betterment Committee have forever left their mark on the revitalization of Park Slope as their committees and causes still exist to this day. There still exists Park Slope House Tours, and a “Save the Slope” blog that is dedicated to Brownstone revival

---

66 Lees, Gentrification, 104-105.
and revitalization of Park Slope as a whole.

Park Slope became gentrified extremely quickly once it was deemed as a Historic Landmark District. The end of the fourth phase of gentrification took place around the mid to late 1980s, as the upper regions of the slope had become thoroughly gentrified and the area started to experience super-gentrification, which is still taking place today as many of the original gentrifiers (especially lesbians) are finding the rents and neighborhood commercial prices too high to maintain.

Today, North Park Slope is considered an elite area of residents, with the median income four times higher than the national average. Some of the original gentrifying lesbians have now decided to move to cheaper neighboring enclaves due to the high rents of the area and the high cost of living in North Park Slope. This is a key factor in the establishment of nearby neighborhood and what I like to call the “Sister Slope,” otherwise formally known as South Slope. Although the two neighborhoods are located right next to each other, their gentrification stories are different. South Slope is just now in the midst of gentrification, and the way the lesbian community has started to gentrify it is quite different than the way lesbians gentrified Park Slope in the 1980s and 1990s. The story of Park Slope’s gentrification offers not only a comparison model for this gentrification study of South Slope, but it also elaborates the historical significance of this neighborhood process and shed light upon information that the residents of South Slope can use to learn from.

How exactly is South Slope different than Park Slope? What makes the gentrification story so different? Have the residents learned anything from the over-gentrification of Park Slope? Do they think that their neighborhood will one day be filled with baby carriages and upper middle class townhomes? Do they see themselves differently than the lesbian gentrifiers of
the 1980s and 1990s? If they do, then how so? Chapter 3 will serve to answer these questions and delve into the very nature of South Slope’s current gentrification processes. In addition, I will use Clay’s model of gentrification stages to hypothesize what “stage” of gentrification South Slope is currently in.
Chapter 3: The Emergence of the Sister Slope

Now that we have discussed North Park Slope, it is time to understand the history and background behind its sister, South Slope. There is far less information on South Slope than Park Slope. The history of North Park Slope’s gentrification is well documented in books (Osman 2011, Lees 2008) and articles (Rothenberg 1993), but less information is available on South Slope’s neighborhood history. This is mainly due to the fact that South Slope as a neighborhood with clear boundaries is quite a new concept. The geographic boundaries of South Slope and North Slope have tended to be a cognitive, meaning the residents mentally map out the neighborhoods in their minds, although, as discussed later, a rezoning process has put the cognitive mapping to rest with official neighborhood boundaries. It is also difficult to distinguish exactly what phase of gentrification South Slope is in at the current moment. While North Park Slopes gentrification took place in a relatively clear period of time, South Slope is only now in the throes of the initial phases of gentrification. The housing stock in South Slope, while still attractive, is composed mainly of vinyl sided row-homes, and remains not as beautiful as the large brownstones in North Park Slope. Thus, none of South Slope has been designated a Landmark Preservation area (one of the catalysts that drove North Slope’s gentrification). South Slope, in every sense, has been left behind by the success of North Park Slope.

Another difference between North Park Slope and South Slope has been a difference in class. North Park Slope residents who live in large historic brownstone buildings are financially well-off and family orientated. In contrast, residents of South Slope tend to live in more contemporary buildings or older row homes. Indeed, there are not many brownstones in South Slope that come close to resembling the status of the ones in North Park Slope. But these materialistic differences do not complete the whole picture; there is also a difference in lifestyle. North Slope is
composed of a “liberal, chic, earthy” type of vibe or cultural style or ethos. Whereas South Slope is composed of “more single professionals, younger folks, lesbians, and working-class immigrants.” This being said, I wanted to get a sense of the main factors that led to lesbians moving into South Slope. What factors caused them to be initially attracted to this neighborhood? Throughout my interviews I noticed three distinct features or themes that each woman identified: 1) Diversity 2) Housing 3) Neighborhood Character. Each of these themes will be discussed in more detail. These “push” factors led to lesbians finding the neighborhood attractive.

**Diversity**

In all of my interviews, I wanted to get a sense of this difference in style and lifestyle between the North and South. The first woman I interviewed, Ella, recently moved to South Slope with her partner Rachel after having lived in North Park Slope for a year and a half.

We decided to move…well 1) because the vibe of Park Slope was just too much for us, it didn’t feel right anymore and 2) because there were babies and dogs, (although I love dogs) all over the place. I initially moved to Park Slope because I heard there was a huge lesbian community, but when I got here I was disappointed to see that it is really full of young heterosexual couples starting families. Not only that, but we were living in a 2 bedroom with another roommate and we wanted to find a 1 bedroom that was cheaper and more affordable. We chose South Slope, because there seemed to be less going on, I could walk into a coffee shop and actually find a seat on the weekends, and the rent was way cheaper, the apartment was huge. Really South Slope just seemed to have more of that “urban grit” feel I was looking for.

(Ella, age 30, on the difference between South Slope and North Park Slope, Author’s Field note, 7-30-2012).

The boundaries between North Park Slope and South Slope are just now coming into fruition, the name “South Park Slope,” was recently given when the entire area was rezoned by the New York City Department of City Planning in 2005. According to this rezoned map, the
neighborhood boundaries are officially marked between 4th and 8th Avenues to the west and east, and 15th and 24th Streets to the north and south.

**Figure 1.7**-Map of the boundaries showing South Park Slope, officially designated by the New York City Department of City Planning in 2005.67

The residents I interviewed seemed to agree with this mapping:

I think there was a point where people thought a “South Slope” didn’t really exist. They thought real-estate agents were making up the name to sell apartments that were cheaper and more affordable than Park Slope apartments. Not that this never happened or isn’t true, but I do think there are clear boundaries at this point, and maybe the whole real-estate naming helped to

---

produce those boundaries. I’m not really sure, but in any case, I know that when I cross 15th street I am entering into the heterosexual utopia of Park Slope. And according to Google Maps South Slope is definitely a neighborhood now!

(Henrietta, age 37, South Slope resident, single lesbian, Author field note 1-26-2013)

As can be seen by my two interviewee’s responses, both being lesbian, they clearly identified North Park Slope as being “heterosexual,” and ultimately less diverse than the neighborhood of their choice. Lesbians tend to seek out a neighborhood where there is a diverse mix of people, not a monopoly of one class, or race, etc. They also want to be in a neighborhood where they are around like-minded people and their relationships are seen as normal.

I ultimately picked South Slope because I knew, from a bunch of my lesbian friends who live here, that the area was safe for me to be in (as a lesbian). I don’t want to feel like I am in the minority all of the time. It’s really important to me that I feel safe in my environment and neighborhood. I don’t want to be afraid of holding my girlfriend’s hand when I walk down the street, or having men yell things at us as we walk. I feel like the lesbian population here is strong and people accept us, even the working-class immigrants who run a lot of the businesses around here. I’ve never had an issue with any of them, nor they with me. I like knowing there are a mixed bag of people in South Slope, as opposed to all heterosexual, upper-middle-class, rich white people in Park Slope. Park Slope almost feels like a suburban enclave to me, the diversity just isn’t there anymore.

In her book A Neighborhood That Never Changes, Japonica Brown-Saracino also found her homosexual interviewees reported “diversity” as being a part of their appeal to a specific neighborhood. For instance, a homesteader said he enjoyed Andersonville’s (a neighborhood studied by Brown-Saracino) “unique mix of diversity”: “I mean, this is probably one of the most diverse neighborhoods in the city...you’ve got Korean, you’ve got Italian, you’ve got Mexican,
you’ve got Japanese, you’ve got French, you’ve got all American.” As such a statement suggests; homosexuals celebrate eclectic neighborhoods made diverse by their own presence. The lesbian newcomers of South Slope were also attracted to a sense of diversity, authenticity, and ethnicity that the neighborhood of Park Slope has long lost. Indeed, South Slope is way more diverse in ethnicity than Park Slope. Taking a glance at the community facts from the 2010 Census shows that 57.8% percent of the population is Latino, 42.8% percent is White, and 16.2% is Asian.

Table 1.1- Shows the racial makeup of South Park Slope Zip Code 11232. Source: American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates, 2007-2011.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>RACE</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total population</td>
<td>28,265</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One Race</td>
<td>26,606</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>12,091</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black or African American</td>
<td>2,068</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American Indian and Alaska Native</td>
<td>581</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>4,568</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian Indian</td>
<td>358</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chinese</td>
<td>3,448</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Filipino</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Japanese</td>
<td>109</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Korean</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vietnamese</td>
<td>101</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Asian [1]</td>
<td>386</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Native Hawaiian</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guamanian or Chamorro</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Samoan</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Pacific Islander [2]</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some Other Race</td>
<td>7,270</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two or More Races</td>
<td>1,659</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White; American Indian and Alaska Native [3]</td>
<td>266</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White; Asian [3]</td>
<td>153</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White; Black or African American [3]</td>
<td>217</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White; Some Other Race [3]</td>
<td>519</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

----

As can be seen by Table 1.1, South Slope is quite an ethnically diverse neighborhood. The presence of minority groups make lesbians feel like they are not the only group with something “different” about them. Several lesbians I interviewed found that Hispanics tend to be very accepting of homosexuality. Valentine (1995, 98) found this to be true as well. She found that in Hightown “diversity of lifestyles appears to allow lesbian households to remain more anonymous than they would be in the predominantly white nuclear-family orientated middle class estate.”

Similarly, in South Slope, the lack of a dominant-white-middle class allows lesbians to feel comfortable in their environment and maintain a sense of obscurity.

Housing

In addition to the prevalent diversity of South Slope, lesbians also place a high value on the prominence of affordable housing within a neighborhood. Every woman interviewed cited cheaper rent as being a huge attractant to South Slope.

Rent prices were a huge influence in my decision to move to South Slope. As I mentioned before, I use to live in a two-bedroom with my partner and another roommate, we decided it was time to live in a one-bedroom and have a place of our own. Naturally, we could not afford the prices of North Slope apartments. It’s literally a difference of $1,000 to $1,400 and the neighborhoods are right next to each other and have the same subway line! It was a win-win situation in my eyes. After looking at the rent prices in a couple of neighborhoods (Clinton Hill, Gowanus, Carrol Gardens) I knew South Slope was the place to go just because of the proximity to North Slope and the restaurants there, the same subway line running through, and the fact that we got an amazing apartment that is newly renovated, high ceilings, new appliances, the works, for almost $1,000 less in rent each month.

Again the Community Facts from the U.S. Census shed light on the economic differences between North Park Slope and South Slope in reference to median income and housing
characteristics. When looking at the data on owner-occupied vs. renter occupied, the difference between North Park Slope and South Slope is acute.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Housing Tenure</th>
<th>Estimate</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Occupied housing units</td>
<td>8,658</td>
<td>8,658</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Owner-Occupied</td>
<td>1,807</td>
<td>20.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Renter-Occupied</td>
<td>6,851</td>
<td>79.1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table 1.2- Results for South Slope, Zip Code 11232. Source: American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates, 2007-2011.*

This chart shows that almost 80% of South Park Slope’s housing is renter-occupied; a huge attractant for a lesbian community is indeed the bounty of affordable housing. Compared to current North Park Slope prices the difference is huge, and although there is a high-percentage of renters in North Park Slope as well, there is an even higher percentage of homeowners in which the majority is owned by white, upper-middle class families.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Housing Tenure</th>
<th>Estimate</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Occupied housing units</td>
<td>28,524</td>
<td>28,524</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Owner-occupied</td>
<td>11,257</td>
<td>39.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Renter-occupied</td>
<td>17,267</td>
<td>60.5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table 1.3- Percentage of Renter vs. Owner Occupied Zip Code 11215. Source: American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates, 2007-2011.*

Another indicator lesbians cited was “cheaper rent.” What seems cheaper to lesbians is generally within the $1,000 to $1,500 dollar range as opposed to the 2000 to 3500 range for an apartment in North Park Slope (See comparison housing data below).
### Table 1.4 - Gross Rent South Slope, 11232

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Occupied units paying rent</th>
<th>Estimate</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Less than $200</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>0.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$200 to $299</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>1.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$300 to $499</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>1.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$500 to $749</td>
<td>682</td>
<td>10.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$750 to $999</td>
<td>1,270</td>
<td>19.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$1,000 to $1,499</td>
<td>2,894</td>
<td>43.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$1,500 or more</td>
<td>1,623</td>
<td>24.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Median (dollars)</td>
<td>1,186</td>
<td>(X)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Table 1.5 - Gross Rent North Park Slope, 11215

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Occupied units paying rent</th>
<th>Estimate</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Less than $200</td>
<td>255</td>
<td>1.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$200 to $299</td>
<td>258</td>
<td>1.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$300 to $499</td>
<td>427</td>
<td>2.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$500 to $749</td>
<td>817</td>
<td>4.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$750 to $999</td>
<td>1,651</td>
<td>9.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$1,000 to $1,499</td>
<td>4,067</td>
<td>24.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$1,500 or more</td>
<td>9,401</td>
<td>55.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Median (dollars)</td>
<td>1,612</td>
<td>(X)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Neighborhood Character

Contrary to the literature on lesbian neighborhoods, especially Castell’s (1983) affirmation, lesbians do value a spatial community. All but two of the subjects interviewed moved to South Slope to be 1) with a partner or 2) close to friends 3) close to the lesbian community.

A big reason I moved here was because a lot of my friends live in the area. I play on the Prospect Park Women’s

---


softball league, and all my teammates are a short walk or bus ride away.

(Allison, 37, Bartender, South Slope resident, Authors Field Note)

The presence of other lesbians in the neighborhood was a very important factor for the interviewees when they moved to South Slope, and led to the contribution of what is perceived as a lesbian centric neighborhood. It would seem that from the interviewees response that a sense of neighborhood character in conjunction with a spatial relationship to nearby friends is incredibly important to lesbians of South Slope. This sentiment is echoed in Tamar Rothenberg’s study on Park Slope lesbians (1995) who “enjoy running into people they know and feeling comfortable.”

Figure 1.8- Photos of South Slope housing. Most homes are row homes and vinyl sided. Source: Google Images.
Gentrification Model

As laid out in Clay’s Gentrification model, South Slope would aptly be placed in Stage 1. Stage 1 of Clay’s model is classified as having a small group of people move into the area. Little public attention is given to the area, and little displacement occurs before the newcomers come in. The first group of newcomers usually contains a significant number of design professionals or artists who have time, skill, and the ability to transform residences and the neighborhood. (In Boston, San Francisco and other cities, Clay notes that his respondents suggested it was the homosexual community who made up the population. They seek privacy and have money to take on the challenge. Other respondents in Clay’s study said that “Smart money will follow homosexuals in cities.” Again, this is another example of gentrification literature suggesting that “homosexuals” refers only to gay men. I am expanding Clay’s model of gentrification to include lesbians and to include gentrification activities that relate not only to securing and renovating housing. It can be hypothesized that lesbians have been the facilitators of Stage 1 gentrification in South Slope. Although lesbians as a whole are known for low socio-economic status, there are other ways they contribute to neighborhood gentrification (Chapter 4- How factors).

However, just because a large presence of lesbians live in South Slope does not mean that they have driven its gentrification. As noted by Adler and Brenner (1992) it takes more to claim an urban territory and requires more than just a residential concentration. To claim an urban territory requires 1) visibility; 2) community activity- fairs, block parties, street celebrations etc., some kind of public, collective affirmation of the people who live in the neighborhood, even if it’s only strolling out in the evening; 3) organization- of business and residents to defend the neighborhoods interests, relate to city government, financially support the communities activities which create and maintain the urban subculture, giving the neighborhood distinct character.
These requirements are inextricably tied into social capital, the creation of social capital, and the livelihood of a group within a neighborhood. In order to get a sense of whether or not I actually had a case of lesbian gentrification in South Slope or simply a residential concentration, I had to tackle these requirements. I devised a series of interview questions honing in on 1) visibility in the neighborhood 2) community activity, personal hobbies within the community, and 3) neighborhood organization. Chapter 4 will explain and summarize my findings on the above requirements for gentrification of a neighborhood.
Chapter 4: Analysis: Social Capital and Gentrification

I first decided to study the social capital within the lesbian community of South Slope and to see if it was linked to gentrification when I read this definition from the Center for Disease Control and Prevention:

Gentrification is often defined as the transformation of neighborhoods from low value to high value. This change has the potential to cause displacement of long-time residents and businesses. Displacement happens when long-time or original neighborhood residents move from a gentrified area because of higher rents, mortgages, and property taxes. Gentrification is a housing, economic, and health issue that affects a community’s history and culture and reduces social capital.

This definition got me wondering. Does gentrification really reduce a neighborhoods social capital? Are there certain circumstances where social capital is actually increased as a result of gentrification? My hypothesis centers on the idea that lesbians are inherently more capable of creating social capital more so than the general population. Lesbians thrive off the components of social capital (trust, networking, relationships). Not only that, but the lesbian community is already networked and communal: each relationship a lesbian creates fosters social capital from an individual perspective, and thus a community-based perspective. It is these networked processes of social capital that allows lesbians to be facilitators of gentrification.

The details given below are from interviews of eleven lesbian residents who offer strong examples of individual cognitive social capital and personal processes contributing to the facilitation of South Slope gentrification. Examples will be broken down into three categories: 1)

---

71 Cognitive social capital, which includes shared norms, values, attitudes, and beliefs, predisposes people towards mutually beneficial collective action (Krishna and Uphoff 2002; Uphoff 1999).
Visibility 2) Community Activity and 3) Organization. Again, just because South Slope is home to a high number of lesbian residents does not mean that they have necessitated its gentrification. However, the three factors listed below provide examples of how the lesbian community has helped to facilitate the gentrification processes of South Slope. As South Slope is currently in Stage 1 of its gentrification, I cannot hypothesize the outcome of South Slope’s gentrification or what will happen if the area becomes super-gentrified as North Slope has. But, there are efforts by activists, organizations and tenants themselves that have led to the establishment of affordable housing in South Slope (see Conclusion), which would undeniably allow the lesbian population in South Slope to remain engrained in the urban subculture without the threat of displacement.

Visibility

The first example I give is from Ella, a 30-year old nanny who moved to South Slope with her partner after being priced out of North Park Slope. When I asked Ella whether or not she thought lesbians were contributing to the gentrification process of South Slope, she responded:

Absolutely…South Slope is full of lesbians. I met most of my lesbian friends at the dog park. We all moved here as a result of being priced out of Park Slope. Where one of us goes, the rest follow in the lesbian community because we all use our networked relationships to find out where to go, where to live, where to shop, where to do anything really. We want to know where we can go for the best ever everything be it food, coffee, bars, or even apartments.

Out of my 11 interviews with South Slope lesbian residents, all seemed to affirm the visibility of the lesbian community in South Slope. By either “holding hands by walking down the street,” or noticing “rainbow flags flying in the windows of businesses.” One respondent even said, “I think we even outnumber the heterosexuals!” Several women acknowledged the
visibility of the lesbian couple by “simply walking down the street and noticing couples who were in restaurants, in bars, or out shopping.

**Community Activity**

Community activity is a key component in establishing a strong presence within an urban community. To get a sense of each woman’s personal level of community activity I asked the following questions:

• Are you active in the neighborhood community?
• What local establishments do you hang out at? Bars? Coffee shops? Restaurants?
• Do you belong to any local groups or clubs/church/LGBT community centers?
• Do you belong to any local neighborhood political groups?
• Any other volunteer groups/networks?
• Any other community based groups?
• How do you think lesbians contribute to the current community/neighborhood you live in?

The answers I received were quite diverse. The majority of women did not belong to any local neighborhood community boards or political groups, but they all volunteered somewhere be it an animal shelter, soup kitchen, or local LGBT center. The 89 year-old lesbian resident I interviewed no longer worked anymore, but volunteered as an Administrative Assistant at the LGBT senior center. She was extremely active within the community, knew a lot of older lesbian couples, and frequently socialized with her lesbian friends at restaurants. She was also the only homeowner of the women I interviewed, having bought her home 10 years ago with her partner after moving from Bed-Stuy, Brooklyn. After living in South Slope for years, she had formed numerous relationships that had facilitated networking, feelings of trust, citizen power,
proactivity within the community, and an ultimate sense of belonging and feeling comfortable within the community. Her example is A) an example of a lesbian gentrifier B) an example of social capital that was never decreased as a result of her gentrifying South Slope, but rather increased, due to the high level of community activity.

Other examples of lesbian community activity involved: the support of local business, formation of sports clubs, dinner clubs, trivia nights at bars, and frequenting lesbian bars and restaurants in which the owners were lesbians. Lesbians were also highly involved in volunteering during Hurricane Sandy (October 2012). One woman I interviewed organized a food drive with her friends to cook meals for the victims of Hurricane Sandy in Red Hook, Brooklyn.

Organization

Organization was probably the hardest factor to track. As far as being politically organized, none of the women I interviewed reported they were involved with any political groups, or related to any city government groups. I tried to track organization based off of financial and economic activities that support the community and maintain the urban subculture. The best example of individual organization was a woman who used her networking abilities, community relations, proactivity, and participation within the community (social capital) to open up a bar on 5th Avenue and 21st Street. Although not catered to a lesbian-only clientele, this bar was opened and financed by a lesbian. The building was bought, renovated, and financed by a single lesbian owner, with no business partners. This example of a lesbian business owner shows the extent to which lesbians are capable of transforming an urban community, receiving access to capital, and facilitation gentrification using social capital processes.
In Chapter 2 the gentrification story of North Slope in the 1980s and 1990s was discussed. Lesbians who gentrified North Slope tended to have less access to capital than their heterosexual counterparts, thus rendering them unable to establish lesbian-owned businesses. The women who gentrified North Slope indeed used networking, visibility, and organization, yet the gentrification of North Slope came from a progressive-feminist, word-of-mouth movement. In addition, the movement of lesbians into North Slope was politically infused with a liberal political attitude.

In contrast, the gentrification of South Slope is based primarily on the trust, relationships, community participation, diversity, and feelings of safety. The processes of South Slope gentrification have been entirely different. The residents here do not want the super-gentrification that North Park Slope experienced to take place in their neighborhood. Brown-Saracino offers some insight into the processes of gentrifiers in her study, defining them not as pioneer gentrifiers but using a new term, social homesteaders.

“While homesteaders’ beliefs and practices distinguish them from urban pioneers, they are nonetheless, internally heterogeneous. The motivations for their relocations and practices vary within a set of parameters. Once in a place, they celebrate its characteristics, ranging from landscape to social diversity. Social homesteaders share a combined commitment to preserving authenticity and ensuring progress. They appreciate authenticity, which they often associate with the built or natural environment, but gentrifications cost for longtime residents and their communities is not their central concern. They welcome others who share their cultural and economic traits and articulate a sense of belonging or ownership via their place of residence.”

---

Although the lesbian residents I interviewed never mentioned anything about authenticity, they did believe in ensuring the culture and diversity would remain intact and not lose itself to super-gentrification such as North Park Slope. As one women mentioned “There are definitely no lesbians left in North Park Slope anymore.” “We have all migrated South.”
CONCLUSION

Overall, this thesis has discussed factors establishing lesbians as the facilitators of gentrification in a certain neighborhood through social capital processes. Lesbians were the facilitators of gentrification in North Park Slope in the 1990s, and they are yet again the facilitators of gentrification in South Park Slope today. As a whole, lesbians are a niche group in the urban subculture valuing diversity, anonymity, culture, affordable housing, and a spatial proximity to friends and other personal relationships. Literature to date has not focused on the lesbian community in the urban environment, placing them in an out-of-bounds sub-culture, unrelated to the processes of neighborhood transformation, community, and gentrification. The examples I have provided show that, indeed, lesbians do value a spatial community, they do want to live in a lesbian centric community and neighborhood, and they do own businesses that provide economic benefits to the community, social activity, and neighborhood transformation.

I hope this case study and story of gentrification will provide a starting point for conversations to develop around neighborhood gentrification. As gentrification continues to be a growing threat to many urban neighborhoods, there are forces that seek to elevate super-gentrification. The residents of South Slope would do well to listen to the community to avoid a similar situation in South Slope of super-gentrification that have occurred in North Park Slope (and is still flourishing). The story of North Slope’s super-gentrification has led to a new fight against gentrification in South Park Slope.

Thanks to the efforts of current housing advocates, tenant organizers, and affordable housing developers in South Slope fighting gentrification, the lesbian population may have a chance to stay longer in their neighborhood, and avoid subsequent displacement. As can be seen, lesbians do not wish to override and displace the current immigrant community of South Slope;
rather they celebrate its diversity and culture and want to be a part of it. They are not the ordinary “pioneer gentrifier,” as described in classic gentrification literature defines. Lesbians represent a new type of social group who brings social change in a neighborhood while respecting its residents.
Bibliography


*International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 16.


University of Queensland.


Rothenberg, T. (1995). ‘And she told two friends’ lesbians creating urban social space


Watkins, R. "Quality of Life" crimes have been a fact of life here for over 2 decades'." *The Phoenix* 12, 1984.


http://factfinder2.census.gov/faces/tablesservices/jsf/pages/productview.xhtml?pid=DEC_10_DP_DPD
Appendix A

Interview Schedule

1) Background of the interviewee

- How old are you?
- What do you do for a living?
- Do you have a partner/roommates?
- Where are you originally from?
- Do you rent or own the home you currently reside in?
- Have you done any home renovations?
- Do you plan to buy a home in the foreseeable future?
- Why did you decide to move to the current neighborhood you reside in?
- What influenced you to make the move to this neighborhood?
- How did you hear about it?
- How is the community different than where you lived before?
- What do you like most about living here?
- Because of your sexuality have you experienced any discrimination from locals?
- If yes/ how do you feel about the discrimination you have experienced?
- If no/ do you think the neighborhood is becoming more tolerant to sexuality given that it is a long standing immigrant neighborhood?
- Do you feel safe living here?

2) Community/Neighborhood

- Are you active in the neighborhood community?
- What local establishments do you hang out at? Bars? Coffee shops?
- Do you belong to any local groups or clubs/church/LGBT community centers?
- Do you belong to any local neighborhood political groups?
- Any other volunteer groups/networks?
- Any other community based groups?
- How do you think lesbians contribute to the current community/neighborhood you live in?

3) Social

- Do you have a large social network of lesbians that you hang out with?
- If so, what local establishments do you frequent? Why? What it is about these places that draw you in?
Appendix B

Informed Consent

South Slope Brooklyn: A case study of lesbian gentrification in the city

You are invited to participate in a research study about the lesbian community in the neighborhood of South Slope, Brooklyn. The goal of this research study is to identify the process of community formation that lesbians engage in, their social networks, their communal habits, their housing tendencies, and the reasons for their attraction to the neighborhood of South Slope. For the purposes of the interview today, we will focus only on the topics that you feel you are knowledgeable about. However, please feel free to extrapolate on any of the topics that interest you.

This study is being conducted by me, Carolyn Rebecca Senn, a graduate student at Fordham University, working towards my Master’s degree in the Urban Studies Program.

There are three qualifications to participate in this study: (1) you are 18 years or older; (2) you hold a knowledge of the lesbian community in South Slope, and/or knowledge on a topic related to lesbian communities within Brooklyn (3) you want to share your knowledge for the benefit of this project, and hopefully the benefit of other lesbian communities within urban settings.

Participation in this study is voluntary. If you agree to participate in this study, you will be interviewed in a recorded interview for approximately forty-five (45) minutes. The interview includes the list of discussion topics that you have already received in preparation for this interview.

I expect that participating in this study will not benefit you directly, but it will help many of us learn more about an under-studied group in social and cultural studies, and the study may lead to a better understanding of how lesbian communities function in an urban environment. You may, although it is unlikely, find answering some of the questions upsetting, but we expect that this will not be different from the kinds of things you discuss with family or friends. You may skip any questions that you do not want to answer, or that make you uncomfortable, and you may end the interview at any time.

The information you will share with me if you participate in this study will be kept completely confidential to the full extent of the law. Your information will be assigned a code number that is unique to this study. The list connecting your name to this number will be kept in a locked file in my office, and I am the only person (and my faculty mentor) who will be able to see the list or the interview data. No one at Fordham University (except me and my mentor, Dr. McCarthy a sociologist) will be able to see your interview or even know whether you participated in this study. We are obligated to keep your identity and interview entirely confidential. When the study is completed and the data have been analyzed, the list linking participant’s names to study numbers will be destroyed. Study findings will be presented in
summary form or with anonymous quotes, and your name will not be used in any report. Pseudonyms will be used to protect your identity.

If you have any questions about this study, please contact me, Carolyn Rebecca Senn, (862)-432-1530.

If you have questions about your rights as a research participant, please contact Dr. E. Doyle McCarthy, Chair of the Fordham University Institutional Review Board (212-636-7946 or IRB@Fordham.edu).

YOU WILL BE GIVEN A COPY OF THIS FORM WHETHER OR NOT YOU AGREE TO PARTICIPATE.

If you agree to participate sign on the next page.

(ORIGINAL SIGNED COPY TO BE KEPT BY THE RESEARCHER/INTERVIEWER)

Agreement:
I have read the study described above.

I voluntarily agree to participate in the procedure and I have received a copy of this description (on the preceding page).

Name (Printed) ____________________________________________

Signature: ________________________________________________

Date: ______________

I agree (if not, do not sign) to allow this interview to be audio-recorded. I understand that I can request that the recording be stopped at any time.

Signature: ________________________________________________
Appendix C

Sample Recruitment letter or email

Dear Mr. Ms [Insert Name],

My name is Carolyn Rebecca Senn, and I am a graduate student at Fordham University in New York City. Currently, I am working on my Master’s Thesis in Urban Studies, studying the formation of lesbian communities and doing a special case study on the neighborhood of South Slope, Brooklyn.

Your name and contact information were given to me by [Insert Name], since he/she felt that your involvement/knowledge of the lesbian community in South Slope might make you specially qualified to provide useful information to me for my study.

If you are interested and willing in helping me with my academic undertakings it would be of immense help to me if you would participate in a one-on-one interview with me at a location and time of your preference.

I would ideally like to meet in person, and I would be willing to travel to a location that is most convenient for you. If you are unable to meet in person, telephone interviews or written responses are also an option. All interviews will take approximately forty-five minutes; however, you will be free to skip questions or end the interview whenever you like.

If you have any questions about this study, please contact me, Carolyn Rebecca Senn, by phone at (862)-432-1530, or by e-mail at csenn@fordham.edu.

Thank you for your time, and I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Carolyn Rebecca Senn
Fordham University, Urban Studies Master’s program
Centenary College, B.A. in Sociology: Human Services
Centenary College, B.A. in Political and Governmental Affairs
862-432-1530
Appendix C

Phone recruitment script

Hi, my name is………………………..

I’m calling you because you asked me to

Or

I’m calling you because a mutual friend (contact) gave me your name and number because I am working on a study that she/he said might be of interest to you.

Can I take a few minutes and talk about it with you?

[start to describe study….ask questions to be sure the person understands]

When completed…what can we now plan…
Do you want to think about it more?
Can I set up an interview with you?

At the interview, I will give you a lot more detail about the study and you can still make a final decision.

Thanks a lot…

Here is my phone/email if you want to take it.
ABSTRACT

Many researchers have studied different types of people who contribute to gentrification, from gay men, loft dwellers, artists, and the creative class. But, lesbians have only been given the same amount of academic attention by a select few scholars (Valentine 1992, Rothenberg 1995, and Adler and Brenner 1995). These scholars all conducted their research over a decade ago, and little attention has been devoted to exploring gentrification by lesbians in a contemporary urban neighborhood setting. Using South Slope, Brooklyn as a case-study for contemporary lesbian gentrification, this paper explores the role of lesbians in the gentrification of a neighborhood. My findings, using social capital theory to explain phenomena, argue lesbians are facilitators of gentrification. This research is important in helping to understand how gentrification is understood, approached, and studied in the future.
Carolyn Rebecca Senn  
168 21st Street, Apt 4B  
862-432-1530  
Rebecca.s@nymc.org

Education

*Fordham University, New York, NY*

**M.A. Urban Studies**  
2013  
GENTRIFICATION, SOCIAL CAPITAL, AND THE EMERGENCE OF A LESBIAN NEIGHBORHOOD

*Centenary College, Hackettstown, NJ*

**B.A. Political and Governmental Affairs**  
2011

**B.A. Sociology: Human Services**

Minor in History

Related Experience

*New York Mortgage Coalition, 50 Broad Street, New York, NY*

**Program Manager**  
May 2012- Present

- Post-Purchase Pilot Project Manager
- Data point person for community housing agencies.
- Community Reinvestment Act lender tracking.
- Financial Literacy content generation and classes taught
- Knowledge of HUD, HPN, affordable housing, foreclosure, and community development within New York City.

*New York Council for the Humanities*

**Communications and Development**  
May-June 2012

- FileMaker data entry
- Newsletter content generation, editing.
- Website Updating
- Excel Pivot Charts

*New Jersey Governor’s Office*

**Health Policy Intern**  
Aug 09- Jan 2010
Carolyn Rebecca Senn
168 21st Street, Apt 4B
862-432-1530
Rebecca.s@nymc.org

- Communicated with Government Officials
- Charted draft memo's for the Health Policy Advisor to Governor Corzine
- Constructed and consolidated research material for presentations
- Analyzed and summarized research on the Marriage Equality Bill

Memberships and Achievements

- Member of the American Sociological Association (ASA)
- Member of the Urban Affairs Association (UAA)
- Member of the American Political Science Association (APSA)
- Magna Cum Laude Honors Distinction
- Creative Writing Literary Magazine Winner- Centenary College
- Environmental Club Centenary College

NeighborWorks Course Certificates:
- Stabilizing Neighborhoods in a Post-Foreclosure Environment
- Community Development: Past, Present, and Future
- Analytical Tools and Methods Used in Community Economic Development
- Foreclosure Basics
- Post-Purchase Education Methods- NCHEC Certification