

**Racialised Lesbian Spaces:
A Mancunian Ethnography**

Nina Held
Diplom, MA

**Thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
Lancaster University
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ABSTRACT

This thesis seeks to understand the relationship between sexuality, ‘race’ and space within the context of urban night-time leisure spaces for women. It is informed by and draws on different fields: sexual geographies, critical ‘race’ scholarship, feminist and queer theories, studies on whiteness, postmodern spatial theories. The intellectual roots of this thesis lie in black feminist theories of gender, ‘race’ and sexuality (and class) as intersecting categories and fields of experience. The thesis draws on poststructuralist approaches that theorise sexuality and ‘race’ as discursively and performatively produced. It argues that ‘race’ and sexuality are mutually constitutive categories and that they can only be understood in relation to each other.

The ethnographic fieldwork of this study is carried out in specific sexualised spaces, namely two lesbian bars in Manchester’s Gay Village. Through participant observations in those bars and qualitative interviews with women who identify as lesbian and bisexual and white, mixed-race, black and East Asian, the thesis explores the role of ‘race’ in the construction of lesbian bodies and spaces and how sexuality, ‘race’ and space work together in shaping subjectivities.

The aims of this study are manifold: to develop an understanding of how practices of inclusion and exclusion work in leisure spaces designed to meet the needs of a marginalised group; to find new ways of understanding ‘race’ and sexuality by

looking at their spatial relationship; to contribute to debates on sexuality and space by investigating how space is simultaneously sexualised *and* racialised; to contribute to existing research on whiteness through an exploration of how different forms of whiteness spatially intersect with sexuality.

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Declaration

I declare that this thesis is my own work, and has not been submitted in the same form for the award of a higher degree elsewhere.

Nina Held

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Chapter 1: Introduction

I think at the time I was discovering my sexuality, so it was all new to me, like I come from a small town, things like that, so... going out there [in Manchester's Gay Village] and seeing, like, loads of gay people, ehm, going to gay bars and having fun and things like that, I expected it, it came across as being more diverse. Even though everyone was all white [laughs] and there were no disabled people, it seemed to be more accepting. [...] What I soon learned was that it wasn't that open and that diverse. I came with the classic assumption that if you were gay, then you would have a higher acceptance and tolerance rate for other people and what I quickly learned was that [gay] people can be just as oppressive and discriminatory and have just as many prejudices as heterosexual people. I thought because, you know, that they been a minority or perceived as a minority within their life and ostracised or oppressed in some way and that they would be able to identify with other people's oppression, and that's where I quickly learned that weren't the case, and I experienced quite a lot, a lot of racism on the scene and was quite shocked by that. [...] I will go out and socialise occasionally and going to those spaces and sometimes it will be OK, do you know what I mean? But I have to be in the right frame of mind, in the right mood. I need to be going in and not being sensitive, not hoping to get someone saying the silliest things through ignorance, through trying to be funny, through being interested, ehm, you know, that by going into that environment, that's what I am letting myself in for, so to speak. (Joanne, 30 years old, mixed-race, British)

The starting point of this thesis dates back a few years when I was reading an article in the UK's lesbian magazine *DIVA*.¹ The article outlined a debate about the creation of 'Asian lesbian spaces' in London. Some white lesbians quoted in the article criticised Asian women for creating their 'own spaces'. They saw this as an act of separation. Asian women replied by pointing out that white lesbians also create their own spaces and that most lesbian spaces are in fact 'white'. Up to this point I had never thought about the racialisation of lesbian spaces² and I had never been aware of the fact that most lesbian spaces I had visited in the first ten years after my 'coming out' had been predominantly white (and I had visited quite a few spaces during that

¹ *DIVA* is a purchasable lesbian 'lifestyle' magazine. According to its website, it 'was launched in 1994 and remains Europe's biggest-selling lesbian magazine, offering readers 100 glossy pages of vital information: news, entertainment, travel, music, scene, real life features and listings.' (<http://www.divamag.co.uk/diva/default.asp>, access date: 10/09/09)

² I explain why and how I use the term lesbian 'spaces' (and not 'places' for instance) below.

period, mostly in Germany and some in the UK). I began to wonder: what makes lesbian spaces white? How do they become white? Why had I never ‘seen’ the whiteness of the lesbian spaces I visited? And more generally, what is the relationship between ‘race’³, sexuality and space?

During the course of my research, which I started a few years after reading the article, when I told white women what the title of my PhD thesis is, a common response was to refer to ‘Racialised Lesbian Spaces’ other than white – a move that ignores the racialisation of white spaces. Hence, like me and my perceptions of space, the women I was talking to did not seem to ‘see’ the whiteness of the space (see also Kawale 2003; 2004). Like various urban areas, ‘Asian lesbian spaces’ are racially marked, whereas most other lesbian spaces are not perceived to be racialised and thus are racially unmarked. As scholars working on whiteness have argued, whiteness is often not seen (by white people) as a racial category and thus tends to work as the silent and unmarked ‘racial norm’ (Back and Ware 2002; Byrne 2006; Cuomo and Hall 1999; Dyer 1997; Frankenberg 1993, 1997).

My research sets out to learn both the reasons for the whiteness of some lesbian spaces and what processes and discourses are at play so that white women (like me) tend to be unaware of the racialisation of lesbian spaces if those spaces are predominantly white. I want to explore the intersections of ‘race’, particularly whiteness, and sexuality and see how those intersections relate to and interact with space. Like Ruth Frankenberg and Bridget Byrne, two white feminists who have worked on the intersections of whiteness and gender, my intellectual roots lie in the analysis of black feminists who urged white women to examine their relationship with and complicity in racism, to analyse the racialisation of whiteness and to interrogate

³ I am using ‘race’ in inverted commas throughout this thesis in order to indicate its constructed nature (and in some sense its artificiality).

how gender intersects with ‘race’, class and sexuality (Byrne 2006: 4; Frankenberg 1993: 2ff).

Although black feminists have pointed to the importance of intersectional analysis since the late 1970s, their thorough analyses are still not fundamentally installed in studies which look at ‘race’ and gender and/or sexuality and/or class. In their ‘Black feminist statement’, first published in 1978, the Combahee River Collective, a Boston-based, black, lesbian feminist group, argued:

The most general statement of our politics at the present time would be that we are actively committed to struggling against racial, sexual, heterosexual, and class oppression and see as our particular task the development of integrated analysis and practice based upon the fact that the major systems of oppression are interlocking. (1982: 13)

The collective formulated this statement out of a critique of some white, middle-class (heterosexual) feminisms that focused on gender oppression as the main cause of inequalities.⁴ Still today, taking their statement seriously fundamentally challenges common arguments made within lesbian and gay communities which separate homophobia and racism as if they are not ‘interlocking’ systems of oppressions and even use those forms of oppressions against each other.

In January, 2009, radio presenter Chris Moyles was in the spotlight for his alleged homophobia on his BBC Radio 1 breakfast show.⁵ He had imitated white, gay, pop singer Will Young in a high-pitched voice and changed the lyrics of one of Young’s songs in a derogatory way by making implicit reference to Young’s sexual

⁴ The Combahee River Collective and other black feminists, like bell hooks and Audre Lorde, point to the importance of class in structuring lives. While class shapes the intersections of ‘race’ and sexuality, I do not use class as a major analytical category in this thesis. However, in the interviews, I asked about the interviewees’ class backgrounds (see appendix 3) and at times will refer to class when explicit reference to it was made.

⁵ Moyles had been accused of homophobia before, in 2006, when he was going through the ringtones of his mobile phone and made the comment about one of them ‘I don’t want that one, it’s gay’.

identity. Referring to this debate, the author of an article published in *g3* magazine⁶ argued that ‘racism still appears to be treated as more of a serious offence than homophobia’ (*g3*, May 2009: 33). Similarly, Gary Nunn, Stonewall’s communication officer⁷, is reported to have said that ‘young people deserve a better role model than someone who tries to make homophobia cool, in a way that racism isn’t’. These two statements draw an analogy between homophobia and racism and thus represent them as *parallel* forms of oppression while suggesting that one (racism) is socially less acceptable than the other (homophobia). In this way, a battlefield of competing oppressions is opened up. Furthermore, by separating these forms of oppression, the lesbian and gay subject produced by such discourses does not seem to be affected by racism and is therefore implicitly white. At the same time, such discourses construct the racialised subject affected by racism as implicitly heterosexual.

Since the publication of the Combahee River Collective’s statement, there has been some considerable feminist debate about which metaphor best describes how different social categories work together in shaping inequalities and experiences. A prominent metaphor used by feminists today is *intersectionality*, coined by the American legal scholar, Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989). Intersectionality approaches suggest that we do not have only one identity, for example, being a woman, but that this identity, whether self-defined or ascribed, intersects with other identities, such as being lesbian and white. We can imagine this in terms of crossroads where gender, sexuality and ‘race’ meet. An intersectional analysis would look at how Joanne’s sexual identity intersects with her racial identity in shaping her experience in the Gay Village. From an intersectional point of view one would argue that although one identity might be more in the foreground than the other, Joanne’s experience is shaped

⁶ *g3* is a monthly free magazine for gay/bi women which lies out in *Vanilla* and *Coyotes* and some other venues in the Gay Village.

⁷ Stonewall is the UK’s biggest lesbian and gay rights group. It lobbied for the dismissal of Moyles.

through the intersection of both identities. That is to say that her experience can be understood as inflected through the multi-dimensional structure of her position and 'identity', even if from her point of view, her racial identity is that which explains her experience.

Joanne's account illustrates that in spaces structured around a certain sexual identity, where sexuality is somehow assumed, a sense of belonging might be difficult to achieve. As her reference to 'they' indicates, she does not seem to include herself in the sexual group the Gay Village is constructed for, and so the question here is whether this group is somehow already racialised. Indeed, some authors have argued that the identity categories 'lesbian' and 'gay' are coded as white (Creet 1995; Fuller 1999). Thus, it seems that the category 'sexuality' itself needs to be interrogated to discover how it might be racialised. Therefore, like Avtar Brah (1996: 95) who writes of the 'racialisation of gender', I want to consider the 'racialisation of sexuality' (whilst acknowledging the intersections of sexuality and gender). When Gloria Wekker argues with regard to gender: 'An *adequate* theory about gender is simultaneously a theory about "race"/ethnicity, class, nation and sexuality' (Wekker 2004: 495, my emphasis), she makes a claim for Women Studies to reconceptualise gender in a way that acknowledges the co-construction with other categories. A theory about sexuality might likewise be simultaneously a theory about 'race' (and gender, class, nation), and a theory about 'race' might be simultaneously a theory about sexuality (and gender, class, nation). In this approach, there is no juncture (crossroads) where categories meet, but as those categories are co-constructed, they are *mutually constitutive*. I want to explore whether, as Gail Lewis has argued (with regard to 'race' and gender), those categories are *always* mutually constitutive, 'even when the language of one (or the other) is foregrounded' (Lewis 2000: 16). Lewis (2000: 160)

argues that the ways in which gender and 'race' are mutually constitutive is 'context specific'. My research explores 'race' and sexuality as mutually constitutive categories in a very specific spatial context, in places that are constructed as sexual spaces.

The fieldwork carried out for my research aims to draw out everyday processes of 'race'-making, sexuality-making and space-making in order to gain a deeper understanding of how they interact with each other.

Through an ethnography conducted in Manchester's Gay Village, primarily in the two bars which are 'known' to be lesbian bars, I identify the nuances and complexities of ordinary experiences of ethnicity and 'race' and their intersections with sexuality. My study looks not only at how 'race' and sexuality shape the construction of those spaces, but also at how space shapes sexuality and 'race'. Indeed, I argue throughout this thesis that 'race', sexuality *and* space are mutually constitutive. However, as my research illustrates, the relationship between sexuality, 'race' and space is complex, and in the analytical moment of lived experience of the everyday, it is often difficult to hold those categories together. In chapter 2, I lay out in more detail the theoretical frame of this thesis; in the remainder of this chapter, I briefly situate my study in Manchester and outline why it seems to be important to look at the relationship between sexuality, 'race' and space.

Manchester's Gay Village and studies on sexuality and space

The fieldwork for this research was carried out in two lesbian bars in the Gay Village in Manchester. Manchester, a major city in the northwest of England, is known for playing a key part in the Industrial Revolution in the late eighteenth and

nineteenth centuries. The de-industrialisation process of the twentieth century led to a strengthening of the service sector and growth of leisure and cultural spaces, and although the city has undergone major transformations since the 1960s, when its textile industry declined, cotton mills still shape the cityscape. In the 1960s, immigrants from Hong Kong and China opened the first restaurants in what is today known as China Town; at the same time, immigrants from Pakistan opened restaurants on Wilmslow Road in Rusholme, which today is called the Curry Mile. As in China Town, the Gay Village developed in a derelict warehouse district and today is a specific, demarcated area of the city which contributes to Manchester's leisure economy (Quilley 1997). Since 1991, it is officially recognised as 'gay space' and marked as Gay Village on city maps (see chapter 2). In contrast to other spaces, which are unmarked yet still sexualised (e.g., there is no area or bar explicitly defined as 'straight'), the Gay Village is constituted as a sexualised space.

Population statistics published by Manchester's City Council estimated that in 2007 all 'Non-White groups' made up 24.2% of the city's population (which is almost half a million).⁸ On my frequent 20-minute bus journeys from Levenshulme, my neighbourhood of residence, to the Gay Village, it always struck me how the racialisation of space changed. Bus No. 192 passes through Longsight – which, according to the statistics, has the highest ethnic minority population (61.3%) – before it arrives in the City Centre. Getting off the 'multicultural' bus at the Gay Village and walking down Canal Street I was often reminded of the phrase 'sea of whiteness' (see Ahmed 2007: 157). Somehow, the area around Canal Street seems to be like a little

⁸http://www.manchester.gov.uk/info/200088/statistics_and_census_information/438/corporate_research_and_intelligence_population_publications/3, access date: 04/04/10. As those estimated population statistics are mainly based on experimental statistics, there is no guarantee how 'accurate' those statistics are.

‘village’ in a big city where the ‘multicultural’ – coded as urban and racially diverse – seemingly disappears.



Figure 1: Lower Canal Street on a sunny afternoon⁹

However, space is not only racialised on grounds of racialised bodies occupying it. When Joanne first visited the Gay Village, the apparent whiteness of the space did not seem to be the issue for her. It was experiences with racism that changed her first impressions and impacted on her use of the space (the frequency of going out).

There are a few studies that illustrate racist practices in (white) lesbian and gay spaces in London and indicate a continuity of these practices across quite a long time period (see GALOP¹⁰ 2001; Kawale 2003; Mason-John and Khambatta 1993). In Mason-John’s and Khambatta’s (1993) research on black lesbian experiences, which is 18 years old, some of those forms of racism included being refused entrance to certain venues (or only being allowed to enter when accompanied by white lesbians) and clubs that do not play certain kinds of music in order not to attract a certain

⁹ Photo taken from *MCR 3 Manchester Magazine 09*. Manchester: Marketing Manchester, 71. Ironically, the description of the Gay Village under the photo says: ‘The Gay Village is the most colourful and friendly place in Manchester.’

¹⁰ GALOP is a London-based, independent, voluntary sector organisation offering assistance to lesbians, gays and bisexuals who encounter homophobic violence (GALOP 2001: 4).

clientele (for instance, it is assumed that reggae would attract only black women) (Mason-John and Khambatta 1993: 45-47). A survey carried out by GALOP in 2001 showed that of 145 black lesbians, gay men and bisexuals interviewed, 57% had faced some form of discrimination from the white lesbian and gay communities (GALOP 2001: 18). The forms of discrimination identified range from subtle, such as being treated 'coolly' or 'stereotypically', to more direct, such as 'not getting served in clubs, being ignored and being treated as an exotic sex object.' (GALOP 2001: 19) Rani Kawale (2003, 2004) interviewed South Asian and white bisexual and lesbian women about their experiences in lesbian and gay spaces. The Asian lesbian and bisexual participants in her study describe how they experienced most spaces as white not only because most of the people present were white women but also because their bodies were 'read' and treated as 'the other' (Kawale 2003: 184).

These studies, plus Joanne's account, indicate that racism often operates in subtle ways. As Joanne's description suggests, racism can take many forms. People might not intend to be (or think they are being) racist when they are saying 'the silliest things through ignorance, through trying to be funny, through being interested'. It is important, then, to define racism not only in terms of verbal or physical abuse but also in terms of everyday interactions in which 'race' is made in certain ways. I do not focus on 'racism' as such, however, but on *processes of racialisation* in which bodies *become* racialised and which are integral to racist practices and racist thinking (Ahmed 2002; Byrne 2006; Lewis 2004, 2007). In particular, by drawing on Bridget Byrne's (2006) concept of 'perceptual practices' I want to explore how 'race' is performatively produced in everyday interactions through ways of *seeing* difference. Processes of racialisation are not specific to lesbian spaces. My study seeks to find out how those processes are sexualised at the same time.

While the studies mentioned above were carried out in London, no research seems to exist which looks at those processes in Manchester's Gay Village. Studies that look at Manchester's Gay Village as sexualised space do either not mention 'race' (Hindle 1994; Whittle 1994) or if they mention 'racial exclusion', then they do not discuss this any further or seek to analyse the processes or factors involved. Furthermore, in those studies 'race' figures as something that is 'pre-given' and stable (see for instance Quilley 1997; Binnie and Skeggs 2004; Pritchard et al. 2002; Skeggs 1994).¹¹ When some researchers write about 'lesbians' experiences', they actually refer to the experiences of 'white lesbians' (see Pritchard, Morgan and Sedgley 2002). By taking a white normative frame, the category 'lesbian' is 'whitewashed' and neglects to show how lesbian lives are structured by sexuality *and* by 'race'. As Kawale (2003: 182) has eloquently argued 'silently, whiteness pervades the character of the discussions of sexuality and space'. The consequence of such approaches is that the experiences of lesbians racialised as other than white are not represented.

Kawale generally refers to studies on sexuality and space, but not only the ones focusing on Manchester's Gay Village. In the UK, since the mid 1990s geographers such as Gill Valentine, Jon Binnie and David Bell have significantly challenged the knowledge production of their discipline by revealing its heteronormative foundations (and Valentine had to face threats of homophobic harassment from someone within the discipline, see Valentine 1998). However, because researchers concentrated on sexuality and its relation to space in those early years, the intersections with other social categories, especially 'race', were not seen. Binnie and Valentine (1999: 180)

¹¹ Some authors even suggest that there is no racism 'on the scene'. For instance, by drawing on his research carried out in gay spaces in Newcastle, Marc Lewis (1994: 98) argues; 'It is as true of the scene in Newcastle as in any other British city that, if not conspicuous by their total absence, then members of the ethnic minorities are certainly extremely under-represented in relation to their true percentage of the gay population. Certainly the few men of Afro-Caribbean or Chinese origins out on the Newcastle scene appear to encounter few if any problems with overt racism.'

admitted in their review of geographies of sexuality that ‘race’ could be seen as a neglected area of geographical research on sexuality and space. Not much progress seems to have been made. ‘Race’ is still absent as a category of analysis in most work on sexuality and space,¹² and studies that bring ‘race’ onto the map in work on sexualised space are rare (Elder 1998; Kawale 2003, 2004; Nero 2005). However, the point is not just to tack ‘race’ on in such discussions or to pay lip service to intersectional approaches. The problem starts right at the beginning, when the category ‘sexuality’ is used as mutually exclusive from ‘race’ (and other categories). The difficult task then is to reconceptualise sexuality as a relational category that is co-constructed with ‘race’. I offer such a re-conceptualisation in chapter 2.

While studies such as those cited above are problematic in terms of neglecting ‘race’, they do offer thorough analyses of the relationship between sexuality and space. Lesbian and gay or queer geography looks at ‘the ways in which space is sexed and sex is spaced, or in other words, the ways in which the spatial and the sexual constitute each other’ (Taylor 1997: 3). Such studies have vividly shown how sexuality is made in everyday interactions in certain places and how those interactions sexualise space. For instance, practices such as holding hands and kissing have been explored as sexual performative acts which (hetero)sexualise the street (Valentine 1996). Some studies have also illustrated how certain sexual performances, such as gay parades queering heterosexual streets or such subversive strategies as ‘dyking’ shop windows, can disrupt the particular sexualisation of space (Valentine 1996). Valentine has been a pioneer of studies on lesbian spaces and has, alongside other

¹² To date, two volumes on sexuality and space have been published. In the first, *Mapping Desire*, edited by David Bell and Gill Valentine (1995), ‘race’ or the racialisation of space (including whiteness) were not considered at all in the nineteen contributions. In the second, *Geographies of sexualities*, edited by Kath Browne, Jason Lim and Gavin Brown (2007), while two of the seventeen contributions include ‘race’ in their analyses, issues of how sexualised space is racialised still remain underexplored.

researchers (see Valentine 1993; 1995, 1996; Probyn 1995; Cieri 2003; Johnston and Valentine 1995; Rothenberg 1995; Smith and Holt 2005), shown that we can think of 'lesbian space' in multiple ways. These studies illustrate how 'lesbian space' can be created through specific practices, not only in urban spaces associated with the 'scene' but also in rural areas, private homes, neighbourhoods and even in nature (Cieri 2003; Johnston and Valentine 1995; Rothenberg 1995; Smith and Holt 2005). Practices of sexualising space not only include social interactions but also employ lesbian and gay symbols such as rainbow flags, books, music, and so on. As Valentine has argued, lesbian space can be created through subtle forms within heterosexualised space, for instance through consuming 'lesbian music' (k. d. lang is an example) or through identifying/spotting each other, which sexualises space (differently), if only for a momentary glimpse (Valentine 1995).

What these studies show is that the sexualisation of space is not fixed once and for all but is constantly in process. While the studies focus primarily on the construction of space, they also point to ways in which space shapes sexual identities and subjectivities.¹³ As Caroline Knowles (2003: 9) argues, we cannot understand people 'without understanding their routes and the nature of their journeys: the ways in which they occupy and move through space. These things are fundamental to who they are in the world.' Knowles highlights the importance of looking at the spatiality of 'race' in order to gain understanding of how it works; how 'people make race in space' (2003: 105). Subjectivity is 'about modes of being-in-the-world' and about 'the underlying principles of what it means to be a person in the world' (Knowles 2003: 31), and spaces are crucial in the making of personhood (Knowles 2003: 35).

¹³ While there is no clear-cut between the meaning of identity and subjectivity, both can be distinguished in the ways Knowles (2003: 50, fn11) describes: 'Identities are an aspect of subjectivity, but subjectivity is the more fundamental category, the models of personhood on which we build embellishments and insignia composing identities. Subjectivities are the templates of personhood, identities are about details.'

Therefore, it is important to analyse spaces when studying the formation of sexual and racial identities and subjectivities.

My study is informed by postmodern geographical approaches that define space as not just an empty entity or container that can be filled with things or people, neither as just marked once and for all. According to these theories, space is not dead and fixed, but alive, active, fluid and always under construction. Space is active and always 'in process' (Crang and Thrift 2000: 3). While there was a 'spatial turn' in the humanities and social sciences in the 1990s, 'space' is often used merely as a metaphor without actually conceptualising it. As Edward Soja (1996: 1) points out, there is an increasing awareness that 'we are, and always have been, intrinsically spatial beings, active participants in the social construction of our embracing spatialities'. Although space has become an integral part of making theoretical and practical sense of our lives, the meaning and understanding of space and spatiality is often muddled (Soja 1996: 1-2).

The same might be said about the concept of 'place' and its relationship to space. Space and place are often used interchangeably (see, for instance, Puwar 2004) or one is given privilege over the other (Agnew 2005). Space is often thought of as the abstract whilst place is considered as specific. As Knowles argues, 'space is the general category from which places are made in more specific terms'. And, as she further describes: 'In specifying a *particular space* we get place, as a building, a neighbourhood or region.' (Knowles 2005: 80, original emphasis) There is no clear-cut between place and space and both are intrinsically linked (Agnew 2005). From a postmodern feminist perspective, Doreen Massey has been an advocate of thinking place and space together (see Agnew 2005: 91). According to Massey, social space is produced through the interactions of social relations. Place then is 'a particular

articulation of those relations, a particular moment in those networks of social relations and understandings.’ (Massey 1994: 5) The meaning of a place is not fixed nor have places fixed boundaries, but the particularity and identities of any place is constructed through interconnections with what is beyond it (Massey 1994: 121).

As I explain below, I define the two bars where I conducted ethnographic research as ‘lesbian *spaces*’. By defining the bars as spaces, I draw on one particular conceptualisation of *space*, which was developed by French sociologist Henri Lefebvre, who ‘insistently wove space into all his major writings’ (Soja 1996: 7), most prominently in *The Production of Space* (1991 [1974]).¹⁴ According to Lefebvre (1991: 26), ‘(Social) space is a (social) product’. He argued that instead of looking at what is *in* space, our focus needs to be on *how* space is actually produced. More than 30 years ago, he said that the ‘production of space’ might sound strange to some people: ‘To speak of “producing space” sounds bizarre, so great is the sway still held by the idea that empty space is prior to whatever ends up filling it’ (Lefebvre 1991: 15). In human geography and other disciplines today, this idea that space is produced is widely accepted and does not sound ‘bizarre’ anymore. However, Lefebvre not only challenged the idea of space as container, but he also made the further claim ‘that the space thus produced also serves as a tool of thought and of action; that in addition to being a means of production it is also means of control’ (Lefebvre 1991: 26). Lefebvre’s approach is useful not only because of the idea of space as produced and as being active but also because he highlights the ways in which space is structured by power. According to Lefebvre, it is spatial practices that produce and maintain dominant codings of space (representations of space). Therefore, Lefebvre’s ideas aid in my analysis of how the Gay Village in general and the two lesbian bars in

¹⁴ Lefebvre’s *La production de l’espace* was first published in 1974. I refer to the English translation published in 1991, almost 20 years later.

particular, are constituted as white and lesbian/gay. (I come back to Lefebvre's theories in chapter 2.)

Focus of research

By locating my research in the Gay Village, I aim to explore how 'race' works in spaces specifically structured around sexuality and created for people who belong to a marginalised group. Those spaces are in some sense 'counterspaces' (Soja 1996: 68) to most night-time leisure spaces in Britain, which are structured around heterosexuality. They can offer a retreat from heteronormative and often homophobic spaces. The two lesbian bars, *Vanilla* and *Coyotes*, seem to be the only places within the Gay Village that are managed by women and where women are numerically in the majority.¹⁵ They are gendered and sexualised spaces offering women a place of retreat from heterosexist and androcentric dominance and violence in whatever forms they take (Pritchard et al. 2004; Wolfe 1997). Although I call the bars 'lesbian', this should not refer to an essentialist notion of sexuality but (in Foucauldian terms) should indicate a certain subject position which is discursively produced. In my understanding of sexuality, I follow Michel Foucault's (1990 [1976]) groundbreaking analysis of sexuality as historically produced and also queer theoretical approaches that explore sexual identities as never fixed but always in process (Butler 1990; Jagose 1996; Sedgwick 1991; Warner 1993).¹⁶

I define *Vanilla* and *Coyotes* as 'lesbian' because, as I have already mentioned, they are known to be lesbian bars but also because they are constituted as such.

¹⁵ I am not using pseudonyms for these two lesbian bars as it is essential to analyse their representations in order to understand how their spaces are constituted. I do however, use pseudonyms for all women who took part in my study.

¹⁶ I elaborate on this in chapter 2.

Vanilla identifies itself as such and proudly promotes itself as the ‘best lesbian bar in the UK’. Although *Coyotes*’ management does not identify the bar as a lesbian or gay bar, it is nevertheless constituted as such through the predominance of and use by lesbian customers.¹⁷ This does not mean that women who identify as lesbian are the only customers who frequent the two bars; other customers are people who might identify as bisexual, gay, heterosexual, transsexual, transgender or queer. As the following chapters show; the dominant coding of their space is lesbian. While identifying the bars as ‘lesbian’ somehow freezes a sexual identity, I consider the sexualisation of the spaces to be constantly in process. The bars are not constructed as lesbian spaces once and for all, that is to say, but the bars’ lesbian identities (and the women’s identities) constantly need to be produced and re-produced.

As Massey argues, places have multiple identities and the dominant image of a place is always contested, the ascribed identity is always only provisional. Places are not bounded areas but porous networks of social relations. Thus, there are no definite boundaries around a place that distinguish the inside and outside because the ‘inside’ is in fact constituted by (relations to) the ‘outside’. Because of being constituted through social relations, which are continually changing, places are processes. Massey would object to identifying the bars as ‘lesbian places’, as places never have distinct identities but become their particular character through the ways in which different people perceive them. The two lesbian bars are ‘places’ in the sense of being perceived as a place where lesbians go to (‘sense of place’). However, I define my research sites as ‘lesbian *spaces*’ because although they are both specific places, I am interested in how within them space is performatively produced (as sexualised and racialised). I look at those *processes of sexualisation* through which bodies and spaces

¹⁷ This is explained further in chapter 3.

become sexualised. *Vanilla* and *Coyotes* are not only gendered and sexualised, but they are also racialised spaces. I chose those two bars for my research for two reasons. First, they are constituted as lesbian. Second, on my first visits, I had the impression that they were differently racialised: *Coyotes* was more ‘racially mixed’ in terms of customers and staff than *Vanilla* (I come back to this topic in chapter 3).

Because I use the idea of space as active, I explore not only how *Vanilla*’s and *Coyotes*’ sexualisation and racialisation are continuously produced, but also how the particular production of space acts upon the women who move in and out of those spaces, how space acts upon their experiences of the livedness of sexuality and ‘race’, and on how the meanings of ‘race’ and sexuality are negotiated in everyday interactions in those spaces. Space is shaped by the intersections of gender, ‘race’, and sexuality, and it also shapes those intersections. The relationship between ‘race’, sexuality and space seems to be a rather complex one and thus requires careful examination.

In order to explore this relationship I ask the following questions: What are the processes that racialise and sexualise lesbian spaces such as *Coyotes* and *Vanilla*? What are the processes through which sexuality and ‘race’ are made and re-made in lesbians’ interactions in and with space? What role do place and space play in constituting sexual and racial identities and subjectivities? What is the specific role of whiteness in the interplay of sexuality, ‘race’ and space?

The overall aim of this thesis is to build an analytical framework that captures the complexity of the relationship between ‘race’, sexuality and space. This study is situated in different fields and informed by those fields: (sexual) geography, critical race theory (including studies on whiteness), queer studies, and feminist theory. While they all offer certain elements for the exploration of this relationship, there exists no

overall theoretical framework that brings them all together. The ethnographic fieldwork and the accounts by women who identify as lesbian and bisexual and white, mixed-race, black or East Asian are brought in dialogue with theoretical approaches from those different fields.

Outline of chapters

In chapter 2, I assemble a theoretical frame for the relationship between sexuality, 'race' and space, which will be further developed through the fieldwork chapters 4 through 7. I use the Gay Village and China Town as examples of differently constituted spaces in Manchester's city centre to illustrate the constitution of space as exclusively sexualised *or* ethnicised/racialised. While research on sexuality and space rarely looks at issues of 'race', and authors who analyse the relationship between 'race' and space tend to leave sexuality out (Knowles 2003; Sullivan 2006), they all offer important insights which I bring together to establish my theoretical frame for this thesis.

Chapter 2 explores the relationship between bodies and space and in particular lays out Lefebvre's conceptualisation of space as representations of space, representational space and spatial practice. I further racialise conceptualisations of sexuality and sexualise conceptualisations of 'race' in order to establish a framework that captures their mutual constitution. Foucault's work is useful for thinking about how sexual and other identities and subjectivities are produced through discourses that work on different levels. I thus suggest that we can think of Britain as a racial and sexual formation where 'race' and sexuality work in complex ways. This has an impact on how 'race' and sexuality are experienced in everyday life and how they are

made in interactions. I suggest that ‘race’ and sexuality are both performative, that is, that they are performatively produced in everyday interactions, in particular through ‘perceptual practices’ (Byrne 2006) and ‘practices of the skin’ (Lewis 2004, 2007). Furthermore, chapter 2 theoretically explores the role of space in the making of sexuality and ‘race’. This theoretical framework helps me to understand the interactions in the lesbian bars and my participants’ accounts of their experiences and perceptions of sexuality, ‘race’ and space.

Chapter 3 outlines the research process: the early beginnings, why I chose to do ethnographic research, the contradictions inherent in the term ‘participant observation’, how I found the participants for this study, and the ethical issues involved. I explain how a discourse analytical approach helps me to understand how the women who participated in this study employ particular discourses in order to construct a position in and from which they make sense of sexuality and ‘race’. I also introduce the two lesbian bars and write of how we can think of them in terms of representations of space, representational spaces and spatial practices (Lefebvre 1991). Furthermore, I explore the methodological implications of the theoretical approach taken in this thesis, which raises challenging questions for my empirical research: if ‘race’ and sexuality have no ontological foundation, does my research not reify sexual and racial categories? If ‘race’ and sexuality are performative, how are they produced in/through the research?

Chapters 4 through 7 analyse the complex relationships between sexuality, ‘race’ and space by drawing on my fieldwork material. We move from the theoretical terrain explored in chapter 2 to an exploration of ‘race’, sexuality and space as ‘lived’. These four chapters speak from the perspective of my lived participant observations – what I saw and how I saw it – and from the perspective of the narratives of the women

who participated in this research. The fieldwork chapters focus on four themes: going-out groups, looking relations, comfort and safety, and subjectivity and spatiality. These themes are inseparable; the division of them into separate chapters is therefore not to be understood as a clear-cut analytical approach. While they all relate to each other, each chapter ‘zooms in’ on one of the themes.

Chapter 4 starts with an exploration of interactions in those spaces by looking at going-out groups. Such groups, which are very visible in the Gay Village, played an important role in my research. The formation of going-out groups is expected to be on grounds of ‘shared sexuality’. The chapter looks at issues of ‘group-ness’ in two ways: on one hand, it looks at the formation of going-out groups, and on the other hand, it links those formations to issues of ‘group-ness’ on a wider level, namely, how ‘minoritised people’ are often ‘grouped’, how they are perceived to belong to a certain social group. I focus on two going-out groups which were formed during the course of my research and look at how those groups moved through different spaces. The members of the groups came together on grounds of sexuality and for going out together in the Gay Village. However, other forms of ‘group-ness’ worked from the outside and within the group and often destabilised the formation of the group on grounds of sexuality. The chapter illustrates how ‘race’ and sexuality are produced in intersubjective relationships in the everyday of going out together. By looking at space-specific practices such as kissing and touching, the chapter explores rather intimate moments of processes of sexualisation and racialisation where the body is in the centre.

Chapter 5 explores looking practices in the lesbian spaces. The chapter illustrates how looking practices sexualise and racialise the bodies in the spaces and therefore contribute to the sexualisation and the racialisation of those spaces.

However, looking practices are also shaped by space. *Coyotes* and *Vanilla* are spaces which are somehow organised around the visual, where looking practices are central – they are about seeing and being seen. Because those forms of looking have positive rather than negative attributes, there is an expectation of reciprocity in looking, where there is the possibility to be both bearer and receiver of the look. Drawing on feminist film theories, I distinguish between looking and gazing. I discuss a few examples of what I call ‘the look’, which is similar to the look described by Frantz Fanon (1967). By distinguishing between different kinds of looking practices and by showing the affects of those practices, my material extends Byrne’s (2006) concept of ‘perceptual practices’. Given that how you are looked at depends on how you look, I explore some of the markers of what seems to be the ‘somatic norm’ in those spaces. In particular, I look at how the (imagined) somatic norm in *Vanilla* and *Coyotes* is produced through the gaze of the bouncers, dominant representations/images, and certain looking practices.

Chapter 6 explores issues of comfort and safety and looks at their relationship to sexuality, ‘race’ and space. In doing so, I contribute to the field of emotional geographies. Issues of comfort and safety seem to be constitutive of the spaces in the Gay Village. Informed by Sara Ahmed’s approach to the *Cultural Politics of Emotions* (2004), I ask: What ‘work’ do comfort and safety do in shaping lesbian spaces? Instead of analysing how the participants of this study emotionally experience the Gay Village, I consider how those emotions produce gendered, sexualised and racialised bodies and spaces. Chapter 6 argues that comfort and safety play a crucial role in constituting white lesbian subjectivities.

Chapter 7 focuses on two of my white participants and explores how their sexual and racial subjectivities are shaped by their perceptions of and experiences in

different urban spaces. By comparing their accounts of experiences in the Gay Village with accounts of experiences in other spaces of the city and growing up spaces, I analyse how subjectivity is in process and shaped by those different spaces. While the Gay Village is primarily perceived and experienced as a sexualised space, and ‘race’ (or at least whiteness) is rather ‘invisible’, my participants’ racialised perceptions and experience of other urban areas seem to be quite different from those in the Gay Village. I argue that the experiences in the two lesbian bars cannot be looked at independently from experiences in other spaces in order to gain meaningful understanding of the experiences and perceptions of sexuality, ‘race’ and space.

The aims of this study are manifold: to develop an understanding of how practices of inclusion and exclusion work in leisure spaces designed to meet the needs of a marginalised group; to find new ways of understanding ‘race’ and sexuality by looking at their spatial relationship; to contribute to debates on sexuality and space by investigating how space is simultaneously sexualised *and* racialised; to contribute to existing research on whiteness through an exploration of how different forms of whiteness spatially intersect with sexuality. The next chapter sets out the theoretical terrain through which we can begin to achieve these aims.

Chapter 2: Mapping the theoretical terrain: ‘race’, sexuality, space

Introduction

Different bodies belonging to “other” places are in one sense out of place as they are “space invaders”. (Puwar 2004: 33)

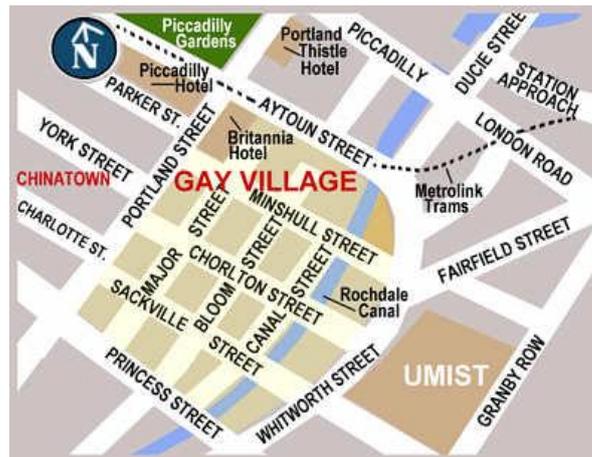


Figure 2: Street map of the Gay Village Manchester¹⁸

Scene 1¹⁹

Let us imagine an East Asian lesbian walking down Portland Street. Where is she really walking? In the Gay Village or in China Town? In which area does her body really belong? While she might have difficulty choosing one or the other, her belonging might be questioned in each space. It seems that East Asianness²⁰ and gayness are mutually exclusive in terms of these two spaces; China Town is given an ethnic/racial identity, whereas a sexual identity is given to the Gay Village.

Scene 2

On one of my observation nights in the middle stages of my fieldwork, I was in *Vanilla* with one of my white participants. The bar was quite empty, with only a few women standing around in the room. Then a group of ‘Chinese people’ (three women, one man) came in, got drinks and started dancing. I had seen them before in another bar on Canal Street, where somehow for me they had looked a bit ‘out of place’. I

¹⁸ Map by John Moss, Papillon Graphics 2002, see <http://www.manchester2002-uk.com/maps/gay-village-map.html>, access date: 07/01/10.

¹⁹ I am using the term ‘scene’ here because I am not directly quoting from my fieldwork material (scene 2 is a mix of fieldwork data and analysis). When I use the term ‘account’, this will be an extract taken from my fieldnotes. I have taken the idea for scene 1 from Esperanza Miyake, who talked about her experiences walking down Portland Street to a Women’s Studies lunch seminar at Lancaster University.

²⁰ I refer to ‘East Asian bodies’ here because they are often ‘read’ and made into Chinese bodies (see scene 2). This is explored further in chapter 4.

made a comment to them about their dancing and soon we all started talking and dancing with each other. Later that night, they took my white participant and me to a Chinese restaurant, where I suddenly felt out of place. I also felt a bit tense going in there with a group of queer people. Later, when I saw two of the women kissing at the toilets, I perceived that as a 'subversive' act and that we were 'queering' the Chinese restaurant. What underlay this thought and my initial feeling when entering the space was the assumption that Chinese = heterosexual and not gay friendly. I marked the space as not only ethnicised and racialised, but also that this attachment to space was inherently sexualised.

The fieldwork on which this thesis is based was carried out in Manchester's Gay Village. As can be seen on the map (figure 1), on the other side of Portland Street is China Town. Both of these areas are demarcated by identity markers set up in the city centre. One area is primarily defined as an ethnic/racial space, the other as a sexual space. It is rarely considered that the Gay Village is a racialised space and that China Town is a sexualised space.

One of the first classic studies on Gay Villages, or as territories marked as gay, is Castells' *The City and the Grassroots* (1983), in which he included San Francisco's Castro district as an example of the construction of urban spaces through social movements. Castells' study is a case in point: he distinguished between 'different ethnic neighbourhoods' and 'the gay territory' (Castells 1983: 105). While he analysed the Castro as a sexualised space, his focus of other areas of San Francisco, like the Mission district, was on the neighbourhood's racialisation. Research on areas defined as gay that has been published since Castell's study also tend to focus on the ascribed sexual identity of places. Questions of 'race' and the racialisation of space are subordinated to questions of sexuality (Binnie and Skeggs 2004; Skeggs 1994; Pritchard et al 2002; Quilley 1997). Similarly, studies on China Towns, mostly conducted in the U.S. (see, for instance, Kinkead 1992; Kwong 1987) but recently also in Europe (Christiansen 2003) focus on space as ethnicised/racialised, while questions of the sexualisation of space are subordinated or not addressed at all.

My research looks at the Gay Village as both sexualised *and* racialised space. I further explore ‘race’ and sexuality through issues of space. In this chapter I develop a theoretical framework that highlights the importance of looking at these three categories together in order to understand how sexualised and racialised spaces and bodies are produced. From a poststructuralist, feminist, anti-racist, queer perspective, I draw on different fields of enquiry: critical ‘race’ theory (including studies on whiteness), black feminist approaches, postmodern spatial theories, studies on sexuality and space, and queer theories. My thesis argues that we need to look at sexuality, ‘race’ and space together and as mutually constitutive categories. The difficulties of taking this approach and holding the categories together, however, become evident in this chapter. It is difficult to write in a way that expresses the mutual constitution. In the following discussion, one category might sometimes be more in the centre of analysis.

Kathy Davis (2008: 70) suggests (by drawing on Matsuda 1991) that we might use the strategy of ‘asking the other question’ as a starting point for analysis in order to address exclusions in feminist scholarship. I follow her suggestion. When I draw on theories of ‘race’, I ask what the relationship to sexuality is; when I focus on sexuality, I ask what the relationship to ‘race’ is. In what follows, I explore the relationships between space, sexuality and ‘race’ in four parts. In the first part of this chapter, I explore the relationship between bodies and spaces by further analysing the construction of the Gay Village and China Town as sexualised and racialised spaces. In the Introduction, I outlined some of the spatial theories I am drawing on in this thesis. In this chapter, by taking the Gay Village and China Town as examples, I further explore Lefebvre’s (1991) account of representations of space, representational spaces and spatial practices. Second, I racialise conceptualisations of sexuality, and,

third, I sexualise conceptualisations of 'race'. In the fourth part of the chapter, I theoretically explore the role of space in the making of 'race' and sexuality.

Bodies and spaces

In her book, *Space Invaders* (2004), Nirmal Puwar argues that 'bodies do not simply move through spaces but constitute and are constituted by them' (Puwar 2004: 32). Puwar argues that there is a coupling of particular bodies with specific spaces so that some bodies (which represent the somatic norm) are deemed to belong to the space, while others are marked as being 'out of place':

There is a two-way relationship between spaces and bodies, which locates the coexistence of "different" bodies in specific spaces as "space invaders": first, over time specific bodies are associated with specific spaces (these could be institutional positions, organisations, neighbourhoods, cities, nations) and, secondly, spaces become marked as territories belonging to particular bodies.' (Puwar 2004: 141)

Puwar is interested in what happens when women and racialised minorities occupy certain positions from which they have previously been excluded, particularly in the parliament, senior civil service, academia and the art world. While women and racialised minorities can enter such elite positions (or positions of authority), inclusions and exclusions continue to function through the designation of a somatic norm which is white and male. Puwar found that 'whiteness and masculinity are embedded in the character and life of organisations', although those spaces are not officially defined as such (2004: 32).

This is different in the case of China Town and the Gay Village, both of which have a specific ethnic and gay identity ascribed to them. So here we might see the

‘two-way relationship’ between spaces and bodies Puwar describes in the ways that, firstly, Chinese bodies are associated with China Town and gay bodies with the Gay Village and, secondly, that China Town is marked as a territory belonging to Chinese bodies and the Gay Village is marked as a territory belonging to gay bodies.

However, according to Puwar, the relationship between bodies and spaces develops over time. In that respect, in the next section I briefly outline how China Town and the Gay Village developed into the spaces they are today. By drawing on Lefebvre (1991), I explore the dominant representations of their spaces. Lefebvre’s theorising of space is complex and at times seems to be confusing; this might be a result of his refusal to give clear definitions of space. As he stated, he did ‘not aim to produce a (or *the*) discourse on space, but rather to expose the actual production of space by bringing the various kinds of space and the modalities of their genesis together within a single theory’ (1991: 16, original emphasis). Lefebvre (1991) stressed the interconnections between spatial practices, representations of space and representational spaces, and he referred to them as the *conceptual triad of perceived, conceived and lived space*. This way of framing the relationship between the three elements separates representations of space (conceived space) from spatial practices that actually secure dominant representations of space. It also seems illogical to separate perceived space (spatial practices) and lived space, as space is always lived *through* spatial practices. As John Allen and Michael Pryke (1994: 454, fn 2) argue, ‘the categorical scaffolding imposed upon the three moments of space should be understood in a nominal, descriptive sense, rather than as part of a broader “logical” system’. Allen and Pryke offer a useful understanding of Lefebvre’s conceptualisation of space. According to them, he defined representations of space and representational spaces as in relation to each other and both as circumscribed by spatial practices.

Representations of space refer to ‘the dominant space in any society (or mode of production)’ (Lefebvre 1991: 39). The dominant coding of space is secured by certain spatial practices. Representational spaces can challenge and subvert those dominant representations when space is directly lived and experienced; it is the space of ‘inhabitants’. Such spaces ‘take their shape literally through the daily routine of “users”’ (Allen and Pryke 1994: 454). As Lefebvre argues, these two spaces cannot be distinguished from each other; ‘in actuality each of these two kinds of space involves, underpins and presupposes the other’ (Lefebvre 1991: 14). Spatial practices give shape to both forms of space. As Allen and Pryke explain, people produce social space through their spatial practice. ‘There is an element of *performance* involved’, they write, ‘whereby specific practices attempt to construct and maintain a particular sense of place, and in doing so limit alternative interpretations.’ (Allen and Pryke 1994: 455, original emphasis)

We might therefore perceive the Gay Village and China Town as representational spaces because they challenge the dominant racial and sexual codings of Manchester’s urban spaces. What today are perceived as China Town and the Gay Village are the results of a long process of development. As I outlined in the Introduction, the de-industrialisation process and a strengthening of the service sector were crucial for the development of both spaces. The Gay Village developed out of what was ‘formerly an isolated, derelict warehouse district’ (Pritchard et al. 2002: 109). The area was used for cottaging and as secret meeting places for gay men, especially at a time when homosexuality was illegal (before 1967, when it was legalised only in private for two men older than 21 years). Similarly, the first restaurants in China Town opened in the late 1960s when Chinese entrepreneurs moved into abandoned textile warehouses on George Street, Faulkner Street and

Nicholas Street (Quilley 1997). When some derelict buildings on those streets were demolished in the 1980s, creating an open space between the three narrow streets, Chinatown started to grow faster (Christiansen 2003: 80-81). The Gay Village and China Town thus came into being through a combination of deindustrialisation and the appropriation of space by marginalised groups. Stephen Quilley describes the process as a success for those marginalised groups, as the City Council now acknowledges the particular identity of those places:

For marginalised groups seeking to appropriate space, a real index of success is when local authorities accept the *local* self-definitions of place. Thus acceptance of Chinatown as a planning entity, as a place, should be seen as an important if limited affirmation of legitimacy for the Chinese's community's place in Manchester. By this logic the council bureaucracy has moved some way towards formally acknowledging the Village. (Quilley 1997: 284, original emphasis)

However, marketing strategies and economic calculations also played a central role in constructing the place. As Quilley writes, the local council was generally not very supportive for lesbian and gay issues during the 1980s but because of this population's contribution to Manchester's leisure economy, the council sponsored the development of the Gay Village (Quilley 1997: 275). Today, the Gay Village is a highly regulated place and its commercialisation has led to the construction of a specific form of sexualised space. As David Bell and Jon Binnie (2004: 1816) argue: 'The key to the "success" of the gay village, however, has been the production of a desexualised consumption space where an asexual non-threatening (especially to women) gay identity can be enacted.' (1816) While Bell and Binnie still refer to the Gay Village as 'sexualised space', they define it as 'desexualised' in the sense that public sex sites such as public toilets, bathhouses and cruising areas are excluded from the construction of the space so that the space remains different and exotic enough,

but not *too* different so as to be threatening to heterosexual visitors. Today, then, the space seems to be defined by sexual *identities* rather than sexual *practices*.

Both China Town and the Gay Village are primarily places of consumption. Whereas in China Town the focus of consumption is on food and therefore most of the places are restaurants, in the Gay Village the main focus of consumption is on drinking and therefore most of the (at least 50) places are bars and clubs. Thus, we have to understand those formations of place and space within the structures of capitalism. In Lefebvre's approach, space is produced through the social relations of production and exchange. He writes that '*the modern form of space is abstract space; a social space in which difference and distinction are continually eroded by the commodification of space.*' (quoted in Allen and Pryke 1994: 457, original emphasis) Such space is characterised by homogeneity, and any diversity of space is repressed in order to convey a singular image (Allen and Pryke 1994: 459). I now turn to a discussion of the dominant representations of the Gay Village and China Town.

Dominant representations of China Town and of the Gay Village

Both China Town and the Gay Village are shown as bounded areas on official city maps.²¹ The representation of space is not only limited to city maps, however; it is featured in Manchester's marketing strategy. Both the Gay Village and China Town are used by marketing to contribute to the city's 'multicultural' and 'cosmopolitan' image. As Quilley argues (1997: 285), 'The Gay Village, along with other cultural quarters such as Rusholme and Chinatown, is being harnessed as an exotic proof of the city's cosmopolitan and progressive credentials.' However, the two areas contribute differently to the city's image. As Binnie and Skeggs (2004) argue, it is

²¹ Although the development of the Gay Village was largely supported by the city's labour government in the 1980s, the idea of a village was first mentioned in the gay press in 1984. The Gay Village 'was only recognised as a planning entity, and specifically as a gay place, in 1991' (Quilley 1997: 275).

mainly (male) gayness that makes the Gay Village into an imagined cosmopolitan area. The authors point out that the term ‘cosmopolitanism’ is contested. They give one definition:

Cosmopolitanism is most commonly conceived or represented as a particular attitude towards difference. To be a cosmopolitan one has to have access to a particular form of knowledge, able to appropriate and know the other and generate authority from this knowing. (Binnie and Skeggs 2004: 42)

As the authors point out, in the Gay Village it is the attitude towards sexual difference that constructs this image of cosmopolitanism. Whereas in other places, ‘race’ enables imaginations of cosmopolitanism, in the Gay Village ‘where the essential authentic branding ingredient is sexuality, race has no place. It disrupts the homogeneity of the user-friendliness.’ (Binnie and Skeggs 2004: 56)

As for Chinatown, it features on the official tourism website for Greater Manchester under a link titled ‘taste Manchester’, which says that ‘you can eat your way around the World in Manchester’. The text reads:

Just behind Piccadilly Plaza is the ornate Chinese arch which sits proudly in Manchester’s Chinatown, home to a stack of predominantly Cantonese restaurants. Look out for exotic vegetables such as gai lan at Ikan and classics like Cantonese roast duck.²²

While it seems unlikely to have been written for the Chinese tourist (who probably will not find those vegetables ‘exotic’), the link ‘lesbian and gay’, which can be found on the homepage, clearly has the lesbian and gay tourist in mind (but probably not only that tourist):

²² See <http://www.visitmanchester.com/Parts2.aspx?ExperienceId=7&PartId=30>, [access date: 10th August 2009.]

Manchester's gay scene is famously one of Britain's friendliest, busiest and most welcoming. There's a huge range of stylish gay and lesbian bars and clubs in the Gay Village and while here you'll find shopping heaven, an arts scene to match anywhere in Europe, and more trendy restaurants than you can shake a credit card at...²³

These representations of space produce not only space, but also the space's 'users', 'consumers' or service providers in certain ways: Chinatown as 'exotic', the Gay Village as 'stylish'. The imagined users of the Gay Village's spaces are trendy (white) middle-class men who are friendly and welcome 'straight people' as well. The representations of space then construct both homogenous spaces and homogenous and fixed ethnic/racial and sexual identities that are mutually exclusive. China Town is given an ethnic identity, primarily constituted through the consumption of food, while the Gay Village is given a sexual (and gender) identity constituted through 'style' and trendiness. Those dominant representations illustrate how sameness is produced rather than simply given by conveying a 'singular image' of space (Allen and Pryke 1994: 459, see above).

Tourism websites and brochures are only one site of the dominant representation of space. In the areas themselves, we can see this representation through symbols like the Chinese Arch (built mainly to attract tourists, see Christiansen 2003: 81), colourful signs with Chinese symbols, and the marketing of particular foods. In the Gay Village the signs change to more sexualised ones, such as rainbow flags and advertisements, flyers, and so on with half-naked, male, white

²³ See <http://www.visitmanchester.com/gay-and-lesbian.aspx>, [access date: 10th August 2009]. That the link is addressed to lesbian and gay visitors is also evident with the fact that under the heading 'lesbian and gay' there are other links provided for general, not gay-specific, events taking place in Manchester. *Visit Manchester* also provides a map of the city centre on which different areas are marked in different colours. On the map, China Town is red, the Gay Village (also stereotypically) pink.

bodies on them. There are many other spatial practices which either secure the dominant representations of those spaces or challenge them.²⁴

These particular constitutions of space imply that the Gay Village is ‘non-Chinese’ and China Town is ‘non-gay’. Both places, as well as the bodies assumed to be in them, are constructed on the basis of identity, which is, like identity categories tend to be, fixed and homogenous. However, as my first reflections of my own assumptions and ‘reading’ of bodies and spaces indicate (scene 2), while a white lesbian might perceive China Town to be a racialised *and* sexualised space, the Gay Village, on the other hand, is more likely to be perceived as only a sexualised space unless its racialisation gets disrupted.

Perceptions of space are fundamentally based on how we ‘read’ the bodies in those spaces; how we perceive them as sexualised and racialised bodies, and how those bodies seem to fit into the spaces. These perceptions, in turn, are based on how we think about sexuality and ‘race’, how they are discursively produced. Therefore, before I return to issues of space and explore how space is active in constituting racialised and sexualised bodies, I offer a conceptualisation of sexuality and ‘race’ and how they are interconnected in the next two parts of this chapter.

²⁴ With regard to the Gay Village, I outline the representations of *Vanilla* and *Coyotes* in chapter 3, plus the spatial practices by staff that circumscribe them, while the chapters 4 through 7 discuss some of the spatial practices by the spaces’ users.

Racialising sexuality

‘Sex is always political’ (Rubin 1993: 4).

Scene 3

I am standing at an NHS reception of the ‘women’s out-patient department’ in a hospital in Manchester. The white woman behind the desk asks me a few questions as part of my registration, including who my ‘next to kin’ is. Before I get the chance to answer, she adds ‘probably your husband’. When I give her the name of my mother; she misunderstands and asks, ‘Is this your husband?’ I finally have to give her my housemate’s details, as it is required that my next to kin live in the UK. Although I clearly speak a woman’s name (‘Andrea’), the receptionist seems to have understood something else. Now she asks, ‘Who is he?’

Scene 3 illustrates how, although lesbians and gay men have gained citizenship rights as sexual subjects over the last 40 years in the UK, and their relationships are legally recognised, heterosexuality still seems to be ‘compulsory’, as Adrienne Rich (1986) argued almost 25 years ago. In a heteronormative way of thinking, the NHS receptionist assumed that I am married, or at least live with a partner who she could only imagine to be male. This scene powerfully illustrates the relationship between sexuality and gender and how both are based on a fixed binarism. Queer theorists (see for instance Butler 1990; Jagose 1996; Sedgwick 1991; Warner 1993) have shown this. My scene points to the ways in which sexuality is institutionalised, how ‘in the everyday political terrain, contests over sexuality and its regulation are generally linked to views of social institutions and norms of the most basic sort.’ (Warner 1993: xiii) It demonstrates how sexuality is regulated and discursively and performatively produced. In this part of the chapter, I want to explore those different and yet connected dimensions. When conceptualising sexuality, we need to look first at how it is historically produced. There seems to be no better place to start than Michel Foucault’s work.

In his study of the *History of Sexuality*, Michel Foucault (1990 [1976]) wrote that sexual identity is nothing ‘natural’ but that it is a product of historical processes. Foucault argued that instead of repression, there had been a steady explosion of sexual discourses in the last three centuries in Western societies and therefore a proliferation of sexual subjects in populations. From the eighteenth century onward, sexuality was seen as something that had to be regulated. Power was exercised through the multiplication of discourses concerning sex, especially in terms of controlling populations. At the end of the nineteenth century, discourses emerged which categorised people into different sexual human beings. As Foucault argued, at that time ‘the homosexual’ came into being as a distinct ‘species’. Whereas prior to that time the main concern was about sexual practices (such as sodomy), in the late nineteenth century a distinct sexual identity (‘the homosexual’) was created:

The nineteenth-century homosexual became a personage, a past, a case history, and a childhood, in addition to being a type of life, a life form, and a morphology, with an indiscreet anatomy and possibly a mysterious physiology. Nothing that went into his total composition was unaffected by his sexuality. It was everywhere present in him: at the root of all his actions because it was their insidious and indefinitely active principle; written immodestly on his face and body because it was a secret that always gave itself away. [...] Homosexuality appeared as one of the forms of sexuality when it was transposed from the practice of sodomy onto a kind of interior androgyny, a hermaphroditism of the soul. The sodomite had been a temporary aberration; the homosexual was now a species. (Foucault 1990 [1976]: 43)

Foucault’s work helps us understand how sexual subjects are discursively produced. Other scholars extend his analysis by showing that the formation of sexual subjects cannot be separated from the formation of racial subjects. Kobena Mercer and Isaac Julien (1988: 106, original emphasis) argue that ‘the prevailing Western concept of sexuality... *already contains racism*. Historically the European construction of sexuality coincides with the epoch of imperialism and the two inter-connect.’ Siobhan

B. Somerville's *Queering the Color Line* (2000) offers a telling example of how not to draw *parallels* between sexual and racial discourses but to analyse the relationship *between* them and their mutual effects. By focusing on scientific discourses and early cinema and literature in the U.S. at the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century, Somerville shows how the formation of notions of heterosexuality and homosexuality emerged through 'a discourse saturated with assumptions about the racialization of bodies' (Somerville 2000: 4). She illustrates how scientific racial discourses were closely linked to sexuality and how the white-supremacist logic worked in the policing of both racialised social boundaries and sexual identities. She argues that

it was not merely a historical coincidence that the classification of bodies as either "homosexual" or "heterosexual" emerged at the same time that the United States was aggressively constructing and policing the boundary between "black" and "white" bodies (Somerville 2000: 3).

These policies, aimed at creating bifurcated identities, were mutually constitutive. Scientific discourses on sexual and racial difference influenced each other; sexologists, particularly, drew on and borrowed methodologies from studies on racial difference to construct homosexuality as the deviant sexuality (Somerville 2000: 10).

While such studies as these seem to extend Foucault's analysis, Laura Ann Stoler (1995) shows in her study on Foucault that 'race' is not marginally explored in his work, as commonly believed, but that his work offers a thorough analysis of the co-constitution of 'race' and sexuality also for the European Empires. Stoler (1995) argues that the three volumes of the *History of Sexuality* have to be read in combination with the lectures Foucault gave in 1976 at the Collège de France. Those

lectures were only published in English in 2003 as *Society must be defended*, many years after the volumes of the *History of Sexuality* were originally published. Stoler illustrates that while in his written work Foucault referred to 'race' only a few times, in his lectures he indeed sketched out a genealogy of the discourse of 'race'. Stoler uses both the lectures and the three-volume book to analyse how we can think of the European bourgeois self as discursively made through the colonial management of sexuality. She argues that while Foucault's accounts of the discursive construction of regimes of power have been thoroughly used for colonial studies, there is no analysis of how

the discursive and practical field in which nineteenth-century bourgeois sexuality emerged was situated on an imperial landscape where the cultural accoutrements of bourgeois distinction were partially shaped through contrasts forged in the politics and language of race. (Stoler 1995: 5)

Queer theory, which emerged in the late 1980s/early 1990s, draws heavily on Foucault, especially the first volume of his *History of Sexuality*, by arguing that sexuality is nothing natural but discursively produced and regulated; it is a product of the interrelation between knowledge and power. Some queer theoretical approaches have been criticised for not thoroughly taking multiple forms of oppression into account (Erel et al. 2008: 265) and for often only adding 'race' onto the analysis of sexuality (Kuntsman and Miyake 2008: 5). However, in more recent years, black and Asian queer theorists have challenged the white male centrality of queer theories. See, for instance, Badruddoja Rahman 2005; Eng, Halberstam and Munoz 2005; Ferguson 2004; Gopinath 2005; Hawley 2005; Johnson and Henderson 2005; Puar et al. 2003; Sanchez-Eppler and Patton 2005. Here we can only speculate as to whether an earlier

English language publication of Foucault's lectures would have had an impact on the development of queer theory in the Anglophone world.

How sexual practices are regulated by institutions is also illustrated by Gayle Rubin (1993). In her essay, "Thinking Sex", she visualises the hierarchical order of sexual relationships and sexual activities in Western societies with two diagrams. The first diagram consists of an inner and an outer circle where the 'good, normal, natural, blessed sexuality' (such as heterosexual, married, monogamous, and so on) is located in the inner circle, while the 'bad, abnormal, unnatural, damned sexuality' (such as homosexual, unmarried, and so on) is shown in the outer circle (Rubin 1993: 13). Her second diagram shows an imaginary line dividing 'good' and 'bad' sexual relationships and practices and indicates that the line is not static, but that there are constant battles over where to draw it – 'the further from a line a sex act is, the more it is depicted as a uniformly bad experience.' (Rubin 1993: 15) Those who enjoy sexual practices at the bottom of the hierarchy, such as SM, often do not have the legal right to do so (Rubin 1993: 31). This can be illustrated with a recent example. On 26th January 2009, the 'Extreme Pornography Act' went into effect. This act criminalises the possession of pornographic images that appear to represent violence or physical harm being caused to a person. Under the claim to 'protect' its citizens, the state here decides what are 'good' and 'bad' sexual practices. This act thus has consequences for people who engage in sexual practices involving bondage, domination, sadism and masochism (BDSM).

The regulation of sexuality, sexual discourses and sexual representations impacts on how people think about sexuality and how they judge what 'good' and 'bad' sexual practices and relations are. Discourses on sexuality are present everywhere. We are all imbricated in them so that even challenges to dominant sexual

discourses may be expressed on the same discursive terrain, as Jackie Stacey (1991) has shown with regard to debates around Section 28.²⁵

It is important, however, to ask the other question here: *Where is 'race' in all this?* How might the hierarchical order of sexual relationships and practices that Rubin describes be racialised? Throughout her essay, Rubin draws analogies between ideologies of racism and ideologies of sexual morality. For instance, she argues that in 'modern, Western, industrial societies, homosexuality has acquired much of the institutional structure of an ethnic group' (Rubin 1993: 17). Such statements depict homosexuals as a homogenous group and erase the fact that people who belong to this group also belong to different ethnic groups at the same time. Constructed this way, homosexuality is implicitly white. As I argued in the Introduction, such analogies are problematic because they separate 'race'/ethnicity and sexuality. Instead, as the works by Mercer and Julien (1988), Somerville (2000) and Stoler (1995) illustrate, ideologies of racism and ideologies of sexual morality actually work together.

Rubin (1993) does not mention interracial sexual relationships in her essay (while she puts 'cross-generational' relationships at the bottom of the sexual hierarchy). This is surprising, considering the history of interracial relations and miscegenation in the U.S., the deeply implemented perception of the immorality of sexual relationships across the racial divides, and their profound impacts on people's lives (e.g., the lynching of black men in the name of 'protecting' white women). In chapter 4, I discuss examples drawn from my fieldwork that indicate that the hierarchical order of sexual relationships and practices might be indeed racialised.

So far, I have shown how we can think of sexuality as historically, socially and politically produced. This institutionalisation of sexuality and the implied hierarchical

²⁵ Section 28 of the Local Government Act, which became law in 1988, stipulated that a local authority should not intentionally promote homosexuality or teach the acceptability of homosexuality as a 'pretended family relationship'. It was repealed in 2003.

order affects how we think of ourselves in sexual terms. This sexual self is historically produced and has its roots as much in imperialism and colonialism as in ‘domestic’ technologies of population and governmentality. It is therefore always already racialised. How we understand ways of being in the world is always produced by a tension between the two dimensions of subjectivity: ‘the external and historical constraints inherent in Foucault’s notion of “subjectification”, in which the micro-physics of power serve to construct the body/individual in particular ways (1979); and the internal ways in which the individual seeks to create him/herself as a subject.’ (Alexander and Knowles 2005: 13)

As Foucault’s work indicates, sexual discourses are constantly changing and therefore the construction of sexuality is never finished. Queer theoretical approaches aim to destabilise the binary of homo/hetero through the decoupling of the triad of sex, gender and sexual desire. All varieties of queer theoretical approaches share the common critique of identity categories (see, for instance, Seidman 1993). While in my research most of my participants defined themselves in fixed ways – as either lesbian or bisexual – the ‘cruelty’ of those identity categories was often evident. The ‘cruelty’ here works in the ways in which a fixed and stable sexual identity is constructed as the core of oneself: ‘What *am* I?’ Hetero? Bi? Lesbian? There is much at stake when one loses the sexual identity one has claimed. This is evident in the example of a gay man going-out group member (see chapter 4) who after a flirt with his female work colleague sends a text message to all the other group members asking whether he would still be allowed to go out with us even when he ‘turned heterosexual’. I also learnt that, if discourse determines what is sayable and intelligible and this constructs reality (see Probyn 1993: 138), then a lesbian identity is discursively produced through the silencing of sexual encounters with men.

What I want to take from queer theoretical approaches is the idea of sexuality as being always in process, as being constantly in the making. Crucial to this idea is the concept of performativity, which is most prominently developed by Judith Butler (1990) for theorising gender. Butler (1990) brought a different approach to the studies of sexuality, and laid some of the fundamental ideas for the development of queer theory. One of her starting points in her book, *Gender Trouble* (1990) was to formulate a critique of feminist literary theory that assumed a heterosexual framework based on gender as only referring to masculine and feminine (Butler 1999: vii). Butler argued that there is a link between gender and heterosexuality in the ways in which ‘under conditions of normative heterosexuality, policing gender is sometimes used as a way of securing heterosexuality.’ (1999: xii) The ‘natural order’ of heterosexuality is maintained through a fixed binary system of sex and gender, and this binarism is necessary for compulsory heterosexuality. Butler deconstructs this system by asserting that there is no ‘natural’ basis for the binarism of sex and gender, that both are culturally constructed, and that there is indeed no distinction between them. There is no pre-existing gender. Gender is performatively produced through the repetitive, compulsory citation of gendered norms: ‘There is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender; that identity is performatively constituted by the very “expressions” that are said to be its results.’ (Butler 1999: 33) Because gender and sexuality are intrinsically linked, therefore, sexuality is performatively produced from the outset.

The concept of performativity is crucial for my research. I am interested in *how* sexuality is performatively produced in the two lesbian bars and how this production is racialised. In the preface to the tenth anniversary edition of *Gender Trouble*, Butler writes that several authors have worked on the question of whether the

concept of performativity ‘can be transposed onto issues of race’ (Butler 1999: xvi). She argues that gender and race should not be seen as analogous because race is always already gendered, and that this points to the limits of gender as an exclusive category of analysis. At the end of her preface to this edition, she admits that if she were to write *Gender Trouble* again, she would include a discussion on racialised sexuality (1999: xxvi).²⁶

As I assert in the next part of this chapter, I draw heavily on the idea of ‘race’ as performative and use the concept of ‘perceptual practices’, as coined by Bridget Byrne (2006), who developed this concept by substituting ‘race’ for gender in Butler’s theory. As I have already argued, there is a danger in drawing analogies between gender and ‘race’ or other social categories. Instead of transposing a theory based on gender onto ‘race’, therefore, it might be better to ask how the category gender is fundamentally racialised and how the performativity of gender goes along with the performativity of ‘race’. As I argued in the Introduction, a theory about gender is always also a theory about ‘race’ (see Wekker 2004). Therefore, I next look at how *both* sexuality and ‘race’ are performatively produced in mutually constitutive ways.

Sexualising ‘race’

Critical ‘race’ theorists have argued that ‘race’ is a fiction, that there is no ‘natural’ or biological basis for the division of people into racial groups. It might be commonly believed that the categories ‘white’ and ‘black’ refer to skin colour, but that this is quite arbitrary is evident when we look at real people and at the fact that some people might fall into different racial groups according to the political, social

²⁶ Although she posed the issue, Butler does not seem to address it in her later work.

and historical contexts of their lives (see Omi and Winant 1986). In addition, in a given society, racial and ethnic categories change over time. In the UK, ethnic categories have changed since the 1971 census. In 1971 and 1981, the ‘ethnic question’ asked concerning country of birth (and in 1971 country of birth of father and country of birth of mother), but in 1991, ethnicity was divided into eight groups, one of them ‘white’. In 2001, the category ‘white’ was subdivided and a category called ‘mixed’ was added (see Lewis and Phoenix 2004: 138-139). Those categorisations are arbitrary and are clearly based on the binary white/‘non-white’. The category ‘mixed-race’ is defined as white plus another racial category. As Suki Ali argues, there is an ‘*inadequacy* of “mixed-race” as a single and coherent category’ (Ali 2003: 5, original emphasis).

Such categorisations of ethnicity and ‘race’ deeply structure (Western) societies. As Michael Omi and Howard Winant (1986) argue regarding the U.S., all the major institutions in America ‘have been structured from the beginning by the racial order’ (1986: 72). Omi and Winant coined the term ‘racial formation’ to refer to ‘the process by which social, economic and political forces determine the content and importance of racial categories, and by which they are in turn shaped by racial meanings.’ (1986: 61) The meaning of ‘race’ is contested throughout society, and racial categories are constantly formed and transformed. For Omi and Winant, ‘race’ is ‘a *central axis* of social relations which cannot be subsumed under or reduced to some broader category or conception (1986: 61, original emphasis).

Gail Lewis (2004: 115) argues that Britain also is a ‘racial formation’ and that ‘race’ and practices of racialising culture ‘stand right at the heart of contemporary everyday life and mediate individual experiences and the social relations of “race”, gender, class, sexuality, and age’. Lewis draws on Raymond Williams’ (1958)

argument that culture is ordinary; that is, everybody is involved in its making. Williams argued that culture is a whole way of life and that all classes take part in it, but Lewis shows how culture is actually racialised, and therefore how racialising culture is ordinary, too. What she takes from Williams is the ‘ordinariness’. She argues that we need to look at everyday practices in order to gain understanding of the mundanity of racialising culture. According to Lewis, identities, identifications, imaginations and social interactions are structured by racialised (and gendered) discourses. What is important here, as Lewis notes, is that racialisation is relational and therefore ‘racialising culture is a field of discourse and *practice* in which we are all imbricated’ (2004: 121, my emphasis). By drawing on Barnor Hesse, Lewis (2004: 116- 117, original emphases) defines ‘racialisation’ as

signalling three overlapping processes. First, the emergence of a discourse in which human physical and cultural variability became constructed as coterminous with, and representative of, the division of human populations into distinct races. Second, the inauguration and reproduction of ‘whiteness’ as the dominant ‘racial’ and ‘cultural’ category, whilst simultaneously constructing ‘whiteness’ in naturalised or ‘non-racial’ terms. In this process ‘whiteness’ is also constructed as being devoid of ‘cultural’ specificity – a move effected by its claim to the status of the universal. Third, the forms of *appropriation of and challenge* to dominant forms of racial categorisation that are themselves expressed on the terrain of racial discourse.

Lewis argues that these three are distinct but intersecting processes of racialisation (see also Lewis 2007). Her definition highlights how ‘race’ is discursively produced, both historically and in everyday interactions. Similar to what Stacey (1991) has argued regarding challenging discourses of sexuality, Lewis argues that, as we are all imbricated in racial discourses, even challenges to dominant racial discourses may be expressed on the same discursive terrain.

Although everybody is involved in the making of 'race', there still exist asymmetrical power relations. Lewis (2004) highlights the ways in which whiteness is reproduced as the dominant, normalised and universal category in processes of racialisation and says that focusing on the mundanity of processes of racialisation challenges the idea that those processes are only happening in extreme moments of British life. As Lewis (2004: 121) stresses, 'its ordinariness includes but extends beyond racism, understood as oppressive practices of racial domination.' Lewis (2004) defines those ordinary everyday practices as 'practices of the skin', in which the boundaries of (racial) belonging are constructed, and which give meaning to interactions and experiences, often through the intersections with gender. Those practices, which are daily repetitive acts, are also performative.

My empirical research explores these 'practices of the skin'. I am not primarily interested in 'big racisms' but more in the everydayness of 'race making', the mundane moments, how 'practices of the skin' establish racial boundaries which are sexualised at the same time. Using an ethnographic approach, I am able to illustrate how even 'small' social interactions, such as touching someone else's hair, can be a highly racialising and sexualising practice (see chapter 4).

As I wrote in the previous part of this chapter, some authors (Mercer and Julien 1988; Somerville 2000; Stoler 1995) have argued that racial formation has gone hand in hand with the historical formation of sexual categories. It is therefore important to always keep in mind that racial discourses are inextricable from sexual discourses. If sexuality and 'race' are discursively produced in and through each other, the question for my research is this: *Through which practices do they come into being?* I now want to offer a 'tool' with which those practices might be examined. I am drawing on Bridget Byrne's (2006) concept of 'perceptual practices', which refers

to the ways in which ‘race’ is performatively produced in everyday interactions through ways of *seeing* difference. I find this concept useful because it illustrates how processes of racialisation work on the individual level. It certainly helped me to understand my own involvement in the making of ‘race’ (which I explore in chapter 3). I want to extend Byrne’s (2006) concept by looking at how we can think of those practices as racialising *and* sexualising bodies.

Byrne (2000, 2006) argues that ‘race’ is performatively produced, in particular, through the repetition of ‘perceptual practices’:

‘race’ needs to be understood as an embodied performative. That is, that the repeated citation of racialised discourses and, importantly, the repetition of racialised perceptual practices produces bodies and subjects that are raced. What is critical here is that these practices *produce* the idea of differences, rather than being an effect of them. (Byrne 2006: 16, original emphasis)

In that sense, Byrne does not use the concept of performativity to argue that ‘race’ is performatively produced through bodily acts in general, as one might suspect, but specifies this by arguing that it is in particular perceptual practices, ways of seeing difference, that discursively produce ‘race’. Visual/physical differences are not only identified through those perceptual practices, but these differences get certain racialised meaning ascribed to them. Bodies *become* racialised in everyday practices, in the ways they are read, and they get meanings ascribed that make them into racialised bodies. It is the repetition of such practices that make ‘race’. Fanon (1967) illustrated this in his accounts of how on the streets of Paris he was continuously made into ‘the Other’ and how white people expected him to ‘behave like a black man – or at least a nigger’ (Fanon 1967: 114).

Byrne illustrates her argument by analysing 25 interviews of white mothers of pre-school children who lived in south London between June, 1997, and March, 1998,

and exploring how her interviewees' everyday lives were shaped by the reiteration of racialised discourses and practices and 'the ways in which white women's seeing, doing, talking and imagining performatively reinscribe racialised discourses' (Byrne 2006: 170). She focuses on how those discourses intersect with gendered and classed discourses. Sexuality plays a rather subordinated role in her analysis, although it is implicitly present in practices of motherhood (biological reproduction). I suggest that we need to take a closer look at how perceptual practices actually produce particular versions of 'race' which are at the same time gendered and sexualised.

Byrne (2006: 22) acknowledges that racial differences are produced not only through the seeing of visible differences but also through other (aural) practices of perception. For her, visual perceptual practices play the 'key role' in processes of racialisation. Although I agree with her argument, I think it is important to look at how different perceptions work together in racialising (and gendering or sexualising) bodies. Bodies are not only racialised through ways of seeing but also through the other physical senses – hearing, smelling, touching, tasting. As Shannon Sullivan (2006: 68) argues, 'racial and racist categorizations often operate by means of the bodily senses – and not just vision, which is often recognised, but smell and hearing in particular.' Similarly, Geoff Mann (2008: 78) makes a claim for considering 'theoretically the crucial ideological role of sound in the cultural politics of race'. He criticises the 'hegemony of visibility' in critical race scholarship, that is, neglecting the importance of hearing in the making of 'race' (Mann 2008: 76). In his research, Mann explores how American country-western music is constructed as white and identifies what it is that constitutes its whiteness. In Britain, some music genres (such as RnB, Hip hop or Bhangra) are likewise racially coded (see Hesmondhalgh 2001). Certain meanings are attached to musical styles. For instance, the music store HMV has a

music section called ‘urban’ where one can find mostly RnB and Hip hop.²⁷ Here music is spatialised in the ordinary, everyday practice of organising the consumption of music. As I wrote in the Introduction, the meanings attached to music also impact on club policies and whether certain kinds of music are played (Mason-John and Khambatta 1993: 45-47). There is an assumption that some parts of the population listen to certain music styles, but the whiteness of music is not seen. White people listening to ‘white music’ is not noticed by white people.

I conducted an interview with the organiser of *Black Angel*, a women’s night club in Manchester for black and Asian women. She told me that they had difficulties in getting a venue for the event in the Gay Village when they started because it was advertised as an RnB night and some managers of the bars in the Gay Village assumed that ‘more black people coming and they’re gonna be smoking spliffs’. *Black Angel* started as a monthly club night ten years ago and today takes place only irregularly. *Black Angel* and a monthly gay club night called *HomieSexual* are the only lesbian and gay nights in the Gay Village that are specifically advertised as RnB nights.²⁸

Another example of how ‘race’ is made through aural perceptual practices is in the ways black and Asian people are often considered to be ‘loud’ by white people. For example, one summer afternoon I was sitting in the backyard with a couple of friends and some voices came from the house opposite ours. One of my friends said, ‘Why do Asians always have to shout?’ This illustrates the attachment of loudness to ‘others’ (white British people, of course, never shout) and how a different sounding voice can first get an identity ascribed to it (Asian) which is then heard to be loud. A

²⁷ The politics of British popular music is complex. Popular music can serve to affirm and to create identities or to contest social and collective identities. It is common for musical artists from different genres to borrow from each other. Who consumes and produces certain kinds of music is a rather complex issue (see Hesmondhalgh 2001).

²⁸ This does not mean that venues in the Gay Village do not play RnB. In most spaces I visited during the course of my research, RnB chart songs were played but always mixed with other musical genres or only played for a certain period.

friend told me a similar story of being invited to a radio station to shoot a video of an African drumming group. When the drummers arrived, the station staff told them that they had to shoot outside because the drums would be too loud inside. This happened just as a whole classical orchestra was coming out of one of the studios. My friend told me that this was the worst experience with racism in Britain she had had during her two-year stay and that it was disgraceful to have to go outside in the cold (it was winter) to shoot the video, even though the radio station had originally invited them to come. In chapter 4 I will outline another example of the racialisation of noise (see also Gunaratnam and Lewis 2001).²⁹ 'Race' is also made through smell which can be seen with the racial marking of cooking practices. While some people are considered to cook smelly 'spicy' food, the smell and taste of other food remains unrecognised (see Fortier 2008). In terms of touch, we need to think about what kinds of skin are touchable and what touch as a practice is doing (or not doing). One of the black participants of this study told me that when she lived in France, where it is common for people to kiss each other on the cheek, she could feel that white people were often reluctant to kiss her.³⁰

These examples highlight the fact that 'race' is made through visual and other sensual practices. These practices work together to produce racialised bodies and the ordinary everyday experiences of 'race'. Even though the visual might play the dominant role, for example with hearing and smelling, there is still a body visually imagined. My research focuses on visual perceptual practices, but I want to be attentive to those other practices as well.

²⁹ Again we can ask here how practices are sexualised. The example of Chris Moyle imitating Will Young in a 'high pitch voice' (mentioned in the Introduction) indicates how sexuality is also produced through aural practices.

³⁰ One of the most cited accounts about 'race' and the touch is Audre Lorde's (1984a) story of sitting on the train as a child. Her jacket touched a white woman who was sitting next to her. The white woman, in disgust, jumped off her seat. I return to Lorde's story in chapter 5.

In my analysis, a central focus is the role space plays in the use of perceptual practices; how space shapes those practices and how those practices shape space. When discussing her empirical material, Byrne (2006: 94-102) looks at some of her interviewees' 'geographies of "race"'. Here she primarily discusses how her interviewees imagine the racialisation of certain neighbourhoods in London, the racialisation of the street, of their childhood, their school and other environments, and how imaginations of urban spaces impacted their decisions about where to live or which school to send their children to. (I draw on those accounts more in depth in chapter 7.) Byrne's theoretical treatment of space is rather underexplored. She outlines how those specific ways of seeing 'race' have a particular discursive history linked to imperialism and notions of modernity and are therefore specifically western (Byrne 2006: 21).

However, the meanings attached to differences which are 'read' as racial differences vary in different locations and depend on the institutionalisation of racial categories (see Omi and Winant 1986) and cultural representations of 'race'. For instance, Brah describes how her body was differently 'read' in the U.S. than in Britain. When she was studying at the University of California in the late 1960s, she was marked and exoticised as a 'foreign' student who 'looked Indian'. When she arrived in London in the 1970s, she quickly learned that Britain's imperial history 'situated' her in the category 'Paki' (Brah 1996: 7-9). This example illustrates how historical and social contexts shape the discursive formation of 'race' in the sense that context provides a vocabulary which shapes our perceptions of racialised bodies.

Place and space, then, play an active role in shaping perceptions. In the first part of this chapter I began discussing the relationships between bodies and spaces by exploring the development of the Gay Village and China Town and their dominant

representations. As I outlined in the Introduction, I draw on postmodern spatial theories that treat space as active. I now explore this idea further by looking at how space constitutes 'race' and sexuality.

The role of space in the making of 'race' and sexuality

In her book, *Race and Social Analysis* (2003), Caroline Knowles highlights the importance of looking at the spatiality of 'race' in order to gain understanding of how it works. She points out that 'race making takes place through space' (2003: 78) and that 'people make race in space' (2003: 105). The spatial dimension of 'race making' takes place 'in the interplay between bodies and their mobile habits of gesture, dress and speech' (2003: 101). She argues that 'race-making' is a spatial practice that is not only apparent in the form of territorial racial segregation but also in the ways in which people make 'race' in their everyday interactions in space. 'Race' is thus actively produced through bodily interactions in everyday life and space is constructed through these interactions ('raced', as Knowles defines it); it is created by people and through their interactions with each other. As she further writes, it 'is the lives, activities and social relationships of people that establish the social character of space.' (2003: 79)

Similarly, Shannon Sullivan (2006) argues that space is crucial for the making of 'race': 'Space, race, and place are constituted transactionally such that space is raced and that bodies become raced through their lived spatiality' (2006: 143). Sullivan offers an approach that highlights the activeness of space, that is, that 'race' is not only made in space through social interactions, as Knowles suggests, but that space itself acts upon the constitution of racialised bodies (Sullivan 2006: 146).

‘Race’ constitutes lived experience in the way spaces can be used – lived spaces are always racialised. Both bodies and spaces and their racialisation exist in a co-constitutive relationship to each other (Sullivan 2006: 150). How space constitutes the racialisation of bodies can be seen with spatial practices that allow some bodies into certain spaces while others are excluded or made ‘out of place’ (see Puwar 2004). As Sullivan argues:

Because race is dynamic and contextual, the race that one is and that constitutes one’s lived experience is composed in part by the spaces to which one is admitted, just as the race that one is and that constitutes one’s experience helps reciprocally “color” those spaces in turn (2006: 147).

She illustrates this with an example of a black woman not being allowed to enter a clothes shop in New York (this happened in the mid 1980s, when some shops had buzzers at the door). While this shop is already racialised as white, its whiteness is maintained through such door policies. But the exclusionary practices manifest themselves on the body of the woman who is excluded from the space: she experiences her body as racialised in the moment of not being allowed entrance to the shop while white costumers are happily shopping. As Sullivan argues, it is this lived spatiality which racialises bodies – not just the bodies which are excluded, but also the ones inside the space. Studies that look at racism and racialising practices in lesbian and gay spaces all refer to dubious door policies as a practice of exclusion (GALOP 2001; Kawale 2003; Mason-John and Khambatta 1993). This can also be found in my study, and I draw on a few examples in chapters 4 and 5.

These examples illustrate the ways in which lived spatiality not only racialises bodies but also sexualises them at the same time. As I outlined in the Introduction, sexual geographers have vividly shown how sexuality is made in everyday

interactions in space and how space makes sexuality. Kath Browne, Jason Lim and Gavin Brown (2007) argue in their introduction to *Geographies of Sexualities* that

sexuality – its regulation, norms, institutions, pleasures and desires – cannot be understood without understanding the spaces through which it is constituted, practiced and lived. Sexuality manifests itself through relations that are specific to particular spaces and through the space-specific practices by which these relations become enacted. (2007: 4)

Here, like Sullivan (2006) has written, space is not just acted upon, but is an active and constitutive element in the making of differences. It is this activeness of space that I am interested in. My research examines how space is constitutive of and constituted through racialising and sexualising subjectivities.

My research shows that the racialisation and sexualisation of space is a process and not only constituted through the presence of sexualised and racialised bodies, but through the ways in which bodies are made into sexualised and racialised bodies (through dividing people into sexual and racial categories and attributing meanings to them) and then through policing which of these bodies can enter the place.

Conclusion: towards a Mancunian ethnography

It is through the body that space is at once perceived, conceived and lived (Puwar 2004). That is why I now want to come back to the relationship between bodies and spaces. If we look at the two scenes given at the beginning of this chapter, then here at the end of this chapter, the relationships between sexualised/racialised bodies and spaces have become rather complex. The complexity of relationship unfolds throughout this thesis. Spaces are at once perceived, conceived and lived, mainly because of the bodies in those spaces, which themselves are at once perceived,

conceived and lived. I perceived the Chinese restaurant as ‘not gay friendly’ because I attached this meaning to the bodies I marked as ‘Chinese’. This was linked to the perception of space and to the fact that representations of lesbian and gay Chinese bodies are almost non-existent in dominant lesbian and gay representations in popular lesbian and gay culture. At the same time, as both scenes illustrate, those perceptions and conceptions of bodies and spaces intermingle with the livedness of the body in certain spaces. The effects of perceiving and conceiving sexuality and ‘race’ as mutually exclusive are profound.

By drawing on theories from different fields I have shown that we can think of sexuality and ‘race’ as historical, social and political categories whose construction is interwoven. We need to look at the processes which establish sexual and racial groups together and at how they are discursively produced in and through each other. As I have illustrated, the sexual categories and meanings available for the participants of this study to think of themselves in sexual terms are already racialised, as sexuality itself is a historically racialised category. Similarly, we need to think of processes of racialisation and ‘practices of the skin’ as intrinsically sexualised. This research follows Lewis’s (2004) urge to look at everyday practices, at the mundanity of processes of racialisation. It looks at how processes of racialisation *and* processes of sexualisation are mutually constitutive and how these act on space as well as how space acts upon them.

How ‘race’ and sexuality are performatively produced through all senses, how they are lived and how they constitute each other is only intelligible through explorative empirical research. Only ethnographic study can capture the complexity of the lived. Furthermore, if we think of sexuality, ‘race’ and space as all in process, then only ethnographic methodology seems to be able to capture this activeness.

The next chapter presents an account of my research process and the fieldwork spaces. I will discuss the advantages and pitfalls of ethnography as a research practice. Some of the leading questions for the chapter are as follows: What are the epistemological and methodological implications of the poststructuralist approaches (theoretically) taken in this thesis? What is 'knowable' about 'race' and sexuality if they do not have an ontological basis? What kind of knowledge do I produce? How can I do research on 'race', sexuality and space without fixing those categories? And what about my own position as a white, German, lesbian researcher?

Chapter 3: A Mancunian lesbian ethnography

Introduction

Account 1

Another of my observation nights. It was a nice, mild evening and still light when I was walking down the street heading towards *Coyotes*. The black female bouncer had a quick look into my bag, and after I had heard her 'OK', I made my way upstairs to the bar. The room was full with people sitting on the couches or standing, altogether, maybe 200, mostly women, but also a few men. There was a lively atmosphere, people standing in groups together and interacting with each other within those groups. There were already quite a few people on the dance floor. I hadn't expected such liveliness, as it was still quite early for a night out (around eight o'clock). I sidled between bodies and made my way towards the bar. The members of the bar crew all seemed to be in a good mood and were joking and laughing with each other. One of them, a tall, slim young woman with long blonde hair and wearing a black shirt, tight black trousers, and high heels, stepped up on the counter and started dancing. Some of the women, and men, also, who were standing around cheered her on with great laughter. She persuaded one of the other barmaids to come up to dance with her. A few other people in the room joined them in their groove and also started dancing. The black barman, who always seems to work, asked me charmingly what I wanted, then put my drink between the legs of the dancing blonde woman. He also gave me my change back through her legs and smiled at me. I turned around and looked for a place where I could stand. The corner of the bar seemed to offer a good position to do some observations. To my left a woman was standing who seemed to be on her own, too. She looked a bit miserable. There were three drinks standing in front of her, so presumably she was waiting for two other people. A South Asian woman who passed me had short, dark hair, wore glasses, and was dressed in a white tank top and blue jeans. To my right was a couple, both probably in their 30s, who both had long hair and wore smart dresses. They looked quite pretty and were clearly very much attracted to each other, deeply looking into each other's eyes and passionately kissing. A few metres away in front of me was a group of 'butch dykes' who all had very short hair and were wearing wide jeans and big T-shirts. A mixed-race(?) woman came to the bar. She seemed to be excited to see a woman again whose telephone-number she had lost. (*Fieldnotes, Coyotes, 23 September 2006*)

In this chapter we move from the theoretical terrain discussed in the previous chapter to the practice of doing fieldwork and empirically exploring the livedness of sexuality, 'race' and space. The chapter explains how I came about to choose two lesbian bars in Manchester's Gay Village as research sites, how we can think of those bars in terms of representations of space, representational space and spatial practices (Lefebvre 1991), and why I choose ethnography as the best methodological approach

to gain answers to my research questions. I discuss some issues inherent in this approach, in particular the contradiction intrinsic in participant observations as a method of participating and observing at the same time and ethical issues, such as not being able to gain permission for doing observations from all users of the bars and the blurred boundaries between friends and participants. I describe how I found the participants of this study and difficulties I encountered. I explain the structure of the semi-structured interviews and the logic behind them and how discourse analytical approaches helped me analyse the interviewees' accounts. Throughout the discussion of the different stages of my research, I try to be attentive to and reflective of my own involvement in the making of 'race' and sexuality.

Ethnographic researchers have highlighted the importance of taking a reflexive approach when doing research (see Ali 2006; Davies 1999; Pink 2001; Stacey 1988). In this vein, my active involvement in processes of racialisation and sexualisation needs careful scrutiny. In this regard, Byrne's (2006) concept of perceptual practices can be productively employed not only for how participants make 'race' and sexuality but also for considering how the researcher is involved in this making.

My participant observations and fieldnotes are based on my own perceptual practices. If, as Paul Rodaway (1994: 11) argues, perception is 'a learnt behaviour', then part of my seeing of 'race' might rely on how I have learned not to see whiteness but to see other 'races' (e.g., blackness or Asianness), as is vividly demonstrated in account 1. In my fieldnotes, whiteness is produced 'simultaneously as a non-racial, "empty" and yet normative and dominant social location and category of belonging' (Lewis 2007: 882). I refer to the women and men I perceived as white as 'women' and 'men', and indicate their whiteness through descriptions of hair, for example, while I ascribe racial identities to other people I saw that night. My perceptual practices made

some bodies into ‘black’, ‘South Asian’, or ‘mixed-race’ bodies, while the white bodies were unmarked, not worthy of explicit comment and thus representative of the racial norm (see Byrne 2006). However, it also seems that I attached certain meanings to some bodies: for instance, would I have described the barman as ‘charming’ if I had perceived him as white? Would I have described his interactions with his dancing colleague in this way if I had not perceived it as an interracial encounter? And more importantly, would I have described the group of women as ‘butch dykes’ if I had perceived them as black or would I have named them differently? My perceptual practices racialised *and* sexualised bodies in this setting.

I am not aiming to find abstract universal knowledge or any ‘truths’ in my research; instead, I see myself as the *producer* of the knowledge presented in this thesis. As Donna Haraway (1991) argued, this knowledge production is dependent on the researcher’s own situatedness and can only be partial. Haraway’s concept of ‘situated knowledges’ has been quite influential in feminist research. In the intersections of sexuality and ‘race’, I am positioned as ‘white’ and as ‘lesbian’ and this situatedness impacted on every research encounter. However, to say, for instance, that this thesis is written from the perspective of a ‘white lesbian researcher’ would ‘fix’ my position. As Suki Ali (2006) points out, to be reflective of one’s situatedness demands a constant engagement with processes of becoming. On my part, that means I must be aware of the processes which continuously make me into a ‘white lesbian’. I am further positioned as a European migrant and as German, which makes my position even more complex.

As postmodern ethnographers argue, ethnography is not just a method but a process through which (inter-subjective) meaning is produced. Hence, my research will contribute to processes of meaning-making of ‘race’ and sexuality. While there is

always the danger that the social categories used in research get ‘fixed’ in and through the research process (see Gunaratnam 2003), the poststructuralist approach I take in this thesis raises challenging questions for my empirical research: if ‘race’ and sexuality have no ontological foundation, does my research then not reify sexual and racial categories? If ‘race’ and sexuality are performative, how are they produced in/through the research (see Fortier 1998, 2000)?

The fieldwork spaces

When I began this research, I had only recently immigrated to England and did not know much about the lesbian spaces in the UK. I was living in Lancaster, and from there I undertook some ‘research tourism’ to places like Edinburgh, Liverpool, Hebden Bridge, London and Brighton in search of potential research sites. My decision to do research in Manchester was based on several reasons: Manchester is one of the cities in the UK which stand for ‘multicultural Britain’. At the same time it is also one of the cities known to have a vibrant ‘gay scene’. The Gay Village is one of the most popular sexualised spaces in the UK (it was featured in the popular Channel 4 series, *Queer as Folk*). In addition, the Gay Village has two lesbian bars, a difference to Soho, London’s gay area, for instance, where the *Candy Bar* is the only bar defined as lesbian. The close proximity of the two lesbian bars (they are two minutes’ walk from each other) offers a researcher the potential to compare their livedness and to look at movement between them. A researcher can also see how the representations of space might impact differently on the processes of sexualisation and racialisation in the two bars.

Vanilla and *Coyotes* are both part of Manchester's night-time economy in general and lesbian nightlife in particular. They are two of approximately a dozen bars in the UK which are defined as lesbian or known to be lesbian bars. While my research focuses on those two bars, it should be clear that the bars cannot be looked at independently from other night-time places in Manchester. As Massey (1994: 121) argues, the identities of any place are always constructed through interconnections with what is beyond it. However, it is beyond the scope of this thesis to offer an exploration of the significance of the broader urban context, and I shall therefore limit my analysis to the two bars.

Vanilla and *Coyotes* are differently yet similarly constructed spaces. In the next section, I draw on Lefebvre's (1991) conception of space to explore in greater depth the similarities and differences between them. It needs to be said, though, that my descriptions of the representations of space are based on my own perceptions and in the following I construct a particular version of representations of space.

Vanilla's and Coyotes' representation of space

As I outlined in chapter 2, in Lefebvre's theorising, representations of space are the dominant spaces in any society. The dominant coding of those spaces are created and secured through certain spatial practices.

Vanilla and *Coyotes* are not in the heart of the Gay Village, Canal Street, but on side streets on the fringe of the Gay Village. *Coyotes*, which had been a warehouse, now consists of two quite spacious floors with high ceilings. On the first floor is the main bar at one end of a triangular room. The bar spans the width of the room, at the other end of which is the dancefloor, which is built up higher (like a stage). There are couches and tables at both sides of the room. The walls are painted orange and display

paintings by local artists. On the second floor are the toilets and a separate room where on one side there is a pool table and on the other side two sofas.

Vanilla's building, by contrast, is a small house consisting of two floors which are not very spacious and have low ceilings. The main bar is in the small, square room that makes up the ground floor. The bar is located at one end of the room, and at the other end there is a small stage. The room is furnished with a few tables with chairs and a pool table. On Friday and Saturday nights, staff members remove the furniture in order to create room for dancing. On the second floor are the toilets and a seating area. *Vanilla* has only small windows and during the day is not as bright as *Coyotes*, though the latter also seems to be lighter at night.

The representations of *Vanilla* and *Coyotes* are sexualised and racialised. Both bars are owned and managed by women who identify as lesbians and appear to be white, but the two bars are represented differently as sexualised spaces. When *Vanilla* opened in 1998, it was the first bar in the Gay Village that was defined as lesbian. On the outside wall is a graffito portraying two women, a DJ spinning records on her turntable and a woman dancing next to the DJ. Above this image it says: '*Vanilla*, where the girls are'. In its early days to 'ensure' that only lesbians frequented the bar, women used to be asked at the door if they knew a lesbian magazine. (Some think this is an urban myth, but apparently it's true!) Until today, *Vanilla* has kept a strong lesbian identity and describes itself proudly as 'the best lesbian bar in the UK'. The *Vanilla* team regularly organises lesbian parties, such as *Climax* or *Fishtank*, at different venues and also in other cities, such as Blackpool. On its website it provides a lesbian dating service and 'lesbian shopping', and there is also a link under which all the staff members are listed. The staffs' profiles include their relationship status so

that customers know who is ‘available’.³¹ Part of the spatial practices constituting the representation of space are staff wearing ‘*Vanilla girls*’ T-shirts and jumpers. Some of the bar staff seem to have similar clothes styles (black jeans, studded belt, black tank top or shirt) and similar haircuts (spiky and dyed red); both dress and hair represent almost a *Vanilla* trade mark. Those embodied representations then contribute to a dominant coding of the space.

Apart from a male DJ, all staff members are women who are between 19 and 28 years old. During my early research, I perceived all of them to be white; later, a black bar staff who had first worked in *Coyotes* started to work in *Vanilla*. Some of the staff model for flyers for *Vanilla*’s events.

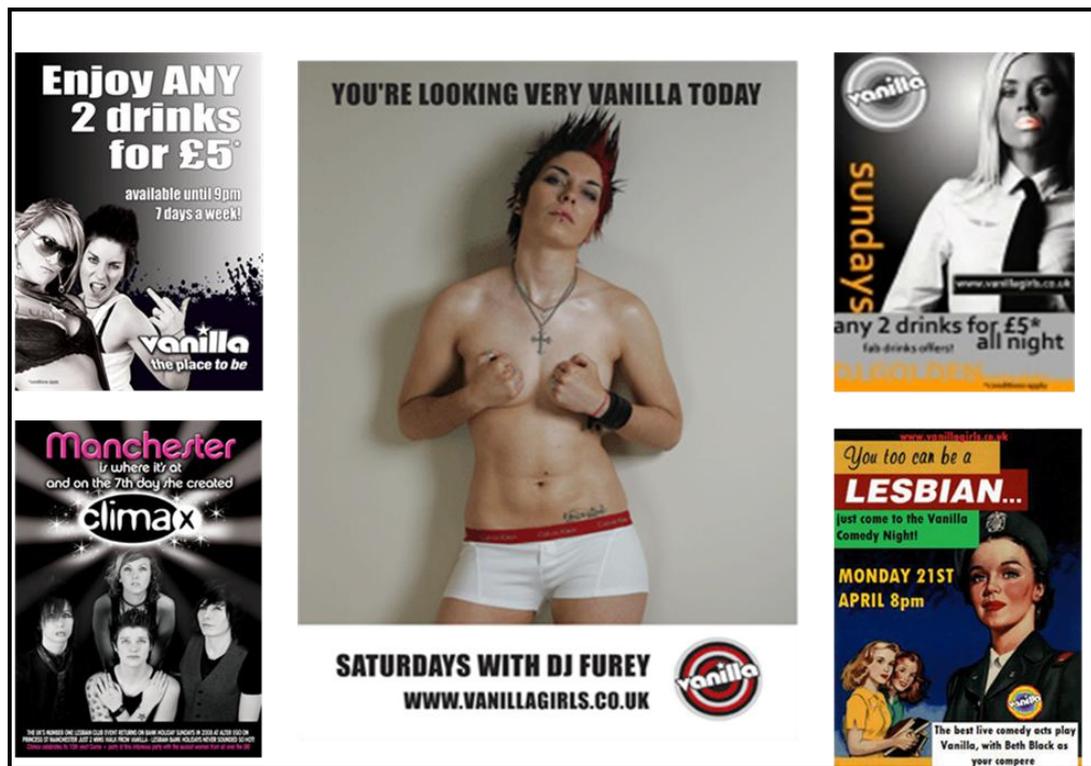


Figure 3: Selected *Vanilla* flyers

On these flyers, *Vanilla* represents a young, confident and almost aggressive (especially the upper left flyer) lesbian image. While this image also seems to confirm the racialised connotation of the bar’s name, it subverts the sexualised notion of

³¹ See www.vanillagirls.co.uk [access date: 08/03/09].

‘vanilla’ through the connotation of ‘sexy aggressiveness’. The representation of this lesbian image seems to draw on popular lesbian culture. For instance, the flyer in the centre replays a scene from season four of the legendary American lesbian soap *The LWord*, where a character named Shane models underwear with the slogan *You’re looking very Shane today*. Episodes of *The LWord* are regularly shown on the TV screens in the main bar, as are music videos by white American pop singer, Pink, who apparently has a lot of lesbian fans. Such representations sexualise *Vanilla*’s space; they also lesbianise and racialise it. *Vanilla* represents mainly a white lesbian image.

Coyotes’ representation is quite different. It does not define or promote itself as a lesbian or gay bar. For instance, it is not listed on ‘scene listings’ for Manchester in the UK lesbian magazine *DIVA* (although some events are listed in *g3* magazine). On some maps of the Gay Village, it is defined as a ‘mixed’ bar.³² The display of lesbian and gay symbols is limited to a rainbow flag hanging at one of the windows and the paintings on the walls, which display lesbian and gay sexual desire. *Coyotes*’ main symbol is a coyote head on the front of the T-shirts worn by staff. *Coyotes*’ staff consists of men and women in almost equal numbers, and during the course of my research several staff were employed that I perceived to be mixed-race or black.³³ A black lesbian is the manager of the door/security staff and works at the door on most nights.

Coyotes’ publicity is limited to its website. It does not produce any flyers for its events,³⁴ nor does it organise any events outside its own bar space. There are a few

³² I have heard that the owner of the bar does not want to define it as a lesbian bar, as in her view ‘it’s a bar for everyone’.

³³ When I started my research in *Coyotes*, there were probably about 10 staff members: a black female bouncer, a mixed-race male bouncer, a black barman, a mixed-race barmaid, and the rest whom I perceived to be white. During my research, a black female barmaid started working in *Coyotes* (and later started working in *Vanilla*) and there was also a black male bouncer. These identifications are again based on my perceptual practices.

³⁴ On its website, *Coyotes* is presented as a place with diverse entertainment: ‘Experience the best in home grown entertainment with something different every night Tuesdays thru until Sundays. Get

TV screens on both floors which usually show random music videos or sometimes football matches. *Coyotes* promotes lesbian culture by having lesbian singers on stage or, say, a Pink impersonator. Fundraising events play an important role in *Coyotes*' representation. A digital banner behind the bar displays the current amount raised for charity through different events (for instance, a head shaving party). Between 2005 and 2007, *Coyotes* raised £15,000 for *Christies*, a hospital for cancer patients in Manchester.

Both bars have similar opening times and charge entrance fees on Friday and Saturday nights.³⁵ They also organise similar events: nights specifically addressed to students, karaoke nights, occasional live music, sport events (usually football) on TV. Their DJs also tend to play similar kinds of music.³⁶ The spatial practices include selling drinks, 'securing' the spaces by bouncers and security people, staff picking up empty glasses, moving furniture around, cleaning the floor, and DJs providing the music. Space is produced here mainly through spatial routines.

All those spatial practices contribute to a dominant representation of sexualised space. Through those dominant codings of space, it is possible to recognise the 'insider' and the 'outsider'. In that respect, both spaces are 'monumental spaces', as they offer their members 'an image of that membership' (Lefebvre, quoted in Allen and Pryke 1994: 460). As is explored in the following chapters, the bouncers' task is to recognise who is a member of the space and who is not.

yourselves in for the footy, live entertainment and the best karaoke experience in town as well as 3 fantastic DJs taking you into the weekend and back out the other side. You'll need a day to recover then we start it all over again.' (www.Coyotesbar.co.uk)

³⁵ Both bars are open late afternoons on weekdays (*Coyotes* is closed on Mondays) and early afternoons during weekends. They both close at about 1am during the week and 4am Saturday and Sunday mornings. *Coyotes* charges £2 on both nights, *Vanilla*, £1 on Friday nights and £2 on Saturday nights.

³⁶ Illustrative of the similarities of music played in both bars was one night when I moved with one of my participants from *Vanilla* to *Coyotes*. When we left *Vanilla*, there was a particular song playing. Coming in to *Coyotes*, we heard the second half of that same song. *Coyotes* organised a dance night for a while called 'Bump 'N' Grind', which was advertised as an RnB and Hip Hop night and where a black female DJ provided the music.

However, not only specific regulations and the staff's spatial practices produce those dominant representations of space. As shown in chapters 4 through 7, the customers' spatial practices also play a crucial role in producing those representations. Lefebvre wrote that through certain spatial practices representational spaces can challenge the dominant representations of space. The chapters that follow look at when those dominant representations of space are contested, and particularly how spatial practices sexualise and racialise the bodies in the spaces.

These research interests require a methodology that is capable of capturing processes and everyday experience, and I therefore chose to conduct ethnographic research in these two bars. In the next section I explain what ethnography as a methodological approach generally is about and what particular methods I chose for my research. I also reflect on some ethical issues which seem to be inherent in the approach I take.

Methodological approach

As I state in the Introduction, my research started with four primary questions: (1) How do lesbian spaces become white? (2) What are the processes that racialise and sexualise lesbian spaces and bodies? (3) What role do place and space play in constituting sexual and racial identities and subjectivities? (4) What is the specific role of whiteness in the interplay of sexuality, 'race' and space? To address these questions, I carried out ethnographic research over a period of 12 months in the Gay Village's two lesbian bars, *Vanilla* and *Coyotes*. I conducted 66 participant observations of nights out, mainly in *Coyotes* and *Vanilla*, and interviewed 19 women, most of whom regularly visit those spaces. Observation and interview are, however,

only two of ethnographic methods I could have chosen. One characteristic of ethnographic research is that basically ‘everything’ relating to the research site can be used as material (see the flyers above for instance) and therefore a variety of methods can be employed to gain material.

While the ethnographical research includes the use of a variety of methods, the understanding of what constitutes ethnography itself is contested. As the term signals, ethnography is concerned with writing about people (*ethno* = people, *graphy* = writing) and therefore refers to both the fieldwork itself and the written product (Davies 1999). In general, ethnographic research approaches the promise ‘to go for depth rather than breadth in the material’ (Denscombe 2003: 165). According to Cook and Crang (1995: 4), the aim of ethnographic research is to gain understanding of parts of the world as they are experienced and lived in everyday lives. Christina Toren (1996: 102) describes ethnography as ‘the comparative, descriptive analysis of the everyday, of what is taken for granted’. Thus, most ethnographic studies are not about ‘spectacles’ but rather about peoples’ daily routines, and ethnography offers a particularly suitable way of grasping the everydayness of processes of sexualisation and racialisation and how sexuality and ‘race’ are *lived* as mutually constitutive categories.

In the past, anthropological studies on ‘race’ have contributed to essentialising racial differences. They were ‘part of a colonial discourse of difference that resulted in the development of scientific racism’ (Ali 2006: 474) and therefore contributed to producing knowledge about the imperial and colonial order and management (Alexander 2006: 401). In recent years, studies conducted on ethnic minority communities in Britain have been criticised for often taking a ‘voyeuristic’ or ‘zoological’ approach and therefore contributing to the tradition of ‘orientalist and

exoticising scholarship' (Alexander 2006: 401). But some researchers illustrate that ethnography can be used in very productive ways for research on 'race' (and whiteness in particular; see work by Les Back, Vron Ware, Caroline Knowles, Anoop Nayak and Claire Alexander). Ethnographic research on sexuality has a complex history and includes research projects which have raised highly ethical questions, especially when doing 'covert' research (see, for instance, Humphries 1970). Research by Kennedy and Davis (1994), Newton (1993) and Wekker (2006) show how ethnography can be sensitively used to study 'lesbian communities' (although in Wekker's case, these communities not defined as such). Whether the focus is on 'race' or sexuality (or both, as in Wekker's research), from a poststructuralist perspective, there has been increasing interest in questions of how research might contribute to reproducing those categories and how the researcher is involved in the making of 'race'. In the next section, where I describe my methods, how I found participants, and the ethical dilemmas encountered during the research, I reflect on my own 'race' making and sexuality making.

Method I: participant observation

Participant observation is the primary methodological tool of ethnographic research. As Cook and Crang (1995: 21) write,

Historically, ethnographic research has developed out of a concern to understand the world views and ways of life of actual people in the contexts of their everyday, lived experiences and the method of participant observation is the means by which ethnographers have often done this.

When I started my fieldwork, I struggled with the contradictions implied in the ‘oxymoronic title’ of participant observation (see Cook and Crang 1995: 21): on the one hand I was immersing myself in the spaces of *Coyotes* and *Vanilla*, being a part of the scene, whereas on the other hand, I was being an observer, which seemed to imply a distant watching of the activities going on in that space (see Cook and Crang 1995: 21-22). I realised that my role and my understanding of being a participant observer might change during the process of the research. In the first weeks of doing research, that is, I felt more like an observer. I was not familiar with the spaces and because I had just recently moved to Manchester, I did not have friends to go out with. I spent a few nights just on my own, just ‘watching’, while at the same time trying to make research contacts. My role as an observer gradually shifted into the role of a participant as I became more familiar with the spaces and immersed in them.

What also contributed to my increased participation was my realisation that in those spaces of ‘fun’ I had to distance myself from the intellectual work of the researcher and the research demands (for instance, the need to be at home to write up my notes) so I could relax and become part of the field. I realised this one Sunday afternoon when I had intended to go to *Coyotes* only for a couple of hours to do some observations and then to come home to do some writing. But plans can go astray. I met a group of women in there, and they persuaded me not to go home but to stay with them. We moved from *Coyotes* to *Vanilla* and back again, and then I met a few other women with whom I had good talks and laughter. Gradually forgetting about the demands of writing, I learned about the pleasures of going out to lesbian spaces on a Sunday afternoon. This experience led me to understand participant observation differently: I learned to participate while at the same time I was observing, not the other way around. As a distant observer, participating is nearly impossible, but as a

participant one can be attentive to interactions. My increased participation led to interesting observations. One of the women in our group was thrown out of *Coyotes* later that Sunday night for allegedly 'sexually provocative' dancing. The staff had had an eye on her before and this was perhaps just the final reason for telling her to leave. This action somehow confirmed Bell and Binnie's (2004) argument that the sexualisation of the Gay Village is regulated in a way that excludes certain sexual practices. While I felt that I had just 'immersed' myself in the field, this incident highlighted my role as a researcher – I was afraid I might also receive an order to stay away from *Coyotes*, which would have resulted in the end of my research there. This example illustrates the complexities of doing participant observation. As Toren (1996: 103) points out, the reading of methodological textbooks and other ethnographic studies cannot 'prepare field workers for the intensity of the field work experience, during which they come to understand what participant observation means'.

Participant observation and ethical dilemmas

The role of participant observer is also very complex because while the researcher is participating, she is also often looking for other participants to interview. In my fieldwork, it was not possible to ask all the women in the bars to participate in my research, as the clientele was constantly changing. Most of the women who were in the bars on my 'observation nights' were not, in fact, aware that I was doing research. This raises ethical issues. I could have shown myself as a researcher by wearing a T-Shirt or a hat proclaiming, *I am a researcher* (as Skeggs et al. 2004 did). In the Gay Village, it is quite common for people to wear T-shirts or hats with silly slogans on them, so on a Saturday night a researcher T-shirt would have been likely to be interpreted as a joke. If taken seriously, then this would have raised other ethical

questions. Some women might have felt uncomfortable by knowing that a researcher was present who was watching and writing about their actions, but these women might not have felt confident enough to come up to me and tell me to stop watching them. My approach thus raises the serious question of how to gain consent from the people I observe. As there seemed to be no solution to this problem, when writing my fieldnotes I tried to preserve confidentiality by not giving too much detailed information about the people I observed or met in the bars. My aim was nobody could be identified. When I got to know people, I told them during the conversation that I was doing research. I never directly approached someone and asked her to be a participant in my study; usually, I asked women when I knew them a bit better if they would like to be interviewed. And this raised a second major ethical issue inherent in the methodological approach: the often blurred boundaries between friend and participant. This was a constant dilemma for me in my research and made me keenly aware of the pitfalls of ethnographic research.

Participant or friend or both?

In her classical article, ‘Can there be a feminist ethnography?’ Judith Stacey argues that the intimate relationships that arise between researcher and researched can create situations of ‘inauthenticity, dissimilitude, and potential, perhaps inevitable betrayal’ (Stacey 1988: 23). Stacey criticises the idea that ethnography is the ‘perfect’ feminist methodological tool because there are underlying assumption that it allows a sharing process in which power inequalities can be minimised. As she argues, ethnographic research can be even more exploitive due to the close relationship between researchers and researched.³⁷ There are power inequalities in the production

³⁷ Stacey’s article was published at a time when traditional positivist methods were being criticised by feminists and when questions about whether particular methods can be called feminist were being

of ethnographic knowledge. Because the researcher is a participant in the field, everything shared in the research process can inevitably become ‘data’, but it is the researcher who has the control over that data and who is the author of the finished written product. Ali (2006: 475) similarly argues that the intimacy in the research process requires the negotiation of even more complex relations of power: ‘Levels of intimacy and trust mean that researchers who go on to “write up” data wield huge power over others and over the data.’

The relationships I formed with women during my research were inevitably influenced by the fact that I was doing research and were therefore somehow ‘inauthentic’. In my case, the power inequalities affected relationships which were also important to me. I considered some of my participants to be friends first and participants in my research only second. While I meant those friendships seriously, I sometimes had the feeling that there was some suspicion on my friends/participants’ part that I only cared about our relationships because of my research.

Quite early in my research, this was highlighted by an encounter I had with a (white) woman I met in *Coyotes*. The first time we met, I was there on my own, she as well, and after a while she approached me on the dance floor and we started talking (as well as we could talk with the loud music). She told me that she recently moved from a small town to Manchester and that she did not have any friends yet in Manchester. This was like my own experience in moving there. We saw each other a few more times in *Coyotes*. I was always happy to see her, for knowing someone in *Coyotes* made the space feel more comfortable. I had told her in our first encounter that I was doing research, and we sometimes talked about it. She once jokingly asked me if she was one of my ‘research objects’. She also told me interesting things about

debated. See, for instance, Du Bois (1983); Duelli Klein (1983); Jayaratne (1983); Jayaratne and Stewart (1991); Kelly, Regan and Burton (1992); Maynard (1994); Maynard and Purvis (1994); Oakley (1998); Westmarland (2001).

her difficulties in ‘becoming a lesbian’ and how empowering it was for her to have *Coyotes* ‘on her doorstep’. One night, when I asked her if she would like to be interviewed, she got quite upset and said that she did not like the idea that I was only talking to her because of my research. She said that she considered me to be a friend and that she entrusted me with personal things. It was as if she felt betrayed in just the way Stacey (1988) described.

This confrontation was one of the most emotionally difficult moments of my research. Although this woman later said that she could understand my position and that the things she told me were interesting for my research, I was left with the dilemma of how to deal with the unclear boundaries of participant/friend. Until the end of my research, I still found it difficult to resolve this dilemma, and there were a few other uncomfortable moments when friends (and lovers) likewise felt betrayed. While this encounter first raised my awareness of the potential difficulties caused by blurred boundaries, it also brought to light the difficulties of finding participants.

Finding participants

At the beginning of my research, I assumed that it would be easier to find participants than it actually was. This assumption was triggered by one of my first visits to *Coyotes*, before I had started my research, when I was still looking for potential research sites. I was sitting with a PhD colleague at a table, and a group of women came in and asked if they could sit with us. One of the white women started a conversation with us. While we were talking about what we are doing in terms of jobs and studying and when I told her that I was doing a PhD, she asked me what my work was about. I told her that I was looking at ‘the importance of “race” in lesbian spaces’. After I had to clarify what I meant by that, she turned to her girlfriend, who was black,

and told her about my research. Her girlfriend then straight away offered to be interviewed. 'Well', she said, 'I can tell you everything about that'. I could not believe my luck. This encounter was very promising. I was happy with having potentially found my first participant, but not only that: this encounter also raised some interesting issues. Firstly, it seemed to confirm the findings of Byrne (2006) and Frankenberg (1993) that white women often think that 'race' has nothing to do with them. After this initial encounter, the same thing happened more times during my research when white women responded to my topic with, 'Oh, I know a black lesbian, maybe you can interview her'. That white women, even when they are in a long-term interracial relationship, seem to think that the topic has nothing to do with them, nor that they have anything to say about it in regard to others who are 'raced', shows that whiteness is not considered as a racial category and that white women are less likely to think about themselves (their identity) in racial terms (or think about the issue in general). Black women, in contrast, are positioned, and might position themselves, as the ones who 'know about it'.

While this early encounter did not lead to an interview (we e-mailed each other a couple of times to find a suitable date, but then she stopped replying), it was very useful as it made me aware of the fact that white women often define 'race' as referring only to people who are defined as 'non-white'. At the end of my fieldwork I e-mailed the black woman again to ask whether she decided not to do the interview because of personal reasons (time, and so on) or if it had anything to do with my research or the way I approached her. She denied that it was the way I approached her and said it was purely a function of time and that our availability had not meshed. She added, however, that she thought that I was 'relaying a genuine "hello" in the bar' and said that if that was not the case, but if I came into *Coyotes* and specifically into the

‘area’ she was in with her friends only for the purpose of ‘making a research contact with a black lesbian’, then she thought that was ‘not right’. This speaks to Stacey’s argument of being ‘inauthentic’, of pretending to be a ‘normal’ customer in the bar while actually doing research.

Furthermore, in this interaction, the woman perceived me to be a white researcher who was specifically looking for black participants. She even seemed to think that I had made contact with her group of friends, particularly, because she was in the group. Although they had actually approached us and her girlfriend had referred me to her, in some ways she was right. I was more aware of her presence than I was about the presence of any of the white women in her group. At the same time, this encounter illustrates that she must also believe that ‘race’ does not refer to white women; otherwise, she would not have thought that I was specifically looking for black lesbians. This discourse somehow circulated between me and her and her partner, confirming that she was *the* person to talk to.

Thanks to this experience and other responses I received from white women who always seemed to feel as if they had nothing to say about my research topic, I changed my initial research approach to ‘I am interested in experiences in lesbian bars and clubs, in particular with regard to issues of diversity’. I further clarified that I was particularly interested in issues of diversity in terms of ‘race’ but also age, class, ability and gender. I chose the term ‘diversity’ because I thought women might find the word easier to relate to, as it is often used in public discourses. I listed the other social categories, first, to also address women who might think they had nothing to say about ‘race’ and, second, because from an intersectional point of view I was interested in how they impacted on the intersections of sexuality and ‘race’, although at the end I was not able to explore this in depth. White women usually reacted quite

openly to this new approach. Interestingly, I had an encounter with a South Asian lesbian whom I was put in contact with by one of my participants (Joanne) that made me realise that changing my research approach did not solve the issue of potential ‘exotification’ and that I needed to be very careful how I presented the focus of research ... and myself. The South Asian lesbian and I had a few e-mail exchanges, and I sent her a short description of what my research was about (experiences, diversity, and so on), but she then decided not to participate. She gave several reasons, one of which was that I had not given her enough information about the research, especially my position and interests. This raised concerns for her, especially, as she said, that I seemed to be a white, European, middle-class, professional who was looking at issues of ‘race’. Here is a part of what she wrote to me in an e-mail:

Black women are often 'exoticised' in the lesbian community or excluded. This is what we have come to expect from the white lesbian world. So the fact that you have not made it clear why you have become interested in documenting black women's experiences rather than exploring lesbian manifestations of exclusion and marginalisation and potentially challenging these, contributes to a lack of safety in exploring issues with/through you. On another note I am often perplexed that white professionals spend so much time documenting black experience but do not spend time actually documenting and challenging directly their own communities to change their attitudes or practices.³⁸

I was quite surprised that she thought that I was interested in documenting black women’s experiences, nothing in the information I had sent her had indicated that.³⁹ So she must have thought that focusing on issues of diversity means interviewing only black women as white women have nothing to say about that.

³⁸ She gave me the permission to reproduce her feedback.

³⁹ I had replied to her request to send her more information with some basic information about my research – that the ‘interview would be about ‘how you experience lesbian spaces such as bars, clubs, etc.’ and ‘how these experiences kind of relate to your own identity’. So, I told her, I would ask questions ‘about being in those spaces and also some questions about yourself’.

Those two examples might also illustrate another issue. If the general perception is that whiteness is not a racial category, and if white women do not (have to) think about 'race', then it is not surprising when black and Asian women refuse to participate in research on 'race', especially when it is conducted by a white researcher (see also Edwards 1990).

While I was not interested in *only* documenting black and Asian women's experiences, I aimed at gaining a 'racially mixed' research sample. This often raised exactly the issues the woman from my first research encounter was addressing – that I directly picked out and approached black women in *Coyotes* or *Vanilla*, not just randomly, but because they were black. I was generally more aware of the people in the space I perceived to be 'non-white', and I usually 'scanned' the spaces for 'racialised others'. On most of my observation nights, women I perceived *not* to be white were present only in small numbers. Approaching them specifically for research, further illustrated this marginality and contributed to a 'process of "Othering" (Alexander 2006: 402) integral to ethnographic research (see above). For instance, one night I approached two black lesbians with the question as to whether they thought it was 'quite white' in there. I was surprised when one of them at first did not understand my question and then denied that the space was 'white' (I explore more of my assumptions below).

I also tried a 'neutral' strategy to gain participants, that is, a strategy which did not require that I directly approach women. A few weeks after I began my research, the Manchester Gay Pride occurred. I saw this as a good opportunity to look for research participants and printed up small flyers to distribute at the event:

Why are all lesbian spaces white? I am doing research which tries to find answers to these questions. If you like to contribute, please contact me: n.held@lancaster.ac.uk.

I put these little flyers, made so that they would easily fit into jeans pockets, on ‘flyer tables’ in bars and tents (such as in the women’s space). Although I saw quite a few women pick up the flyer, I did not get a single response. While it is not possible to know why nobody e-mailed me, the lack of response does not seem to be uncommon. A PhD colleague told me she had tried a similar approach for a different research project a couple of years before and she was also unsuccessful. I can speculate that my flyers might have been too small and women easily lost them or that my research was not seen to be important or interesting enough. It is also possible that my flyer did not give enough information about the research project. This latter speculation was confirmed by an observation one afternoon in *Coyotes*. I had put some flyers on the tables and watched some women read them and put them in their jeans pockets. Two (white) women were holding flyers in their hands and seemed to be discussing them, but one of them seemed confused and looked around at the walls while the other one pointed at her face, and then they both looked around. The idea of lesbian spaces being ‘white’ seemed to lead women to different interpretations (for instance, colour of the walls). But the definition of ‘space’ also seemed not to be clear. My companion that afternoon told me later that she had heard one of the women at that table saying, ‘Lesbian space? Car park spaces, or what?’ I am not quite sure why she thought of ‘car park spaces’, but this incident made me aware of the fact that the meaning of ‘space’ is not clear. As Cook and Crang (1995: 28) suggest, the ethnographer is continuously engaged in a process of translation. The theoretical terms must be translated into plain terms so that the researcher can talk about fieldwork in everyday language. Although I perceived my flyer as a ‘neutral’ strategy to find participants, I

later became aware of the fact that some women might have thought that a ‘non-white’ woman had put the flyers on the tables. Hence, again, I was contributing to forms of ‘Othering’.

While these first research encounter indicated that afternoons might be quite suitable for making contacts, it also seemed to me that women might be using the spaces for intimate conversations, which made being there as a researcher feel like an ‘intrusion’ (see also Miyake 2007). I therefore decided to do my observations mostly on weekends late at night, when *Coyotes* and *Vanilla* are usually quite busy and when dancing is the main activity. The downside of this approach was that the music was usually extremely loud, so that it was difficult to talk to people.

One might think that going out on my own was advantageous for getting to know women, but my experience was that often nobody talked to me, and being there on my own I often did not have the courage to approach people. It took a few weeks until I gradually got to know women in *Coyotes* and *Vanilla* and twelve of those women participated in my research. While I got to know them individually, most of the women also got to know each other during the course of my research. I show in chapter 4 how we formed some ‘going out groups’.

As Burgess (1991: 22) points out, researchers often find participants who are similar to them while others might not be included. The participants of this study are all women ‘I connect to’. Sexuality, age, ethnicity, ‘race’ and class all play a significant role, plus the fact that I was an immigrant and newcomer in Manchester. It is very striking that the majority of my participants are not British and that no one is Mancunian. Appendix 1 presents the ‘cast of characters’ of this study, including personal information about them and where I met them. I include myself, as I consider myself to be a participant of this study and the knowledge that I produce is the product

of those inter-subjective relationships (I come back to that issue in the final part of this chapter).

While I used pseudonyms the interviewees and participants chose for themselves, pseudonyms alone do not ensure anonymity. My participants are drawn from a quite small 'community'. Women who are not white and British would be easily identifiable if detailed information about them were given, so I decided to describe their geographical backgrounds more broadly (for instance as 'South European') to reduce the risk of their being identified. My notes on our nights out in combination with their interviews built the core material I draw on in the following chapters. I also conducted semi-structured interviews with seven other women with whom I never had any nights out.

Method II: semi-structured interviews

In addition to the twelve interviews with the women I met in the Gay Village, I also conducted two interviews in Lancaster as a kind of 'pilot study', which gave me the opportunity to refine my interview guide. I have not included those two interviews in the discussion of my material. In Manchester, I found three interviewees through snowballing, that is, women I interviewed referred me to other women. One of these interviews led to an interracial couple. Although this interview was very rich, I do not draw on it in my discussion, as 'couple interviews' require a very different kind of analysis.

Most of the interviews were conducted at the interviewees' houses, two of the interviews took place at my house, and the interview with the organiser of *Black Angel* was conducted in a coffee shop. To conduct these semi-structured interviews, I

used an interview guide (see appendix 3) which broadly outlined the themes and questions to be covered. The interviews were more like conversations than a strict question/answer format, so I used the interview guide quite flexibly. In general, the interviews had three parts: (1) on lesbian spaces, (2) on the interviewees' identities, and (3) on popular lesbian culture.

I usually began the interviews by asking the women to try to imagine a lesbian space of their dreams and describe what it would look like. After their initial reply, I asked probing follow-up questions about the music, who would be there, and so on. Most of the time, I next asked questions about 'real' lesbian spaces (*Coyotes* and *Vanilla*). This first part of the interview often illustrated how, as Lefebvre argued, perceived and conceived spaces cannot be separated from each other. In my interviewees' accounts, 'dream' and 'real' lesbian spaces were often intermingled, meaning that their perceptions of the 'real' spaces often structured their descriptions of their 'dream' spaces.

Building on those descriptions of lesbian spaces, in the second part of the interview, I often asked how they thought the picture they had just drawn related to their identities. Here I probed them about their identities, and if they had not described themselves before, I asked them about their age, their class background, and where they were born and grew up, and then I asked them if they had ever identified themselves in racial or ethnic terms. From the discussion of their growing up spaces, we often then talked about Manchester and how they perceived and experienced the city, not only the Gay Village but also their neighbourhoods of residence and other areas.

In the two pilot interviews, I asked about the interviewees' identities at the beginning of the interviews. I began with those questions because I assumed that it

would be an ‘easy start’ to let them talk about themselves. To my surprise, women often struggled or even refused to give an account of what were their important identifiers. This illustrated that social science research might use established categories, but these categories do not often in fact have significant meaning for the people studied. On the one hand, in their refusal to identify themselves, my interviewees seemed to be following poststructuralist perspectives. ‘Fixed’ identities were not often seen as important, and sometimes identities were expressed as fluid and changing. On the other hand, not to ‘see’ certain identities or to consider them as not important seemed to be problematic. All of my white interviewees knew they were white, so they might have identified themselves as ‘white English’, for example, but this description was nevertheless quite ‘empty’. Women often said, ‘it does not matter’. (I reflect on the makings of ‘race’ and sexuality in the interviews in the next part of this chapter.)

After asking the more difficult questions in the middle part of the interviews, I usually finished with some questions about ‘lesbian culture’ (whether they know any lesbian singers, authors, and so on). The aim of the last part of the interview was on one hand to finish the interview with some ‘lighter’ questions, and on the other hand to find out how the imaginations of the lesbian culture are racialised. However, this part of the interview did not provide any rich accounts, so I hardly draw on it in my analysis of the interviews.

Making ‘race’, making sexuality in the interviews

There has been quite some debate – often framed in terms of ‘sameness’ and ‘difference’ between the interviewer and the interviewee – among feminist researchers about how ‘race’ impacts the interview situation (see Bhopal 2000, 2001; Edwards

1990; Egharevba 2001; Johnson-Bailey 1999).⁴⁰ In such accounts, ‘racial identity’ is somehow used in ‘fixed’ ways. It is important to analyse how understandings of ‘race’ and sexuality might be shifting during an interview rather than assuming that they are fixed once and for all because, like sexual identity, ‘racial identity is an incomplete project, forever in a process of becoming’ (Nayak 2006: 414). As Anoop Nayak (2006: 426, original emphasis) argues:

Instead of seeing race as a dimension we bring to the interviewing table, a post-race reading would stress the *impossibility* of this identity. The radical potential in this perspective lies in the understanding that our cultural identities are *produced* in the ethnographic encounter itself rather than coming to precede the event.

As I have already noted, in my observations I ‘made’ some women into black or white women. I had a higher awareness of bodies that I perceived to be not white. Furthermore, I homogenised ‘black women’ and assumed that ‘they’ must be aware of the racialisation of space, that it is important for them to be in ‘mixed’ spaces, and that they might feel uncomfortable in ‘white’ spaces (see account above).

My assumptions affected my interviews with mixed-race and black women. In some of those interviews, I was irritated when this was not the case and my interviewee generally did not seem to have critical view of ‘race’ and racism (especially in the interview with Tania). I asked the women directly how they identify racially, and in the interviews with white women I formulated this quite carefully with a question like, ‘Have you ever thought about yourself in racial terms?’ My

⁴⁰ Edwards (1990) has explored the implications of white women interviewing black women. Bhopal (2000, 2001) discusses the implications of her South Asian identity for interviewing South Asian women. Johnson-Bailey (1999) explores the effects of her African-American identity on interviewing African-American women. Egharevba (2001) speaks of experiences of interviewing South Asian women as a black woman.

underlying assumption was that white women do not perceive whiteness as a racial category they identify with, whereas black women think of themselves as racialised.

Both Frankenberg's (1993) and Byrne's (2006) studies illustrate that 'race' is a difficult topic for white women to talk about, especially because of the underlying thought that if white women have something to say about 'race', then they are implicitly racist (Frankenberg 1993: 33). This implies that 'race' generally refers to 'the others' and equals 'seeing difference' with 'being racist'. Byrne notes that her interviewees often spoke more softly when issues of 'race' were raised and how her interviewees used different strategies to avoid addressing 'race' directly (equating colour differences with hair colour, for instance). She found that it was easier for the women to talk about 'cultural differences' (multicultural discourses) and to refer to 'black' or 'Asian', while it was more difficult for them to refer to 'white' as a racial marker (Byrne 2006: 72-73).

I had these findings in mind when I asked white women about how they racially identified themselves. Although I was always a bit tense when asking these questions, most of the time they did not lead to discomfort and often the white women seem to be at ease when discussing issues of 'race' and racism. I had to learn that there were differences within the group of 'white interviewees', however, just as there were differences within the group of 'mixed-race and black interviewees'. While it should not be assumed, as white scholars often do, that people positioned as ethnic minorities do not 'have "the privilege" to be able to avoid the issue of race' (Twine 2000: 21), it should also not be assumed that people positioned as white do not have any 'race awareness'. My interviews indicate that 'race' is much more fluid than the strict categorisation of 'black' and 'white' people. My assumptions about who has

‘racial awareness’ and who does not illustrates one of the ways ‘race’ was produced in the ethnographic encounter.

While ‘race’ worked in complicated ways in the interviews, the making of sexuality was rather more subtle. As sexuality is continuously in process, it had to be made and re-made in interactions in the lesbian spaces and in the interviews (see Fortier 1998). In all my interviews, there was an assumed understanding of sharing the same sexual identity. Sexuality was somehow assumed and became fixed through this understanding. I often did not even ask how the interviewees identified sexually, but only asked in a general way what importance their sexuality had in their lives. I assumed that awareness in my interviewees of sexuality issues and a critical understanding of sexual discrimination and was sometimes surprised when this was not the case (especially in the interview with Danielle, see chapter 6). However, what became also clear to me was that I seemed to assume more ‘sexuality awareness’ from white interviewees and more ‘race awareness’ of mixed-race and black participants, and while I discussed more issues concerning sexuality with white interviewees, in the interviews with mixed-race and black women I focused more on issues of ‘race’. How sexuality and ‘race’ intersected in the interview encounter is shown in my interview with Joanne who self-identifies as bisexual and mixed-race. I was quite oblivious to the fact that she identifies as bisexual, and when she referred to her mother, grandmother and brother, I imagined all of them to be black. This illustrates not only how whiteness is often invisible in the category of mixed-race but also how I ‘made’ her into a black lesbian.

These examples illustrate that I was not merely collecting ‘data’ in my research but that I was also an active *producer* of the material presented in this thesis.

This has implications for the material generated, the analysis of the material, and the knowledge produced.

Analysing the material

Although the material presented in this thesis was generated through an interactive process, I am the final producer of its meaning. One of the strengths, but also a downside, of ethnographic research is that the researcher is usually left with an incredible amount of material. By the end of a year of fieldwork, I had written 170,000 words of fieldnotes, 36,000 words of reflections on my feelings/thoughts/concerns of being in the field and the progress of the research (I wrote a separate research diary⁴¹), and 33 hours of recorded interviews. I used similar strategies to analyse the 66 detailed participant observations and the 19 interview transcripts. This included, first, reading and re-reading of all the material – an initial coding process – and looking for recurring themes and patterns (see Creswell 2005: 237). In order to be able to quickly remember the nights out, I had noted a few keywords for each observation that characterised the night and a short summary of the night. I constructed a table (see the illustration, below) in which I noted the keywords, together with date and place of observation and who had been with me on those nights.

⁴¹ My reflections did not focus on specific observations, but more on things that happened ‘outside’ the field (see Cook and Crang 1995: 31-35). However, this does not mean that my fieldnotes and diary were distinct from each other. My fieldnotes also contain a lot of feelings, thoughts and connections to readings, etc.

30	07/01/07; Sunday, 2.30- 5.30 pm	Coyotes	Louise, Clare	Football; Pat – unspoken subject; transvestite in his man’s clothes because “AXM” is closed; not very busy (just against Watford?); very smoky (still from the weekend?) (1000 words)
31	10/01/07, Wednesday, 9.30 pm – 2 am	Coyotes Vanilla	Di, later Amanda	Quiet, only couples in Coyotes; playing pool - new heater in the pool room (?); rock night in Vanilla; real “kindergarten”, very cliquey; only four women with short hair (out of 20-25); great place for young girls; L Word (season 3) in background on screens; Amanda – I see her as research participant (but she does not know it yet); you need “attitude” to work in Vanilla?; no tab water; difference of bouncers (Coyotes/ Vanilla) (2500 words)
32	12/01/07, Friday, 11 pm-3.45 am	Coyotes Vanilla Coyotes	Louise, Clare, Danielle + new gf	After the interview with Louise; horrible cough; some of my “new” friends together; Coyotes boring first time, then better later (after Vanilla); problems with Louise’s Coyotes stamp; Coyotes’ barmaid in Vanilla (first time that I had seen one in there); Vanilla-shirt with English flag (worn by a barmaid); Vanilla first livelier then boring; all my interviewees there (Sarah was also there with ultra cool friend); Clare - the hunter (2 women that night) + binge drinker; Clare and Amanda snogging; emotional night, Amanda telling me that I make Manchester more home for her, ethical dilemma; she has always trouble with guys (heterosexual appearance?); I approached the Germans, Andrea told me that she has problems because of her gender ambiguity, Jens told me of hostility towards Germans in the South of England; Manchester scene better than London? (4800 words)
33	13/01/07, Saturday, 10.30 pm - 3.30 am	Coyotes	Firth	Knackered from night before (+my cold); Coyotes the best lesbian space you can get besides Candy Bar in Brighton? (Firth said that); Sphere women; Linda; some women I saw last weekend (group around small black woman, the blonde “nice and friendly” looking woman (now after Danielle’s theory I actually think that she is not from Britain!), small woman with curly dark hair and glasses; Tania gave me kiss; German crowd (Andrea, Jens); discussion with Amanda: ETHICS IN THE FIELD - friendship/research participant problem; what that space offers: feminist, empowering, coming out; very emotional night (crying when I came home); women smiling at me and trying to make contact (felt very friendly); Amanda’s night with Clare, red bull on table still there after an hour, a jacket missing, Kylie in Manchester (3500 words)

This table was particularly useful, as it enabled me to easily trace things said in the interviews back to particular nights out.

The poststructuralist thinking underlying this thesis has particular effects on how I treated the interviews in my analysis. For instance, I am not mainly interested in how ‘lesbians’ experience lesbian spaces. I follow Brah’s approach that ‘contrary to the idea of an already fully constituted “experiencing subject” to whom “experiences happens”, experience is the site of subject formation.’ (Brah 1996: 116) The implications of this are twofold. First, rather than occurring on already constituted and fixed subjects, experiences shape subjectivities. This is not to say that subjects are blank slates that lack experience; it is to recognise that subject formation is an ongoing

process and that experience continuously shapes subjects and subjectivities. Second, experience, as Joan Scott (1992) has argued, it is not foundational but is rather the site where particular understandings of the world are mobilised. Thus, I am interested in the processes of meaning-making that are crucial to the processes of subject formation. To capture these processes of meaning-making I draw on discourse analytical approaches to analyse my interview material.

Discourse analysis can generally be described as ‘the close study of language in use’ (Taylor 2001: 5). According to Rosalind Gill (2000: 172-173), there are probably at least fifty-seven versions of discourse analysis. What they all share is a belief that language is not just a neutral means of describing the world, but that discourses are central in constructing social life:

The term “discourse” is used to refer to all forms of talk and texts, whether they be naturally occurring conversations, interview material or written texts. Discourse analysts are interested in texts in their own right, rather than seeing them as a means of getting at some reality that is assumed to lie behind the discourse, whether social or psychological. (Gill 1996: 141)

The term ‘discourse’ has complex meanings and generally refers to all written and spoken text. As James Paul Gee asserts, discourses are material realities in the sense that they are ‘out in the world’, but at the same time they

also exist as the work we do to get people and things recognized in certain ways and not others, and they exist as maps that constitute our understandings. They are, then, social practices and mental entities, as well as material realities. (Gee 1999: 23)

In analysing my interviews, I am mainly interested in looking from a Foucauldian perspective at how sexual and racial subjects are ‘produced through the workings of a set of discourses’ (Potter and Wetherell 1994: 47). My research is thus

informed by discourse analysis in that sense that I want to explore what work the ‘big’ discourses do. So I look in the interview material for particular discourses and examine how my interviewees produce, re-produce and challenge discourses. This sometimes involves looking closely at the language used by the interviewees to analyse what work they are doing to produce and re-produce certain discourses, as well as how the discourses themselves work to produce certain sexual and racial meanings. My research aims to produce thick ethnographic description. The analysis of rhetorical strategies, and so on, is limited.

My position in the field

I follow postmodern understandings of ethnography that see ethnography as not so much a method as a process through which meaning is produced. I am not a distanced researcher who is emotionally detached from what is going on in the field. Just as my fieldwork relies on me as the research instrument, it also impacts on me. Ethnographic knowledge, then, is produced through an interactive relationship between me, the fieldwork spaces, and the participants of this study. As Amanda Coffey (1999: 8) argues, ‘Fieldwork is itself a “social setting” inhabited by embodied, emotional, physical selves. Fieldwork helps to shape, challenge, reproduce, maintain, reconstruct and represent our selves and the selves of others’.

The fieldnotes and interviews on which my analysis presented in chapters 4 through 7 is based are the outcome of interactions in which I sexualised and racialised marked women while at the same time they marked me. As France Winddance Twine (2000: 17) argues, in certain local and national contexts researchers ‘frequently have to negotiate the way their bodies are racialised and the meanings attached to these

racialisations.’ At the same time, as Anne-Marie Fortier (1998) asserts, researchers also have to negotiate the way their bodies are sexualised. Although Twine refers to researchers’ bodies marked as ‘racially other’ in racially heterogenic fields, the white researcher’s body is racialised even when the field is predominantly white. The racialisation and sexualisation of my body made it easy for me to gain entrance to the two lesbian bars as well as other gay bars; in contrast, some of my participants found entrance more difficult, as I show in the following chapters. I never felt excluded. I never experienced a ‘look’ making me out of place (see chapter 5; see also Held and Leach 2008). I quite fitted in there. My body did not stand out. It was ‘at home’ in these white lesbian spaces (see Ahmed 2007).

However, I was not completely ‘at home’, and I was often reminded of that when I was asked what my accent was. This further illustrates that perceptual practices work not only visually but through other senses, too, as I have already argued in chapter 2. My body might have been visually marked as white and lesbian (and maybe British), but when women heard me speak, it got differently marked. I was constantly asked where I was from, and when I replied, there followed discussions about culture and language differences. Women often referred to me as *the German*.⁴² Although my body was ‘read’ as white, I often got marked out in terms of my nationality, which was revealed by my accent.

Account 2

We are standing next to each other and she encourages me to dance. ‘Move your hips’, she says. She tells me that her girlfriend is white but that she has taught her how to dance. (*Coyotes*, August 25, 2006)

⁴² The BBC TV program *What Not to Wear* was once advertised with a comment made by the presenters ‘Oh, my God . . . she looks like a German lesbian’ (see McRobbie 2004: 106). So it seems that there exist some stereotypes about German lesbians that might affect how I might be ‘read’ or perceived.

In account 2, a black woman teaches me how to dance and somehow makes me into a white woman by attaching the meaning to my body that white people cannot dance. This example illustrates that whiteness is not invisible to everybody, that stereotypes about white people exist (see hooks 1997), and that everybody is involved in the processes of racialisation (Lewis 2004, 2007). When I analysed my fieldnotes, however, her ‘race making’ remained invisible to me for quite a while.

Conclusion

As postmodern ethnographers argue, ethnography is not just a method but a process through which (inter-subjective) meaning is produced. My research not only documents the processes of meaning-making of ‘race’ and sexuality, but it also contributes to those processes. Woven through this chapter was the question of how to account for my own involvement in the making of sexuality and ‘race’. This thesis is very much the product of my perceptual practices. While I have mainly focused on visual perceptual practices, ethnography is about not only seeing. All of our senses are involved when we are doing ethnographic research. Even though I have not discussed them, my other sensual practices also produce sexuality and ‘race’ in the field.

My research sites are particular spaces – they are constructed around sexuality, they are spaces of ‘partying’, they are loud, and drinking, dancing and having sexual encounters are main spatial practices. Because they are somehow ‘spaces of intimacy’, the relationships built among participants are likely to be intimate. I discussed the issues of not having clear boundaries between friends and participants and I included myself as a participant of this study. This chapter has given some insights into the complexities of ‘race’ and sexuality. In the chapters that follow I hope to tease out

some of the everyday processes and the complex ways in which 'race', sexuality and space are lived.

When I was looking for participants, I sometimes hoped to make contact with one of the many (friendship) groups I saw in my fieldwork spaces. Through making contact with a group, I might gain several participants at one time. I also thought it would be interesting to explore how women interact with each other in those groups, how they make 'race' and sexuality within them, and maybe how they draw boundaries around the groups. It never happened that I got to know a group of women who regularly go out together. Instead, I got to know women individually, and those women got to know each other, hence I gradually built my own friendship/participant groups around me. The next chapter looks at two of those groups and explores issues of 'group-ness' and sexuality, of 'race' and space.

Chapter 4: Going-Out Groups

Introduction

Account 3

After I had a quick look in *Vanilla* to see whether the members of our going-out group were there, I went out again. Lots of women were standing around. It was so 'lesbian'. They had put some Dixie toilets outside, the garage was being used for another bar, and a fence had been put up next to it. There were big stones on the ground to sit on. It was really busy. I bumped into Christi, and we looked for the others. It was good to see them again: Juan, Danny, Lu, Kate, and Simone. There were a few Chinese women there, too, friends of Danny, who came up from London. When I talked to Kate, she told me that a friend of hers had made a comment about the fact that 'so many Chinese lesbians' were there. Kate said that she 'thinks it's great' and that she liked to be together with people from other cultures as there was so much to learn about them. Lu was excited that 'so many tomboys' were there and jokingly said that she needed to find one before Qooz came back (she had left to pick Maya up). When Qooz and Maya arrived, we all walked in together. It was a bit inconvenient, as it was permitted to take the drinks outside but not to take them inside again (to avoid that people bringing in drinks from other venues). We didn't stay inside *Vanilla* for long, but went out again and had a drink in front of the garage.

After a while we decided to go to *Coyotes*. On our way, it seemed that Maya had eyes only for Verena, a blonde student from Central Europe whom she had kissed the weekend before. There was a long queue in front of *Coyotes*, but it did not take long to get in. Wow, it was really busy! And it had a good atmosphere, everybody was grooving. We all went to the dance floor. Juan sometimes tried to bring me and Qooz closer together (Qooz's girlfriend had gone home), Maya enjoyed herself by getting the attention of lots of women. I also exchanged a smile with a nice-looking woman who seemed to be quite young. The two black women I had seen several times before, and who were one of the rare black lesbians couples I have ever seen in there, came in. There were a few other 'ethnic minority' women, but it seemed generally to be quite 'white'. Maya started dancing and kissing with a Chinese woman, who after a while was reaching her hand out to touch me while she was still dancing with Maya. Maya told us later that this woman said to her that she was not a lesbian. Simone and Verena were suddenly dancing with each other, and it seemed that they started kissing as well. Juan and I just exchanged knowing glances; this might soon lead to a drama. A bit later, when Verena was talking (and flirting?) with another woman, Maya got really jealous and asked why she'd prefer that woman over her. (*Fieldnotes, Manchester Pride, Friday, 24th August 2007*)

As I explained in chapter 3, it took some time until I was able to grasp what it meant to do 'participant observations', i.e., to 'observe' and to 'participate' at the same time. In fact, my fieldnotes of account 1 (which open chapter 3), which I had

written at the beginning of my fieldwork, seem to be written more from the perspective of an observer. In contrast, account 3, which I recorded at the end of my 12 months fieldwork, indicate that by that time I had become much more a participant. A reason for that was that I now was part of a ‘going out-group’. My interactions in this group – which were shaped by my position as a member of the group *and* a researcher – led to much ‘richer’ observations of the processes of sexualisation, racialisation and space-making. As I explained in chapter 3, some of the members of the group got to know each other through my research, which made my research somehow constitutive of the formation of the group. This illustrates that groups are shaped and that being part of a group is not something that is just a given, but that belonging needs to be achieved.

In this chapter, I look at the formations of going-out groups and link those formations of groups to issues of ‘group-ness’ on a wider level: it is often assumed that minoritised people have some common characteristic that mark them as distinctive and homogenous. Some markers are used to categorise them into a particular group. As Beverly Daniel Tatum (2003) writes, people who are perceived as belonging to an ‘ethnic minority’ group are often not perceived as individuals, but are primarily identified with that group. In her book with the provocative title, “*Why are all the black kids sitting together in the cafeteria?*” she describes that this is a commonly asked question on campuses in the U.S., and it is asked in a tone that indicates that there is a ‘problem’. While ‘the black kids’ are perceived to be building exclusive groups, she writes, it remains unnoticed – by white people – that ‘the white kids’ also sit together in groups in the cafeteria. This indicates that white people are more likely to be ‘viewed as an individual, rather than as a member of a racial group’ (Tatum 2003: 8). bell hooks, also uses the example of students sitting together in the

cafeteria in her discussions with students in her classroom. When she tries to turn it around by asking white students why they think they are sitting together as a group, the white students explain it as sharing ‘common interests’. As hooks (1992: 16-17) points out, the white students ‘were rarely at the point where they could interrogate whether or not shared “whiteness” allowed them to bond with one another with ease.’

Lesbians and gay men are minoritised in the same sense that some markers characterise them as such. Will Young, for example (see the Introduction), is defined as the ‘gay singer’, and in some spaces a group of lesbians might be marked as lesbians. In the Gay Village, people tend to go out in groups, but the formation of these groups are often not recognised in those spaces if the groups are not particularly marked – they are if the people in the group are minoritised within the minoritised group of lesbians and gay men. The formation of groups is expected to be on grounds of ‘shared sexuality’. However, groups might be also formed around ‘shared whiteness’. Because the whiteness is usually not seen by white people, a group of black or Asian lesbians going out together is much more visible. ‘Race’ can therefore disrupt the assumption of group formation based on shared sexuality.⁴³

This chapter explores wider forms of ‘group-ness’ and the formation of going-out groups where some members are not only minoritised in terms of sexuality but also because of their nationality, ethnicity and/or ‘race’.

Groups can be researched from different perspectives. Group processes have been widely studied in the field of social psychology (Wetherell 1996) and by Tajfel, who offers a highly influential, if critiqued, theory of group formation and inter-group relations (Tajfel 1981; Tajfel and Turner 1986).⁴⁴ In the social sciences, Charles K.

⁴³ In chapter 7 I discuss an incident where one of the white participants of this study got angry when she saw a group of black women coming into *Coyotes* together.

⁴⁴ Social psychology is beyond the scope of this thesis.

Warriner (1956) argued more than 50 years ago against the common belief held at that time that a group is just an assemblage of individuals and less ‘real’ than individuals. He claimed that studying social interactions within groups and treating groups ‘as real units or systems’ leads to findings that are different from studying individuals. Therefore, studying groups might tell us something different about sexuality, ‘race’ and space and lead to findings we would not get without looking at groups. According to Vernon Wilson and Paul Zisman (1992: 201), a group has ‘its own independent effects on the individual and the social system of which it is a part’.

But what constitutes a group in the first place? I find Wilson and Zisman’s definition useful. They argue that a group

can be defined as three or more individuals who, by their pattern of interactions over a period of time, form a *social space* within which a degree of emotional bonding occurs. (1992: 202, my emphasis)

People who interact with each other to emotionally satisfy needs is what distinguishes ‘true groups’ from a ‘bunch of people’. As Wilson and Zisman point out, while the individual members of a group do not necessarily need to be always present at the same time they do need to be known as members of the group.

Wilson and Zisman’s definition is useful, as it points to the ways in which we can think of groups as *process*. The question now is this: How do group formations relate to the issues of ‘group-ness’ described above? How might the social space and the emotional bonding be affected by group members who are marked as belonging to certain social groups? Like Tatum and hooks, Wilson and Zisman looked at group formations in a cafeteria of a desegregated junior high school in the U.S. They observed two different kinds of group formations: (1) ‘tight-knit groups’ (cliques), which consisted of students who shared the same table every day, who rarely visited

other tables, and whose table was rarely visited by other students, and (2) ‘loose-knit groups’ whose boundaries were more flexible. Crucial to the changes in the loose-knit groups were ‘table-hoppers’ who visited different tables in one day or on different days.

Wilson and Zisman found that cliques tended to be racially homogeneous, whereas there was greater ‘racial mixing’ in the ‘loose-knit groups’.⁴⁵ They explain this difference with what they call ‘rule of intimacy in “race” relations’: there is greater racial mixing in loose-knit groups because those groups require less intimacy (Wilson and Zisman 1992: 203). Wilson and Zisman also suggest that schools should encourage the formation of loose-knit groups.⁴⁶ In their approach, racial categories are used in rather fixed ways and while Wilson and Zisman look at the formations of groups on grounds of ‘race’, they cannot provide any information about the processes involved in the formation of the groups, as their findings are primarily based on quantitative observations (i.e., taking note and counting who is sitting with whom at a table).

This chapter offers an ethnographic description of the group formations and processes I encountered during my research. I focus on two going-out groups: the group described in account 3 and another group of which I was part for several months. I define both groups as ‘loose-knit groups’ because their boundaries were flexible and the groups were generally open for new members or ‘group hoppers’. As I show, however, being a table or group hopper might be more complex than Wilson and Zisman suggest.

⁴⁵ According to Wilson and Zisman (1992: 205), loose-knit groups also consisted of ‘a stable core of members’, but these members encouraged interactions with students who were not members of the group.

⁴⁶ The underlining idea here is that interracial contact is good for ‘race relations’, an idea which became popular in the U.S. in Gordon W. Allport’s (1954) ‘intergroup contact theory’. This theory suggests that if white people have individual personal contacts with black people, this will dissipate prejudices toward them as a group.

A crucial difference to Wilson and Zisman's research is that the going-out groups of my research were formed primarily on the basis of 'shared sexuality' and the common practice of going out in the Gay Village. While both of the groups I studied came together on the grounds of sexuality, they were mixed in terms of nationality, ethnicity and 'race', and some of the group members were minoritised in more than one way. I look at how racialised or ethnicised minoritisation influenced the groups from the outside and also how minoritisation operated within the groups. I explore the 'social space' produced within groups and how racialising and sexualising practices played in and out in the group dynamics and in the 'emotional bonding' between group members.

Although sexuality formed the basis for the group formation in the Gay Village, it was both negotiated and in process. As account 3 relates, sexuality might have been the core for the emotional bonding between group members, but it sometimes also created distance (through jealousy, for instance). There is a dynamic relationship between the space within the group and the space outside of the group. The space outside of the group impact on group dynamics through the ways in which group members' bodies are sexually and racially constituted before they enter the space of the group. Within the group these sexualised and racialised positions might be re-constituted or challenged.

In this chapter, I analyse how sexualisation, racialisation and spatialisation are at work to convene and disrupt groups and how the dynamics within the groups act back upon how group members experience themselves as sexualised and racialised subjects.

In the next part of the chapter, I focus on the first going-out group and outline how sexuality and ethnicity intersected in the formation of the group. I then explore

how some members of the group are ethnically marked by people outside the group, how they seem to have a liminal belonging to the group ‘lesbians’, and how this marking impacted on the interactions within the group. Following on, I focus on the articulation of sexual desires and discuss sexualising and racialising processes (based on ‘group-ness’) within the group. In the last part of the chapter, I focus on the second going-out group and explore how perceptions of the texture of hair and touching hair can racialise bodies and fix or destabilise group boundaries.

Group formations

The group I discuss was ethnically mixed and most of its members were migrants.⁴⁷ Most members of the group got to know each other in the Gay Village, and we tended to meet mostly for the purpose of going out. After a night out, we often said to each other, ‘See you next weekend’. Thus, the Gay Village (and my research) was constitutive of the group’s formation. When some group members met for the first time in *Vanilla*, and we talked about where we are from, not everybody was initially sure of anyone else’s country of birth. Although we had met in a lesbian bar, sexuality was not first assumed, so we began by checking whether we all identified as ‘gay’. Sexuality operated in ways in which ‘gay life’ in Manchester is constructed as ‘open’ and ‘free’, whereas in other countries sexual life for lesbians and gay people is characterised as ‘oppressed’. Being minoritised seemed to be a reason for us to be able to meet in *Vanilla* in the first place: Maya and Qooz said that the simple fact that the Gay Village exists played a role in their decision to come to Manchester. As we

⁴⁷ Core members of the group were: Maya (white East European), Qooz (East Asian), Juan (a Latin American man), Simone (white British), Christi (East Asian), Danny (East Asian), Lu (East Asian), Kate (white British), Nina (white Central European). I interviewed Maya, Simone and Qooz (see cast of characters, appendix 1).

learned through our conversations, most of us had lived in England for several years, we defined ourselves as ‘gay’, we had a similar dress sense, and we shared a passion for dancing.

Despite all those similarities, however, our bodies were ethnically marked, and this marking played a role in our interactions both within the group and with people outside the group. Some group members seem to ‘fit’ better in the spaces than others, and this not only because of visible markers. Nirmal Puwar (2004: 150) argues that in spaces where ‘black bodies are marked out as “different” and as “other” in a negative way, they are actually under pressure to minimise any signs of cultural difference.’ When I first got to know Qooz, Danny and Christi, I became aware of possible strategies for minimising difference. When we introduced ourselves to each other, I was worried that I would have difficulty understanding, pronouncing and remembering their names, but to my surprise, they all introduced themselves with English names. In our interview, Qooz explained that she had invented her English name when she came to Manchester because ‘it’s easier for people to recognise, easier for them to remember’. This might suggest her assimilation to Anglo domination and illustrate an act of minimising ‘any signs of cultural difference’ (Puwar 2004: 150). Although Qooz said she changed her name to make it easier for people to address and remember her, she seems to have chosen an English name as a strategy also to make life in the UK easier for her. Having a pronounceable name helps especially in the lesbian bars, where having to repeat your name several times can become tiring and lead to uncomfortable situations caused by the loudness of the music.

As I wrote above, I define group as ‘process’. Our group was never fixed. It was constantly in the process of being formed. Sexualisation and racialisation played a major part in the process of formation. From the beginning, sexuality intersected with

nationality and/or ethnicity in the formation of the group, which was formed around a sexual identity *and* a migrant identity, and both identities were crucial in the emotional bonding within the group; as I show below, however, this bonding was sometimes disrupted by ethnicity, ‘race’ and sexuality. The group’s internationality was often noticed by the group itself, especially on occasions when we recognised that not one single one of us had been born in Britain. We were proud of the group’s mix. Sometimes, however, our pride turned into ‘anti-Britishness’. When the group was getting smaller due to visa regulations and we were thinking of ‘recruiting’ new members, Qooz said, ‘But less British’. She and Maya were critical of having British friends, in part because both found keeping in contact with British people problematic. Maya said that

you can see that it’s different because they are foreigners [sic.], we are foreigners [sic.] and it’s different, you’re always, you get in touch and you see each other, with British it’s so fucking wasting time [sic.].

Similarly, Qooz said she does have a few British friends, but not ‘very close’ ones, and that she feels she always has to contact them. While Maya did not seem to interpret these difficulties in forming friendships as being based on being a minoritised person (an East European), as I explore below, in Qooz’s case, being minoritised seems to play a role in her interactions with British people. The group had actually two white British members, however: Kate and Simone. While they were somehow minoritised within our group, other group members seemed to have a liminal belonging to the group of ‘lesbians’ (outside of our group), as I demonstrate in the following part.

Liminal belonging to the group of lesbians

Whenever I raised the issue of racism, no one in the group gave any account of feeling treated differently in the lesbian spaces because she was not British. When Qooz described her dream lesbian space, she said that the women could all be British if they accepted her and did not discriminate against her. I then asked her if she had ever felt discriminated against in Britain:

Qooz: Yeah, a lot.

Nina: Yeah, OK, and how?

Qooz: Not really from that lesbian group, that, it's like ... er, how do you say ... it's like they treat you different if you're Asian or British, they treat different way.

Nina: Mhm.

Qooz: It's like they treat British nicer I don't know how to explain it, but it's just a feeling, yeah....

In this brief conversation, it seems unclear who the 'they' are that Qooz is referring to. Who are the people who treat her differently? As I understood it at the time, she was referring to (white?) British people in general. What is interesting here is her reference to 'that lesbian group'. It suggests that while she does not feel discriminated against in lesbian spaces – in contrast to other spaces – she also does not seem to feel entirely part of that group. Her belonging to the group 'lesbian' seems to be ambiguous, and I would call it 'liminal'. Although in this conversation, it could be a matter of translation, some of my observations suggest that East Asian women indeed seem to be not fully 'members' of the monumental lesbian spaces (see chapter 3) but are often singled out/marked as 'Chinese'. This sometimes happened at Gay Pride, and account 3 offers a first example of that ('so many Chinese lesbians'). There

were a few other moments during the Pride weekend when the marking of bodies as ‘Chinese’ came to the fore.

One early evening I was with Christi in *Vanilla*, which was the meeting point for the group. We were waiting for the others. When Christi went to the toilets upstairs, I was standing next to a group of young white women. When Christi came back down, one of the women in the group giggled and said, in a derogative tone, ‘that Chinese girl’ as the others watched Christi coming down the stairs. I had the feeling that Christi noticed she was being marked out by the group of women in *Vanilla*, although this marking remained unspoken between us. But shortly afterwards we decided to leave and wait for the others outside. Later that night our group went to *Fishtank*, a club party organised by *Vanilla*. I was talking to somebody when Christi came to me and asked where the others were. She seemed to be quite distressed and was relieved when we finally found them. This episode demonstrated to me how important our group was. While some members of the group could be singled out by others as ‘*the Chinese*’, this marking was not possible within our group. Later that night, we were all sitting in a corner near two blonde women in smart dresses. They looked around and seemed to be bored, but not keen to interact with others. Qooz and Lu were dancing in front of them and started kissing. I caught the two women ‘gazing’ at them (more on the gaze in chapter 5) while they were talking to each other, and it seemed to me that they made some uncomplimentary comments, as indicated by the expressions on their faces. So here sexuality was enacted through kissing and, as Ahmed (2006) argues, made through orientation towards and contact with the lesbian body. As was often the case through such sexual practices, group members both contributed to the sexualisation of the spaces and also constructed the space within the

group. However, the kiss between Qooz and her girlfriend seemed to be more visible than other kisses and it also racialised – or rather ethnicised the space.

According to Puwar (2004), the presence of bodies in spaces they are not expected to be in because they do not belong to the somatic norm can occasion disorientation for the people who represent the somatic norm. Although there might have been other reasons why their kiss caused some disorientation for the two white women, I want to suggest that one reason for their disorientation was the liminal belonging of East Asian lesbians (and lesbian couples) to the group, ‘lesbians in Manchester’. As I wrote in chapter 2, through the separation of China Town as an ethnicised space and the Gay Village as a sexualised space, sexualised bodies have been racially fixed as white and the ‘other’, in this case the ‘East Asian body’ read as ‘Chinese body’ has been fixed as belonging to China Town (or if in the Gay Village, then as selling toys on Canal Street).⁴⁸ This kiss was not just a lesbian kiss – a kiss sexualising bodies – but it was also a kiss between two women who were perceived to belong to a different minoritised group. Hence, it destabilised the boundaries of the group ‘lesbian’, which seems to be implicitly constructed as white. While members of our group might have been marked by those two white women, this seemed to have remained unnoticed by the other members of the group (apart from me) and did not directly affect the interactions within our group.

On a different night (not at Gay Pride), I was in the *New Union*.⁴⁹ with a friend of Qooz and a male East Asian member of the group. There were many people in the room, but it was not packed, as it sometimes is. I could still see lots of floor space

⁴⁸ Also in popular lesbian culture, the somatic lesbian norm is predominantly white, and representations of East Asian lesbians are rare (see *DIVA* and *g3* magazine). This seems to have changed slightly over recent years.

⁴⁹ The *New Union* was the first bar that opened on Canal Street (in 1959). At that time, its main clientele were white working-class men. The classed and gendered space of the bar seems to have shifted a bit.

between the groups standing around or dancing. It was a very white space. We were dancing to the charts played by the white male DJ. I did not know Qooz's friend very well, but I had the feeling that her friend did not feel comfortable and was not particularly enjoying it. When we were standing at a bar table next to the dance floor, a man who I perceived to be 'a white gay bloke' (as I recorded in my fieldnotes, thus 'grouping' him) came straight towards Qooz's friend, folded his hands in front of his chest and said 'hello' in Mandarin. She did not seem to be particularly enthusiastic about his approach, but replied 'hello' in a friendly manner. She then told me that people often use that gesture and say hello in Mandarin because that is the only Chinese they know.

While the man's actions might be interpreted as a friendly gesture, maybe even an attempt of inclusion, I was left with the feeling that this interaction had a very problematic gendered, sexualised and ethnicised dynamic. Not only did he mark her as belonging to the group 'Chinese' (and he did not do that with any other member of the group), but his whole body language suggested that he attached certain characteristics to her body that categorised her into the group 'Chinese woman'. His gesture seemed to mimic softness, overt friendliness and submission and he could only do this mimicking through an assumed gender and ethnic power relation. Let me add that his 'grouping' had a negative effect on our group. We left shortly afterwards.

The examples of Christi in *Vanilla* and Qooz's friend in the *New Union* indicate an ambiguous and liminal belonging to lesbian and gay spaces. In contrast to the white lesbian and gay body, Christi and Qooz's friend are in the position of the 'other' (see Ahmed 2000) as those spaces are structured around whiteness. Writing about predominantly male and white organisational spaces, Puwar (2004: 143) notes:

Taking gender and race together, we have a complicated and enmeshed layering of “othering”, whereby different bodies are “othered” according to one criterion or another in relation to the centrifugal invisible somatic norm.

In my examples, the ‘othering’ took place according to physical characteristics which were read as ‘Chinese’. Those moments thus show that in predominantly white spaces, not only might ‘blackness’ be ‘super-visible’ while ‘whiteness is invisible’, as Puwar argues (2004: 66), but also that other racialised bodies, such as ‘Chinese bodies’, might be ‘super-visible’. However, a crucial difference between Puwar’s research and mine is that the ‘othering’ taking place in lesbian bars is occurring in a space created for the use by sexual minorities. It is through processes of ‘grouping’ that people are ‘othered’ within this minoritised group.

There were moments in our going-out group when minoritised ‘grouping’ operated to destabilise the formation of our group in more severe ways than previously described. Account 4 describes one of these more severe ways.

Account 4

It was very busy in *Coyotes*. We were on the dance floor. When I looked at my mobile phone, I saw that Qooz had tried to call me and had also sent me a text message saying, ‘They won’t let us in. Please come out to gal [sic] us up’. Wondering how I could help them to come in, I went to the entrance. I was still inside, Qooz and Juan were standing outside, and the door man represented a border between us. Qooz told me that he did not believe that she and Juan were not a heterosexual couple. I tried to negotiate and told him that we were all ‘regulars’. But he misused his power by telling them that they should come back later, when it would not be as busy, and that he might let them in then. My stomach hurt when I saw Qooz begging him to let them in later. Standing there, *inside*, I had the strange feeling that my body had more right to be in that space than theirs. (*Fieldnotes*, 6th October 2007)

The perceptions of the bouncer had a direct impact on the interactions of our group. While some of us were ‘read’ as gay and easily gained entrance to *Coyotes*, the bouncer was not able to imagine that Qooz and Juan were gay friends and not a

heterosexual couple. (The bouncer did not deny this when Qooz reported it to me in front of him.)

This was the only time that members of the group had difficulties getting into *Coyotes*. Because of the bouncer's actions, the group was split into members grouped as 'gay' and members grouped as 'non-gay'. The group members who were inside *Coyotes* were thinking about showing solidarity and joining Qooz and Juan outside, but the atmosphere in the club was quite good and we were enjoying ourselves, so we decided to stay and expressed our hopes that Qooz and Juan would be able to join us later. The group was thus fractured for a while, separated in two different places (Qooz and Juan went to *Queer*) and communicating with each other through text messaging. Here 'group-ness' operated to destabilise or test the ways in which we formed our group. 'Group-ness' was in play in the sense that the bouncer marked Qooz and Juan's (minoritised) bodies as 'non-gay'. Our group was thus constituted through external eyes.

In chapter 5 I further discuss door policies in the Gay Village and explore how they seem to be oriented toward a specific lesbian and gay somatic norm. With regard to issues of 'group-ness', door policies illustrate how the ways in which minoritised people are often assumed to have some common characteristic that categorises them as a distinctive group and how such an assumption can impact on the processes within a group on a micro-scale (the 'going-out group').

I want to give another example of the link between door policies and groups. As I mentioned in the previous chapters, some research (GALOP 2001; Kawale 2003; Mason-John and Khambatta 1993) suggests that black and Asian lesbians and gay men are often excluded from predominantly white lesbian and gay spaces through racist door policies. Joanne, who facilitates a black LGBT support group, told me that

her group members reported that it is difficult to get into lesbian and gay venues in the Gay Village when coming in a group of more than three or four black people. Claud, the organiser of *Black Angel* (see chapter 2), said that she thinks one of the reasons is that some of the club managers are racially prejudiced, and when they see ‘more than two black people [together] in the place they think it’s a gang and [that] there’s gonna be trouble’.⁵⁰ Thus, in Claud’s view, the common characteristic that marks black people as a homogenised group is being criminal and ‘making trouble’.

On one rather quiet evening during the week, I was sitting with Juan, Qooz and Danny on the balcony of *Mantos* on Canal Street. Joanne and three other members of the black LGBT group joined us. We began talking and laughing and our conversation somehow celebrated the ‘mix’ of our group. To visualise the ‘diversity’ in the group (I was the only white person), we put all our hands together and took photos. I had the feeling that our group was disrupting the racialisation of the Gay Village in ways I had never observed before (and never saw afterwards). Whilst I was thinking that, I saw *Mantos*’ bouncer coming out and directly approaching us. He told us (in an aggressive manner) that we should be quieter.

As I argued in chapter 2, ‘race’ is not only made through visual perceptual practices but also through aural perceptual practices, and in this example our racialised group, or members of it, were somehow perceived as ‘loud’. We disturbed the place not only visually but also aurally. The bouncer’s perception of our ‘group-ness’ had an impact of the interactions within the group. We kept quiet for a while, and then Joanne told us that the bouncer had been reluctant to let them in to begin with. We were unsure about how to react to this obviously racist practice. What is the most alarming is that this group, which had almost been refused permission to enter a

⁵⁰ A ‘gang’ is another type of group and contains a racialised and gendered (masculine) meaning in the sense that it is often associated with youth crime in urban areas which are perceived to have a high population of ‘ethnic minorities’ (see Alexander 2004).

bar defined as 'gay', is a social group identified as 'lesbian-gay-bisexual-transgender' and is part of the biggest lesbian and gay organisation in the northwest of England, where they had just been to their monthly meeting. The grouping by the bouncer as 'black' destabilised or even overrode the grouping as 'lesbian and gay', powerfully illustrating the separation of 'blackness' and 'gayness'.

Puwar argues that in predominantly white spaces, there is often a racialised discourse going on that if two or more black people gather together, it must be for reasons of conspiracy. She argues that although there might be only a few black bodies,

their numbers become amplified and they come to threateningly fill the space in much larger numbers than they literally do. That means that a sprinkling of two or three Black and Asian bodies rapidly becomes exaggerated to four or seven. And, interestingly, even a single body can be seen to be taking up more physical space than it actually occupies. (Puwar 2004: 48-49)

If perceptual practices produce racial differences (Byrne 2006), as I argued in chapter 2, then here the bodies of Joanne and the LGBT group were made into threatening heterosexual black bodies. The repeated citation of those racialised discourses and the repetition of racialised perceptual practices produce not only bodies and *subjects* that are raced, as Byrne (2006: 16) suggests, but also racialised *groups*. However, in this example the situation was even more complex, as our group might have caused some disruption already before Joanne and the others arrived. While research on racialisation often focuses on skin colour and on 'black' and Asian bodies as racialised bodies (Nayak 2006), my research shows that discourses that 'group' some people into the group 'Chinese' are readily available and deployed in the ethnographic sites I visited for my research.

Another example. One night our going-out group went first to the house of one of the member for food and drinks and from there went to the Gay Village. While we were walking down the street, we decided to stop a taxi to take us there. After we all got in, the taxi driver started a conversation with us. His first question was whether we are all Chinese. We laughed and shook our heads and told him that in fact no one was from China. One of us had an East Asian background, another was South East Asian, two were Latin American, and one (me) was European. He told us that he is originally from Pakistan but had lived in Malaysia for many years. We were all surprised and somehow confused about his ethnic/racial marking of our group and wondered what markers he had used to put us all into one distinctive, homogenous ethnic group. I then remembered that the first time I saw Qooz, Danni, Christi and Juan in the Gay Village, I had also referred to them as ‘a group of Chinese people’ in my fieldnotes (see scene 2, chapter 2). They had looked ethnically fixed and also ‘out of place’ to me. In the taxi driver’s and my perceptions, certain markers were used to categorise people into the distinctive group ‘Chinese’. This example of our bodies being marked outside the spaces that brought the group together also illustrates that it is not only people positioned as white who take part in processes of ‘group-ness’. It vividly illustrates how, as I have described above, minoritised people are often ‘grouped’ according to some characteristic they seem to have in common.

So far, I have only given examples where some members of the group were marked from someone outside the group and where this marking sometimes had an impact on the space within the group. In the next part of this chapter, by focusing on the expression of sexual desires, I shift to the creation of space within the group through complex forms of ‘race’ making and sexuality making.

Eating the 'Other'

Account 5

I texted Joanne and asked her whether she was going to *Black Angel*. We met at the Women's Space and made our way to *Vanilla* to meet the others there. They were standing outside. Carol was smiling all over her face, and the rest of them looked happy as well. After we had a drink, Joanne and I finally decided to go with the others to *Climax*, a club night organised by *Vanilla*. Nobody wanted to go to *Black Angel*. I had tried to persuade the others to go *Black Angel* before, but Maya commented that she does not like black women, especially when they 'grab her vagina' (referring to Joanne who had picked her up by putting her hands between her legs the night before).

A few black men and women were standing with us in the queue at a cash machine in front of the Student Union, so I thought that it might be more mixed than on usual *Vanilla* nights. When we came into the Student Union, this did not seem to be the case, although this was the first time I saw black women being employed by *Vanilla* (but maybe they were employed by the Student Union?). Joanne and I went to the bar and ordered some drinks. Two white blonde women wearing Afro wigs were standing next to us. Joanne smiled and made a sign towards them with her eyes, then we went to the dance floor to join the others. From that moment on, we were all just dancing and dancing and dancing.

Carol had told me earlier that *Climax* was a 'shag fest'. It didn't really look like that to me, but we were in a really big group, so it was probably difficult to interact with us. When Verena danced with a black woman who was a member of her football team, Maya looked in their direction with the kind of disgusted expression she sometimes gets. Then Verena and the black woman kissed! Maya said, 'Uuuuh, I will never kiss her again'. A bit later, Carol came to me and said, 'Shit, she was kissing Qooz', and then Qooz's girlfriend came and saw it. They had a 'little argument' about it. Others were also kissing, but in general it was not as sexual as I would have expected. Maybe it was the music, which did not encourage any closeness of bodies. It felt like the house music got right into your body and brought you on your feet so you just had to dance. The fast music did not provide the background for any 'romantic' dancing. It was one of those nights when you just hoped the DJ would carry on playing music forever, that it never ends. At 4.30am the DJ finally had to stop. She had already been persuaded to play another song, and the crowd was still asking for more.

(*Fieldnotes, Manchester Pride, Sunday, 26th August 2007*)

In my research sites, kissing is a major spatial practice. Kissing not only sexualises the spaces, it also constitutes a particular lesbian identity in those spaces. In *Coyotes* and *Vanilla* (and related spaces such as *Climax*), kissing is part of the 'game', and here I refer not so much to the kiss between women who are in a relationship with each other but rather to the kiss between strangers or, indeed, between friends. There

was a phase when Maya and Qooz had a kind of competition going on: who kissed more women. Often this meant kissing different women the same night. In that phase, both seemed to perform a specific lesbian identity whilst this game playing was confirming their identities as lesbians. Within the group, as account 5 illustrates, kissing often caused disruption, through moments of jealousy. In Maya's case, Verena's kissing another woman not only triggered jealousy but disgust. Here, an interracial kiss caused some disorientation for a group member and disrupted processes of sexualising the space within the group. So here it was somebody in our group who was involved in the practices of grouping. Maya uses 'not desirable' and 'disgusting' as markers on which she constructs a distinctive group 'black women' (or black people in general). Furthermore, as I will show, she not only expresses her sexuality in racialised ways but actually negotiates her sexual desires around 'race'.

At the time I heard Maya saying 'Uuuh, I will never kiss her again', there had already been a few instances before which had made me aware of her racialised desires and which had often caused discomfort (and arguments) between us. In one of our first nights out together, she expressed those desires (or rather non-desires) quite frankly. While we were standing near the bar in *Coyotes* and looking around, Maya complained that there were no 'good looking' women in there. I said, 'I think the woman sitting on the couch and wearing a red T-shirt looks nice'. 'The black woman?' she asked. When I nodded, she got a disgusted expression on her face and said, 'I don't like black'. She added that she was 'not her type'. This moment highlighted my difficult position of being a friend and a researcher at the same time. As a friend, I was shocked by Maya's comment, whereas as a researcher I got excited and thought I was gaining some interesting material to work with. (And I did.) However, my emotions somehow took over, and so I told Maya that she 'should be

careful' what she said because I was 'in a relationship with a mixed-race woman'. This made our interaction even more uncomfortable, as Maya had to face the discursive problem of finding 'legitimate' reasons (Gill 1996) for her racialised desire while at the same time not appearing to be racist while talking to a friend who is also a researcher and who at that time was in a relationship with a mixed-race woman. Maya got insecure and then seemed to make a difference between 'black' and 'not really black' (equals 'mixed-race'), indicating that mixed-race (equals 'not really black') is OK for her.

In the interview we did a few weeks later, she drew on a well established discourse of lighter skin being more attractive than darker skin (see Tate 2007; Weekes 1997). She told me that there were few black people in the Eastern European country in which she grew up. It would be unusual to have a relationship with someone who was black and her family would be against it. However, as if distancing herself from the constraints of her 'culture', she said that in her case it was just that black people are not her type:

Mixed, you know, mixed skin, you know, brown, sexy, but I'm not into, I'm not seeing each other, I'm not seeing myself into a relationship with guy who is black ... or girl, you know, black black.

In this quotation, Maya was also drawing on discourses of fears of interracial mixing, indicated by the fact that she framed the issue in heterosexual terms first.

While Maya used the characteristic 'non desirable' to homogenise black people into a group, 'exotic' is used to characterise other minoritised people. The night when Maya and I first met Qooz, Juan, Christi and Danny in *Vanilla*, we had been in *Queer* earlier. A friend of Maya's was with us. Maya told me that her friend 'wants to have something' with a black girl and that I should find her one in *Coyotes*

(she seemed to be referring to our earlier dispute). Later, we met the others in *Vanilla* and ended the night in the Chinese restaurant where Qooz and Maya were kissing in the toilets (see scene 2, chapter 2). The next day, Maya told me that when they were on their way to the Gay Village, she had said to her friend that she would like to ‘have something with an Asian girl’. She was excited about the fact that it had not taken long for her wish to come true.⁵¹

This account seems to be very similar to what hooks (1992) has called ‘eating the Other’, where she argues that in mass culture Otherness is commodified as something which gives some spice to the ‘mainstream white culture’. In that respect, ‘race’ and ethnicity are used as resources for pleasure. The desire for contact with the Other for the transgression of racial boundaries is rooted in an imagined promise of changing the white self through the encounter. Hooks (1992: 23) describes a scene where she overheard a conversation by a group of white (‘very blonde’) male students expressing their plans to ‘fuck as many girls from other racial/ethnic groups as they could “catch” before graduation.’ She argues that in the students’ eyes, ‘getting a bit of the Other’ is considered to be

a ritual of transcendence, a movement out into a world of difference that would transform, an acceptable rite of passage. The direct objective was not simply to sexually possess the Other; it was to be changed in some way by the encounter. (hooks 1992: 23-24)

While the white male students might not consider themselves to be racists, they use the Other for their expectations of gaining an intensity of pleasure through the contact while at the same time asserting ‘themselves as transgressive desiring subjects’ (hooks 1992: 24). As hooks (1992: 28) argues, it is ‘the ever present reality

⁵¹In the interview, she made a distinction between Asian women and Indian women, so to her, Asian referred to East Asian women.

of racist domination, of white supremacy, that renders problematic the desire of white people to have contact with the Other.’ Maya likewise takes on the ‘the role of cultural tourists’ (see hooks 1992: 17).

While, again, this is an example of how ‘group-ness’ works, namely, in ways in which all East Asian women become somehow exotic and homogenised as a group, here it worked directly *within* our going-out group in the interactions between Maya and Qooz. Qooz was caught up in Maya’s negotiating her sexuality around ‘race’. A few weeks later, when we were all on the dance floor in *Coyotes*, Maya looked in Qooz’s direction and sarcastically said that she had had ‘enough of Asian girls’. Qooz seemed to be upset by Maya’s comment, but no one in the group intervened in any way.

The ways in which ‘group-ness’ was at play within our group suggest that the social space of the group had not been formed once and all on grounds of sexuality (and therefore assumed sexual desire), but that this formation was in process and that ‘race’ and/or ethnicity intersected with those formations on grounds of sexuality, often through disrupting the formation on grounds of sexuality. These group processes suggest that Wilson and Zisman’s (1992: 202) definition of ‘group’ needs to be slightly revised. In our group there was ‘over a period of time’ a social space formed ‘within which a degree of emotional bonding’ occurred, but this social space was never fixed. It was constantly changing, as was the emotional bonding. Both sexuality and ‘race’ were constitutive of those processes. As my research suggests, sexuality and ‘race’ work through processes of ‘grouping’. While talk about sexual desires played an important role in the formation of the group as sexualised, by expressing those desires in racialised ways, minoritised people got some markers ascribed which lumped them together as a group.

Maya was not the only one in our group who did this marking. It was an ongoing process by all group members. In my interactions with Juan, I often heard him raving about ‘German men’, while suggesting to me that I should have something with a ‘Latin girl’. He once wanted to hook me up with a friend of his. He described her to whilst showing his arm to indicate that she had the same skin colour as him. Because I was having had a relationship with a mixed-race woman, I was made into someone who ‘likes black women’ in the group members’ eyes. My ‘racialised desire’ was often a topic of conversation, as when sometimes I was asked if I liked black women and sometimes when it was just assumed. Being marked in this way, I became aware that while Maya expressed dislike (and disgust) of black women, other group members did not seem to *include* black women in their sexual desire.

Such expressions of sexual desire illustrate Tatum’s (2003: 8) argument that people who are perceived to belonging to an ‘ethnic minority’ group are often not seen as individuals but are primarily identified with the ethnic group. Each individual who becomes marked as ‘Asian’ or ‘black’ stands for the whole group (‘Asian girls’, ‘black people’). In such expressions of sexual desire the other person is not seen as a person but as ‘a type, an archetype’ (Almgren 1994: 57). Some sameness is imagined between all those marked as ‘Asian’, ‘German’, ‘Mexican’, or ‘black’. I was always amazed by the wide range of women group members thought I ‘fancied’, how all black women got lumped together, and how my mixed-race girlfriend seemed to represent all mixed-race/black women.

Those examples also reveal that although we came together as a group based on sexual identity, each of us was constituted and constituted herself as belonging to different ethnic/racial groups. By expressing her sexual desires for ‘Asian girls’ and her non-desire for ‘black girls’, for example, Maya implicitly positioned herself as

white. My body got marked as white by the other group members who attached the meaning of desiring black women to it. In those everyday practices, then, sexuality and ‘race’ were made in certain ways.

I have focused here only on the articulation of sexual desires. In the next part, I discuss how touch can racialise bodies and either fix or destabilise group boundaries.

Can I touch it?



Figure 4: Violence of touch⁵²

White people seem to have an obsession with black people’s hair which is often expressed in a desire to touch it.⁵³ There is a history inscribed in such encounters. As Sara Ahmed writes, history lies beneath the surface of the body, and therefore bodies are shaped by histories of colonialism (Ahmed 2002). As a racial signifier, hair has been historically inscribed with social and symbolic meaning. In the era of scientific racism and colonialism, the appearance of hair was used as a signifier

⁵² <http://www.thedirtyartist.com/index.html>. This image is from a T-shirt that the self-described ‘dirty artist’ creates. Other tees have slogans like *pretty because I am a darkskinned girl!!* And *black guys in elevators don’t want your purse*.

⁵³ I recently met an Eritrean-Italian lesbian who is planning an installation with documentation about white people’s obsession with ‘black’ hair. The owner of the *Glass Bar* in London once told me that when customers ask to touch her hair, she always knows that they are from the north. One night in *Coyotes* I saw a woman I ‘read’ as mixed-race. Her hair was standing in all different directions. I was absolutely shocked when I realised that I felt an immediate desire to touch it.

of European superiority and African inferiority. This was in part related to the establishment of whiteness as the measure of beauty. According to Kobena Mercer, 'black people's hair has been historically *devalued* as the most visible stigmata of blackness, second only to skin' (1994: 101, original emphasis). The stigmatisation of black people's hair was evident in children's books and figures like the Golliwog and still persists every day in degrading comments made by white people (Mercer 1994: 101-102).

Where "race" structures social relations of power, hair – as visible as skin color, but also the most tangible sign of racial difference – takes on another forcefully symbolic dimension. If racism is conceived as an ideological code in which biological attributes are invested with societal values and meanings, then it is because our hair is perceived within this framework that it is burdened with a range of negative connotations. (Mercer 1994: 101)

People are thus 'grouped' by their hair. If you have an afro hairdo, this might mean that (white) people do not perceive you as an individual but as a member of the 'black' racial group (see Tatum 2003), which some people seem to think gives them the right to touch your hair.

As a social practice, touching can illustrate power dynamics and affirm white power as one person somehow 'consumes' the body of the Other (see hooks 1992). In that respect, the question is this: Who has the right to touch? Who thinks to have the right to touch? Analysing a photo series from an American fashion catalogue which uses Egypt as a scenic background, hooks concludes that whenever bodies touch in those photos, 'it is almost always a white hand doing the touching, white hands that rest on the bodies of colored people, unless the Other is a child' (hooks 1992: 29). Touching hair is one of the 'practices of the skin' through which bodies become

racialised (see Lewis 2004). The desire to touch hair carries an element of exotification.

When a white woman asks a black woman if she can touch the latter's hair, this is not just an individual or personal request; it carries ethical and political issues with it. Repeated experiences of touching and being touched makes the question more problematic. This is shown in the gendered and racialised encounter in image 3, which documents the violation felt by a woman being asked the question and the anger it produces. This image comes from an American website, but similar racialising processes seem to be at work here in the UK. While such interaction can occur in any space, the effects of touching hair in a sexualised space created for a minoritised group, and, more precisely, the impact of the touch for interactions within a going-out group are discussed below.

As I wrote in the Introduction, Joanne described the kinds of racist experiences she has in the Gay Village as fairly subtle. Although she grew up in a white family and identified as white when she was younger, she told me how people had used certain body markers to put her in the distinctive group 'black'. People still today had certain assumptions about her, for instance, that she could speak 'ghetto slang' or that she liked RnB music. She also related of how her body was exoticised in places in the Gay Village. Women have come up to her and wanted to kiss her lips or touch her hair. They say things like, 'I have never kissed black lips before', 'I have a friend who is black', or 'I like black people, they are cool'.

People, I mean, that's another irritating thing, I mean hair is [laughs], the difference in hair, this is quite a big thing for a lot of, a lot of my, you know, black friends and has been for me. It's like a lot of people wanna touch your hair because it's different. When you're on a night out, you don't want someone coming up and rubbing their hands in your hair because it's gonna mess it up, you know, you just don't want people touching it. (Joanne)

Joanne believes that white people have the desire to touch her hair because it is different. In almost all of our nights out together, this difference impacted on Joanne's experience, either because white women touched her hair (with or without asking) or because they were wearing Afro wigs (see account 5). During one of those nights, the question and 'the touch' happened in a going out group that we both were part of for several months (this was before the other group described previously was formed). The other members of this earlier group were Lesley, Kathryn and Anja. We were an ethnically and racially mixed group and similar to the group described above, most members of which were migrants⁵⁴. The earlier group consisted of more intimate relationships (most members were housemates or lovers) than the newer group (see appendix 1). As a group, the five of us only came together to go out in the Gay Village. The formation of and space within this group were quite different to the later group. We were divided in terms of preferences for one or the other lesbian bar, and there seemed to be some leadership struggle. The group was formed in complex ways and as in the other group, sexualising and racialising practices played an important role in this formation.

Account 6 describes a moment when the space of the group was constructed in certain ways through the practice of touching hair.

Account 6

Thursday night, upstairs in *Vanilla*. We were sitting around one of the tables: Lesley, Anja, Kathryn, Joanne and three of Kathryn's work colleagues (one heterosexual couple and another possibly heterosexual man). Although it was the Thursday before Easter Friday, it was surprisingly quiet. I talked to Anja for a while, and when I turned to Joanne, she seemed to be distressed. She said that Kathryn seemed to be obsessed with her hair. That evening she was wearing a hat. She told me that while I was speaking to Anja, Kathryn said to her in front of the others that she found her hair 'really cool' and then asked if she could touch it. I was surprised (actually shocked).

⁵⁴ Lesley and Summer both identify as mixed-race and British, Anja is white and from Central Europe and Kathryn is white and from the Antipodeans.

‘And then’, Joanne said, ‘she invited everybody else to touch it.’ I asked her if Lesley had touched it. Joanne replied that Lesley had hesitated, but that Kathryn had persisted, saying, ‘Touch it, touch it’. After she had touched Joanne’s hair, Lesley talked about an Erykah Badu song on Afro assuming that Joanne knew it. Joanne said that because the music was so loud, she could not understand everything Lesley was saying. Although Joanne was laughing when she told me this, she looked hurt (and annoyed or irritated or angry).

A bit later, I asked Joanne how she felt when Kathryn asked to touch her hair. She said that her first reaction was, *Great, here we go again*. It was particularly difficult for her because she cared about Kathryn. She said she felt apprehensive about what Kathryn was going to say. ‘What if it goes too far?’ She was worried in case Kathryn said something really ignorant, like the usual comments, ‘oh, it is so greasy, it feels funny, it’s oily’, and so on. So when Kathryn asked Joanne to touch her hair, Joanne kind of panicked (as she described her reaction). As this happened in front of so many people, she was concerned that it was going to turn into a ‘patting session, like a dog’. She added that it would have not bothered her too much if Kathryn had asked her at home. (*Fieldnotes, Vanilla, 04/07*)

Like the previous examples, this incident illustrates the emotional impact of racialising practices and shows how they can disrupt ‘emotional bonding’ (see Wilson and Zisman 1992) within a group. For Joanne, this was exacerbated by the fact that Kathryn asked to touch her hair in front of people she hardly knew. Asking the heavily loaded question and touching her hair disturbed and hurt Joanne. Her account powerfully illustrates the accumulation of experience which makes such a situation difficult – not just having had the experience of having your hair touched, but also of hearing people making degrading comments about it (see Mercer 1994). Joanne was ‘on alert’. She especially panicked because she considered Kathryn to be a friend and worried that she might say something ‘really ignorant’.

This group was ethnically and racially mixed. Kathryn, Anja and I were white migrants. Like Joanne, Lesley identified as mixed-race, although unlike Joanne she had ‘passed’ as white. In our interview, Lesley said that this would often cause misunderstanding, as people would usually not see ‘the Indian culture’ of her mother but, she told me, if she ‘looked darker, if I looked more Indian, then people would go

“well, that’s that culture””. Unlike Joanne, Lesley seemed to wish that the colour of her skin triggered assumptions that would put her in a particular racial group.

But ‘differences’ between Lesley and Joanne did not seem to matter to Joanne when she was made into ‘the Other’ and experienced herself as such. Kathryn somehow seemed to manifest her role as the leader of the group by pushing Lesley to touch Joanne’s hair and ‘inviting’ all the others to do so. Kathryn saw Joanne regularly and often in Joanne’s house. Although she gave as a reason for her desire to touch Joanne’s hair that she thought it was really ‘cool’, she had not asked her before but decided to do so at that moment in *Vanilla* in front of the group (and others). For Joanne, this made a real difference, that it happened before a big group of people, which made it likely that it would turn into a ‘patting session’ like a dog.

In contrast to our other nights out, that night our group was ‘sexually mixed’. Because heterosexuals were sitting with us at the table, it seemed that the space within our group was less ‘lesbianised’ than at other times because of the things we were talking about. Nevertheless, we were in a lesbian bar and for Joanne that space seemed to be important. The issue was *where* she could be asked to touch her hair. It would have made a difference in the private space of her home. Ironically, the episode happened in *Vanilla*, a space that has quite negative emotions attached for her. She had had some disturbing experiences with staff and customers there, particularly racialising experiences.

Most of the ‘hair incidents’ I witnessed happened in *Vanilla*. In one of our nights out, we were standing near the bar, which was really packed, and two young women passed Joanne on their way out. One of them said, ‘What a nice hairdo’, and both of them then touched Joanne’s hair without asking. There was also a moment in *Coyotes* when Joanne’s hair was exoticified. A very feminine white blonde woman

began flirting with Joanne and holding both of her hands and saying that she ‘loves Afro hair’. While this woman also did not respect physical boundaries (in terms of holding Joanne’s hands), she at least did not grab Joanne’s hair. So this encounter seemed to be different from others I witnessed.

It was still another night that finally shone a light for me on the fact that there *must* be a difference between *Coyotes* and *Vanilla*. When our group was in *Coyotes*, a friend of Kathryn and Anja was with us. After we moved to *Vanilla*, Joanne and I got in there a bit after the others, and as soon as we got in, this friend grabbed Joanne’s hair. It made me wonder if *Vanilla* gives greater legitimacy to cross body boundaries and what it is that makes this difference in *Coyotes*. Joanne clearly preferred *Coyotes* over *Vanilla*. She called *Coyotes* the best bar in the Gay Village because ‘it’s the closest they’ve got to tackling diversity, I suppose’. Interestingly, one of the things Joanne named as distinguishing *Coyotes* from *Vanilla* was that it would not only be more diverse in terms of what people look and dress like, but also in terms of hairstyles.⁵⁵ Joanne experiences *Vanilla* as a white space.

This might suggest that the apparent legitimacy of touching hair and thus disrespecting boundaries of the body, is greater in spaces constituted as white and that, as a spatial practice, touching hair racialises space and contributes to maintaining space as white. People with Afros might stay away from spaces where people push their hands in the Afro. Another issue is whether a hairstyle such as the Afro is actually worn. Mercer (1994) argues that black hairstyles develop in a dialogical response to racism of the dominant culture. I suggest that the touching of hair is a racialising practice (see ‘practices of the skin’, Lewis 2004, 2007) that actually polices black hairstyles and can lead to a form of self-policing. On a couple of nights when

⁵⁵ At the time when the incident happened, I perceived all of *Vanilla*’s staff to be white. Later, a black barmaid, who had worked in *Coyotes* before, joined the *Vanilla* team. In her profile on *Vanilla*’s website under the rubric ‘dislikes’, she specified people touching her hair.

women were touching Joanne's hair, she commented that she regretted not wearing her hair band or a hat.

Another issue is the practice of white people wearing Afro wigs. One night Joanne and I were walking down Canal Street to meet the others in *Coyotes*. We passed *Queer*, where many people were queuing to get in. Two white men wearing tight dresses and stilettos were distributing flyers for the club. They were also wearing purple Afro wigs. Joanne had not been sure before then how to style her hair. When we passed those two men, she asked me whether I had seen the guys with 'her hair' and commented, 'I don't even need a wig to look stupid'. It seemed to me that Joanne had internalised the devaluation of African hair and absorbed the negative connotations attached to it (Mercer 1994). In the 1960s, the Afro was a symbol of the slogan, 'Black is beautiful', proclaimed to counteract Eurocentric definitions of beauty (Mercer 1994: 99). Today it seems that although white people are wearing Afro wigs, the Afro as a marker of 'otherness' is commodified as something which gives some spice to 'mainstream white culture' in terms of 'eating the other' (see hooks 1992). Often, however, the Afro is actually worn as a caricature. (And Joanne does not even have an Afro, or as she said, 'a *real* Afro'.)

The difference in the spaces of the two bars impacted not only Joanne's experience but also how the space within the group was constructed. In contrast to Joanne, Kathryn and Lesley preferred *Vanilla* over *Coyotes*. This often led to difficulties within the group. Kathryn and Lesley often seemed dominant in making the decision where to go, but there seemed to be no awareness in the group as to *why* the choice of *Vanilla* meant a real sacrifice for Joanne. For instance, one night, when Lesley 'informed' us that they were going to *Coyotes*, Joanne said to me that they should know how much she hated it in there. We followed the others, but after we had

been there for a while, Joanne and I suggested going to the ‘black night’ in *Mantos*. Kathryn said that she had been there a few times before and that it had not felt ‘very safe’ the last time she was there; she also said it was very ‘heterosexual’. (I discuss issues of ‘safety’ in chapter 6.) Nevertheless, she and Lesley half-heartedly agreed to go. Because there were only a few white people there, we did not stay for very long. We ended up having a huge debate on Canal Street about where to go next, and Lesley angrily said she had been happy in *Vanilla*. It was clear that there was no awareness in the group concerning why going to a differently racialised space would have made a change.

Conclusion

This chapter explored how processes of sexualisation, racialisation and spatialisation work on the level of ‘group-ness’. While I was originally interested in the interactions within ‘going-out groups’, it soon became apparent that interactions are shaped by other forms of ‘group-ness’, namely, the marking of minoritised people as belonging to certain groups. The ‘going-out’ groups were constituted on grounds of this form of ‘group-ness’ (being minoritised as lesbians), and in some interactions and processes within the groups, it became apparent that wider forms of grouping were at play – either externally or internally. Sometimes the group was constituted through external eyes, for instance, when our group was marked as Chinese or when some of us were made into heterosexuals. Those forms of group-ness ruptured the group from the outside, but sometimes also from within the group when group members drew on those forms of group-ness in their interactions with each other. This chapter explored how in spaces structured around sexuality, groups might be shaped on grounds of

sexuality but that those group formations intersect with ethnicising and racialising practices in complex ways. Processes of ‘group-ness’ are inherently linked to perceptual practices (Byrne 2006) and looking. A powerful example of this was the taxi driver’s summing up of all members of our group as ‘Chinese’.

This chapter also illustrated how ‘race’ and sexuality are produced in intersubjective relationships in the everyday of going out together. Those forms of ‘race making’ and ‘sexuality making’ contribute to the sexualisation and racialisation of my research spaces. I focused here on spatial practices such as kissing and touching, which sexualise and racialise bodies, groups and spaces. At the same time, those spaces are constitutive of the formation of the groups and sexualising and racialising practices; they are spaces structured around sexual desire. Kissing and touching are therefore central spatial practices closely linked to looking practices, as seen in the practices of looking that shape bodies and spaces, for instance when the two blonde women were looking at Qooz and her girlfriend kissing or when Maya was looking at Verena and a black woman kissing. Those looks were racialising and sexualising and grouped some bodies into an undifferentiated whole, e.g., ‘black people’ or ‘Chinese people’. In the next chapter I turn to the more specific practices of looking and gazing and their roles in shaping sexualised and racialised bodies and spaces.

Chapter 5: ‘You’ve got the Look’

Introduction

“*Look* at the nigger! ... Mama, a Negro! Hell, he’s getting mad.... Take no notice, sir, he does not know that you are as civilized as we....” My body was given back to me sprawled out, distorted, recolored, clad in mourning in that white winter day. The Negro is an animal, the Negro is bad, the Negro is mean, the Negro is ugly: *look*, a nigger, it’s cold, the nigger is shivering, the nigger is shivering because he is cold, the little boy is trembling because he is afraid of the nigger, the nigger is shivering with cold, that cold that goes through your bones, the handsome little boy is trembling because he thinks that the nigger is quivering with rage, the little white boy throws himself into his mother’s arms: Mama, the nigger’s going to eat me up. All round me the white man, above the sky tears at its navel, the earth rasps under my feet, and there is a white song, a white song. All this whiteness that burns me.... (Fanon 1967: 113-114, my emphasis)

Brighton introduced me to the dyke stare; it gave me permission *to* stare. It made me feel I was worth staring at, and I learned to dress for the occasion. Brighton constructed my lesbian identity, one that was given to me by the glance of others, exchanged by the looks I gave them, passing – or not passing – in the street. (Munt 1995: 115, original emphasis)

I start with these two contrasting accounts as they illustrate different ways in which looking practices are constitutive of the relationship between sexuality, ‘race’ and space. Frantz Fanon’s account is perhaps the most prominent description of the racialising look, of being made into a racialised body through practices of looking, here by a white child on the (white) streets of Paris. Sally Munt describes sexualising looking practices on the streets and how looks contribute to sexualising space and to constructing her lesbian identity. Like Munt’s experience in Brighton, in my research sites sexualising looking practices are central – the issue is about seeing and being seen. One can be both bearer and receiver of the look.

At the same time, however, I found not only a sexualising look but also a racialising look similar to the one Fanon described. Chapter 4 gave examples where two women kissing triggered certain forms of looking which seemed to sexualise *and* racialise bodies and spaces. Those looking practices operate through processes of ‘grouping’. Chapter 4 explored how looking practices made some bodies into ‘black’ or Chinese bodies. The accounts by Fanon and Munt both illustrate forms of grouping through looking (black men and lesbians).

While Munt takes pleasure in looking and being looked at, in Fanon’s story, the look is deeply inscribed with power relations and rooted in a coloniser/colonised relationship. Arriving in Paris in the 1950s from the French colony of Martinique, Fanon became interested in the effects of the coloniser/colonised relationship on both white and black psyches. He powerfully tells how he is made into the colonised ‘other’ on the street, in the train, in the lecture hall, or at a social gathering, through white people’s perceptual practices, which attached meanings to his body – he is seen as uneducated, unintelligent, uncivilised, a cannibal, and threatening. Fanon’s account is important because he ascribes history to ‘the look’ and shows how looking practices operate within relationships of power. As bell hooks (1992: 115) argues, ‘there is power in looking’. Looking practices are inscribed with power, and some people have an entitlement to look while others not, or, rather, their ‘looking back’ does not have the same authority. We are all part of a ‘scopic regime’, in which we learn from an early age who has the authority to look and that when you occupy a certain subject position you can be looked at but your looking back has no authority (hooks 1992).

In that respect, feminist film theorists have examined ‘the gaze’. In her classic article, “*Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema*”, Laura Mulvey (1975)

argues that cinematic looking is structured around the 'male gaze'. In gendered looking practices, women are only the object of the gaze; they have no power to look back and women even identify with the male protagonist to gaze at other women. While Mulvey seems to use 'the gaze' and 'the look' interchangeably (see Kaplan 1997: xvii), others have distinguished between them. Ann Kaplan gives a useful definition when describing how she uses the two terms in her book, *Looking for the Other*:

The concept of the "gaze" as distinct from that of the "look" requires attention here, since articulating the difference between the two is an ongoing project throughout the book. I will reserve the term "look" to connote a process, a relation, while using the word "gaze" for a one-way subjective vision. (Kaplan 1997: xvi)

Kaplan also draws attention to space by arguing that power relations are space-specific. It is only in specific spaces that, for some people, looking back is not possible or has no authority. It is in spaces constituted as white that whiteness privileges white people to gaze (see Fanon's account). While according to Kaplan's definition we might define Fanon's experiences as receiving 'the gaze', the word he used was 'the look'. In contrast to feminist film theorists, who are concerned with cinematic viewing, Fanon describes looking practices in everyday encounters and teaches us that even though one might have the physical (ocular) capacity to look back, this looking can still be structured through power. Fanon's account problematises the look/gaze distinction because it illustrates that even for the person with power (the authorised looker), looking at Fanon's body has an affect (the child is afraid).

My research is concerned with everyday interactions within specific, constructed spaces where looking is a central practice. As I will show, in the

complexities of the interactions (actual physical encounters) in the lesbian bars, the distinction between the look and the gaze is not as clear-cut as theories on cinematic viewing suggest. In contrast to other everyday spaces (such as the street), in *Coyotes* and *Vanilla* active looking is expected and (often) desired. In those gendered and sexualised spaces, there is no power in the ‘male heterosexual gaze’, and I have sometimes observed women turn the gaze around and make men ‘out of place’.

We can find different types of looking in these spaces. My focus is on one particular look that I call ‘the look’. Whereas in the incident recounted at the top of this chapter, Fanon describes an encounter with a child and its mother on the street, the examples of ‘the look’ I will discuss in this chapter describe women-to-women looks and assume bisexual/lesbian to lesbian looking practices. As I conducted my interviews, one thing that struck me was that all of the women in this study who can be perceived as black or Asian gave accounts of receiving certain looks in *Coyotes* and *Vanilla*.⁵⁶ While Tania did not define the look as a racialising look, Natasha, Joanne and Firth gave very explicit accounts of experiencing it as such, although they described and interpreted ‘the look’ in slightly different ways.

Those looks are very different to the ones Munt describes, which in a process of mutual recognition constitute her sexual identity. Munt highlights how dress is important for the construction of this identity and for those looking practices, indicating that on the streets of Brighton certain styles of dress might increase the possibility of receiving looks. As the previous chapters indicated, in *Coyotes* and *Vanilla* some bodies and presentations of self are more expected than others. In this chapter I want to explore this idea in more depth because what you look like and how others perceive you are crucial to how and if you are looked at. Therefore, in the

⁵⁶ I choose this formulation here because Lesley, like Joanne, identifies as mixed-race, but her experiences seem to be very different as she ‘passes’ as white (see chapter 4).

following, before discussing ‘the look’ I will explore some of the markers of what seems to be the ‘somatic norm’ in the spaces in the Gay Village.

The (imagined) somatic norm

Formally, today, women and racialised minorities can enter positions that they were previously excluded from. And the fact that they do is evidence of this. However, social spaces are not blank and open for any body to occupy. There is a connection between bodies and space, which is built, repeated and contested over time. While all can, in theory, enter, it is certain types of bodies that are tacitly designated as being the “natural” occupants of specific positions. Some bodies are deemed as having the right to belong, while others are marked out as trespassers, who are, in accordance with how both spaces and bodies are imagined (politically, historically and conceptually), circumscribed as being “out of place”. Not being the somatic norm, they are space invaders. The coupling of particular spaces with specific types of bodies is no doubt subject to change; this usually, however, is not without consequence as it often breaks with how bodies have been placed. (Puwar 2004: 8)

As I wrote in chapter 2, my research spaces are quite different from Puwar’s. Although not organisational spaces of elites, *Coyotes* and *Vanilla* are nevertheless regulated spaces. I outlined some of those regulations in chapter 3: fixed opening times, paid bar staff, door policies, and security staff inside who keep an eye on the customers’ interactions. Like Puwar’s organisational spaces, there also seems to be a connection between bodies and spaces in the sense that ‘some bodies are deemed as having the right to belong’ while others are ‘out of place’. In the discussion that follows, my use of somatic norm include other markers, such as dress. I explore how the (imagined) somatic norm in *Vanilla* and *Coyotes* is produced through the gaze of the bouncers, dominant representations/images, and spatial practices (looking practices).

The gaze of the bouncers

Most bars and clubs in the city centre have bouncers at the door, especially on Friday and Saturday nights, so this practice is not specific to the venues in the Gay Village. However, in contrast to those other spaces, bouncers in the Gay Village, who are hired by the particular bars, might specifically look for people they perceive to be heterosexual and not let in (see account 4). *Vanilla* and *Coyotes* are the only two bars in the Gay Village that are constituted as lesbian spaces, and their bouncers' gaze seem to be attuned to keep it that way. I have often watched the bouncers, who work at the bars regularly, turn people (usually men) away at the doors of both bars by saying that the bars are for 'regulars'.

As *Coyotes* is not defined as a lesbian bar, its door policies seem less strict than *Vanilla*'s, which still seems to operate a 'women/men ratio'. This ratio requires that a group of people approaching *Vanilla* consist of more women than men. Sarah told me that she sometimes goes out with a male gay couple but that because of this ratio they cannot go into *Vanilla* unless other female friends are with them. I also experienced this restriction when the bouncer turned me and two male gay friends away at the door.⁵⁷ But the three of us had no problems of gaining entrance to *Coyotes*, where the bouncers seem to be mainly concerned with not letting too many heterosexual men in. I have occasionally taken male friends who identify as heterosexual to both places. On one of those occasions, we were questioned. It was a rather quiet weekday night, and nobody apart from the white female bouncer was standing outside of *Coyotes*. When we approached the door, she did not look at me but focused her gaze on my friend, and looking him up and down in a non-approving

⁵⁷ Other venues in the Gay Village operate on the opposite ratio. One night a female friend and I were turned away by the (lesbian) bouncer at the door of *New York New York* with the argument that there were already too many women in there.

manner. She did not speak during her visual interrogation, but then turned to me with a conspiratorial look and asked if he was with me. He gained entrance through my confirmation. The fact that she did not gaze at or question me constructed my lesbian identity at that moment; at the same time, it confirmed the assumption that I am easily 'read' as a lesbian, thanks to my stereotypical looks of short hair and an androgynous appearance. Because of my 'obvious' lesbian markers, she did not seem to consider us to be a heterosexual couple, which is an interesting contrast to Qooz and Juan (see account 4). At the door of this specifically gendered and sexualised space, and in interactions with the bouncer, my friend's male heterosexual gaze had no power. Indeed, while the bouncer was 'scanning' him, he looked down to avoid her gaze. I had the feeling that it was also his Eurasian appearance that made her want to 'scan' him more thoroughly.

Coyotes and *Vanilla* are not the only spaces in the Gay Village which operate with problematic door policies. I witnessed another incident in a different club where the bouncer's gaze had powerful effects and resulted in an act of humiliation I had never seen in either *Vanilla* or *Coyotes*. This incident occurred at the door of *Cruz 101*, a night club in the Gay Village that is defined as gay and where the somatic norm seems to be male and gay (the few times I visited *Cruz 101*, at least 70-80 % of the clientele were men). I was there on a night out with two friends: a white British lesbian and a British South Asian gay man. While he had no difficulties getting into the lesbian spaces with us, when we approached the door of *Cruz 101*, he was stopped by a big, white, male bouncer. As *Cruz 101* is a specific kind of gendered and sexualised space, when we approached the door, I was actually surprised that I could not feel the gaze of the bouncer on my body (as I sometimes do in spaces defined as gay). Neither did he seem to look at my lesbian friend. His gaze was on our male

friend. In a suspicious or provocative manner, the bouncer asked him if he knew what kind of club it was. Our male friend replied, 'Yes, I know what kind of club it is.' The bouncer probed him: 'So what is it?' 'It's s a gay club'. He then turned to my other friend and asked her if our male friend was gay. Our friend gained entrance through her confirmation.

While also in the previous example, the gaze of the *Coyotes*' bouncer humiliated my heterosexual friend by only talking to me about him but not addressing him directly and only gazing at him, his exclusion from the space was somehow expected. In *Cruz 101*, the effect of the bouncer's gaze was different. He tried to exclude someone who identifies as gay and whose space this was supposed to be. The power in the bouncer's gaze worked not only through his specific role as a bouncer but through his position as white, male and British (and maybe even heterosexual). His gaze constructed a somatic norm which white lesbian bodies seem to represent more than South Asian male gay bodies.

As account 4 illustrated, the gaze has particular effects when a woman who identifies as lesbian is turned away at the door of a lesbian bar. Of all the women I went out with during my research, I never witnessed one of my white friends/participants being turned away at the door of *Vanilla* and *Coyotes*. Louise was the only white participant who told me that she had had difficulties in the past in getting into a lesbian bar (and that was in the city she lived in before coming to Manchester). However, I heard of and observed many examples of black and Asian women having difficulties in getting into the lesbian bars.

It seems that racist exclusionary door policies in predominantly white lesbian spaces have been an issue in different times and places. For instance, in her

autobiography, *Zami*, Audre Lorde describes the role of the bouncers in the 1950s in New York:

I walked down those three little steps into the Bagatelle on a weekend night in 1956. There was an inner door, guarded by a male bouncer, ostensibly to keep out the straight male intruders come to gawk at the “lezzies,” but in reality to keep out those women deemed “undesirable.” All too frequently, undesirable meant Black. (1984b: 220)

Lorde’s account highlights the bouncers’ role in excluding a certain would-be clientele. While it is not possible to know with certainty what the actual reason is for being turned away at the door of a bar or club, the examples I now discuss indicate that some women are subjected to extra scrutiny that seems to include visible markers of ‘race’ although not necessarily limited to those markers.

In chapter 4, I wrote that members of the black LGBT group Joanne facilitates have experienced not getting into bars and clubs in the Gay Village, especially when they come as a group. Joanne told me that she once was turned away at the door of *Vanilla*. The bouncer told her that it was ‘full’, but then let somebody in who was standing behind Joanne. This experience confirmed her general feeling for the place and augmented other disturbing racist experiences she had at *Vanilla*. *Coyotes* is Joanne’s favourite place in the Gay Village, and one reason is that it is more ‘diverse’ than any of the other places.

However, she was also stopped at the door of *Coyotes* once. This was particularly disturbing for her. It was the last evening of Gay Pride, and we were all on the dance floor celebrating what we had perceived as a fantastic Pride weekend. When Joanne finally joined us, she looked quite disturbed. She told me that the bouncer had asked her for an ID to prove that she is in fact 30 years old. She did not have one with

her, and the bouncer did not believe her. Only when the bouncer's colleague, who knew Joanne, reconfirmed that she was old enough, did she let her in.

Age plays an important role in the bars' and clubs' door policies, and the bouncers need to make sure that they only let people in who are old enough. But they only ask some people, not everyone, to show their ID cards. Similarly, the bouncers are supposed to keep people who are 'too drunk' out, but it is left to them to judge who is too drunk. During my research, I saw quite a lot of people I perceived to be drunk who did not have any difficulties in gaining entrance to the bars. It was only once that I witnessed a black female friend of mine being turned away by one of the (male) bouncers at *Coyotes* for the reason of being 'too drunk'. While I do not want to deny that she was quite drunk, it seemed to me that she was given more thorough scrutiny than other people who were also drunk.

Like Joanne, Firth defines *Coyotes* as her favourite bar in the Gay Village. She clearly prefers it over *Vanilla*. In fact, she had been to *Vanilla* only once, but her experience there was so insulting for her that she never went back. This was shortly after *Vanilla* opened in 1998 as the first lesbian bar in the Gay Village. Back then, its door policies seemed to be open to gay women only. Firth was accompanied by a male gay friend. When the bouncer asked her whether she was a lesbian, she told me, she

was quite upset to be asked that. You go into a lesbian bar and you are asked if you are a lesbian. And I was insulted to be asked a question like that. I'm in my 30s and you're asking if I'm a lesbian? 'No, but what the hell'. And that was the only time I went into *Vanilla's*, you won't catch me in *Vanilla's*. [...] I've never set foot back in *Vanilla's* again. To be asked if I'm gay, don't insult me, and that was an insult, even though I went in, and then, it was like, I didn't like it 'cause it really felt cramped, couldn't fit into a like small space [inaudible], didn't like it whatsoever. And that was the last time I've ever went in.

Even ten years later, recounting her first and last visit to *Vanilla* seemed to trigger some anger in Firth. She told me several times that this encounter with the bouncer was the reason for her not going to *Vanilla* again.

Some other participants also told me about *Vanilla*'s strange door policies in its early days, although most of them made jokes about it. When I probed Firth about her experience and asked why she found it so insulting, she said that she had been to many bars and clubs and never been asked whether she was gay. They would not, she said, ask whether you are heterosexual when you go to a straight bar. She told me that her friend said to the bouncer, 'She is more butch than me'. Firth did not experience the bouncer's question as a kind of 'routine question', but as a question signalling doubts that she was a lesbian. Her friend then drew on stereotypical discourses of lesbians being butch to prove that Firth was indeed a lesbian. This encounter with the bouncer probably inspired her to dislike the place and even experience it as an excluding place. When she went in, Firth added, she 'hated it'. She felt uncomfortable and thought that the people in there were 'up their own asses, that's what I thought, it wasn't welcoming'.

Recounting this experience with the bouncer and her impression of the place, Firth made reference to sexuality, age and gender. 'Race' did not seem to matter. Later in the interview, however, it became clear that 'race' did in fact impact on her experience. When I asked her about her first experience in *Coyotes*, she said that in contrast to *Vanilla*, she quite liked it:

You could see like different people coming in. ... I noticed there were a few black women coming in compared with *Vanilla*'s, where there isn't one black person in there or one black person at the door. ... But with *Coyotes* they were, there was a black woman on the door. I liked it, there was a variety, there were different kind of people, they weren't all the same, they were all different individuals, that's what I liked about it.

In her experience of *Coyotes*'s space, it clearly mattered to Firth that she saw black women outside and inside the space. Not only seeing black women coming in, but also the fact that there was a black female bouncer at the door – in contrast to *Vanilla*'s white bouncer – seemed to have greatly impacted on her experience. It might also have predisposed her to like the place and experience it as an inclusive place.

This account illustrates that Firth experienced *Vanilla* as a space where white lesbians represented the somatic norm, which seemed to stand for an array of boundary controls over who was subjected to extra scrutiny and who was not. This powerfully illustrates how the bars' bouncers (and their gazes) construct a somatic norm for those spaces. Firth's anger about *Vanilla*'s bouncer indicates how she experienced this as a situation of power, and that she felt the power of looking.

While the gaze of a black bouncer might not necessarily lead to more inclusive door policies, it somehow disrupts certain inscribed power relations in looking. Interestingly, during my research I often heard comments about the black female bouncer at *Coyotes*. Whenever somebody raised issues with *Coyotes*' door policies, there was an assumption that it was 'the black bouncer'. Sometimes white women (but not only them) seemed to be angry with her. I often had the feeling that this anger was produced by an unusual power inequality by disturbing the power to gaze that white people assume they have and by being in the position of power to refuse someone entrance to the space.

I have given three examples of women who identify as bisexual or lesbian either being turned away or at least stopped and questioned at the door of a lesbian bar. In all three cases, the ostensible reasons were not 'race' but age, drunkenness, or asking a 'routine question'. While the ostensible reasons for having bouncers at the

doors of *Coyotes* and *Vanilla* might be to keep male intruders out, we might ask if, as in Lorde's argument, the bouncers keep women out who are perceived to be not 'desirable' for whatever reason. While this argument cannot be proved, I suggest that black women are often subjected to extra scrutiny, maybe because they are minoritised within a minoritised group and therefore 'hyper-visible' (Puwar 2004), maybe also because, as I write in chapter 7, black and Asian women are more often perceived to be heterosexual than gay. While they are not completely excluded from the spaces, their belonging is liminal (see chapter 4). Rani Kawale found in her research on lesbian spaces in London that South Asian women experience exclusionary door policies and that their sexuality is questioned at the door. As Kawale argues, this illustrates that in such spaces 'white female bodies are perceived as the somatic authentic lesbian norm' (2004: 184). The bouncers' gaze seems to be attuned to this 'somatic norm', and it is through their decisions that they dictate what the somatic norm is inside those spaces.

As Firth's example illustrates, even when you are finally let in (after being scrutinised), your experience at the door impacts on how you experience the place. After Qooz was rejected at the door of *Coyotes* (although she was let in later that night), she was reluctant to go there again for a few weeks. While the others in the group wanted to go in, she said, 'It's boring, anyway', even though it had been her favourite place before that. Some women experience *Vanilla* and *Coyotes* as excluding places before they even get inside. While the bouncers' gaze shapes the somatic norm inside those spaces, it might be attuned to the dominant image of the lesbians who frequent these spaces and they might therefore exclude women (and men) who do not fit into this image.

I described the bouncers' practices of looking as 'the gaze' instead of 'the look' because in the interactions between bouncers and customers, there is no reciprocity in looking. Even though customers might be able to look back at the bouncer, there is no power in their looks. It is the bouncers who decide to refuse entrance if the customer's body does not meet the criteria of their gaze. Inside the spaces, however, we are concerned with 'the look', as looking practices inside are different from the looks exchanged between bouncer and customer outside. Before I explore looking practices inside the spaces, I briefly discuss some representations of a dominant lesbian image in the Gay Village.

Dominant representations of a lesbian image

From slavery on, white supremacists have recognized that control over images is central to the maintenance of any system of racial domination. (hooks 1992: 2)

Most of the participants in my research seemed to have clear images in their minds when they described what the women in *Coyotes* and *Vanilla* look like. While the descriptions of the women in *Coyotes* generally were more 'diverse', there seemed to be a dominant image of *Vanilla*'s clientele. Joanne's account is an example of how some of the participants imagined the women in *Vanilla*. When I asked her if something like 'lesbian knowledge' or 'lesbian culture' exists, she replied:

Lesbian knowledge or lesbian culture? Yeah of course. Go to *Vanilla* [laughs], yeah there's definitely lesbian knowledge and culture, stuff I didn't know, I had to learn about, yeah [laughs]. I still don't know about, flipping hell. [...] I can't identify it, but there is a lesbian culture in terms of, like, *Vanilla*, where you've got butch lesbians, lipstick lesbians, you know what I mean, ehm, a certain look, an attitude, a way to speak, actions, mannerism, and things like that.... , ehm... [...] Everybody has a Tony and Guy haircut, with the gel and

the flip on it and they've got their boxer shorts, their Calvin Klein boxer shorts, showing over their jeans and stuff, a few tattoos, some piercings.

In defining *Vanilla* as an example of lesbian culture, Joanne includes dress, hairstyles and a general 'habitus' in her description. Other participants also described the hairstyles in *Vanilla* as specific to the place. For instance, the first night Kathryn approached me in *Vanilla*, she said there must be a lot of money in there, that the hairstyles alone would suggest this, since the women always looked really styled, with short, spiky hair with a lot gel in it. As I mentioned in chapter 3, the spiky haircuts are part of the '*Vanilla* trademark' and play a dominant role in how *Vanilla*'s clientele is imagined. (On *Vanilla*'s flyers, image 3, we can also see the Calvin Klein boxer shorts Joanne mentions.) The specific representation on *Vanilla*'s flyers suggest that only some women are addressed as potential and desired clientele: women who are young, white, in good shape ('six pack abs') and able-bodied. Women who do not fit into this image might not feel they are even being addressed.

The organiser of *Black Angel* told me that one of her reasons for starting the club night was that when she was growing up she never saw any images of black gay people:

And then once I came out and I go around the village, all the imagery was of white men...., predominantly, there would be white women, but it would be predominantly white men, so there's never anything that I could identify with and the music they played, it wasn't, you know, it's not what I [like]...

Claud stressed two important ways to create a different space: the imagery and the music. She told me that *Black Angel* was the first event in the Gay Village that played RnB and Bhangra music and explained that when they promote the club nights,

they create flyers that have black and Asian women on them. For Claud, this imagery is very important.

That the dominant lesbian and gay image is white is also apparent in lesbian and gay magazines. One afternoon I was sitting with Joanne and a male member of the black LGBT group in *Taurus*.⁵⁸ He was flipping through a free lesbian and gay magazine published by the organisation the black LGBT group is part of. When he got to the last page, he was shaking his head and told us that he found ‘not one single black face in there’. This dominant image of whiteness suggests an exclusive belongingness to the group ‘lesbian and gay’. My friend had picked up the lesbian and gay magazine from a long table near *Taurus*’ entrance, where one can find flyers advertising all kinds of lesbian and gay venues, events and groups in Manchester and surrounding areas. The somatic norm on those flyers is white. When I helped to distribute flyers for one of the *Black Angel* nights, I often had the feeling that putting those flyers on flyer tables and in the toilets of bars was an act of disrupting the racialisation of those predominant white spaces. When I was going to put some *Black Angel* flyers on the flyer table in *Taurus* I saw that Claud had already put some out – next to flyers promoting a ‘gay skinhead’ group in Manchester.⁵⁹

Claud told me that she and the co-organiser did not want the flyers to say that the event was for black and Asian women because then other people would feel excluded. Instead, they decided to use the name in combination with the imagery to indicate that the club night was addressed to black and Asian women:

⁵⁸ *Taurus* is a cafe/bar at the upper end of Canal Street. While its primary clientele seem to be gay men, as in most bars of the Gay Village, it also seems to be one of the most mixed and including spaces.

⁵⁹ Even though this group defines itself as non racist and non political, a very aggressive (and potentially violent) image of white masculinity is portrayed. I am aware that some authors argue that gay skinheads subvert gender and sexuality constructs (see Bell et al. 1994).

Well, I tell you what's really interesting. It's like if you look at flyers and they have a white person on it, I don't look at that flyer and think I can't go to their nights, whereas we get white people and they see the flyer and they have black and Asian women and they're "alright, we didn't think we could come". It's interesting how people's minds work. They don't see the reverse and think about the imagery they're putting on, then what that says to people and they don't realise how important imagery is.

Although Claud does not think that she 'can't go' to events that are promoted with flyers that show only white people (meaning, significantly, that she could not go to *most* events), her account indicates that if a flyer gives the wrong message, while 'they' do not see the reverse, the event might be perceived as an event addressed primarily to white people. As Kawale argues (drawing on Creet 1995): 'A group or commercial venue does not need to specify that "white" people are welcome: this is assumed because the term "lesbian" is racialised and usually refers to "white" lesbians' (2003: 183). In the reverse, then, events like *Black Angel* are imagined to be (solely) for black people. As I mentioned in chapter 4 (account 3), group members were reluctant at Gay Pride to go to *Black Angel*, although nobody except Maya directly said why.

When Joanne, Kathryn, Lesley, Anja and I went out together, and one night we went to the 'black night' in *Mantos*, it somehow seemed that we only went there with or for Joanne and when we saw only a few people there, we quickly left (see chapter 4). We referred to that night as the 'black night', which illustrates that all other events in the Gay Village are implicitly marked as white, though they are not named as such. Lorde (1984b: 220) further described her experiences in the *Bagatelle*:

When I moved through the bunches of women cruising each other in the front room, or doing a slow fish on the dance floor in the back, with the smells of cigarette smoke and the music and the hair pomade whirling together like incense through charged air, it was hard for me to believe that my being an outsider had anything to do with being a lesbian. But when I, a Black woman,

saw no reflection in any of the faces there week after week, I knew perfectly well that being an outsider in the Bagatelle had everything to do with being Black.

Lorde's feeling of being an outsider was triggered by not seeing any other black women in this lesbian bar in New York in the 1950s. She saw 'no reflection' in the faces she saw there. Her account powerfully illustrates how 'race' can cut into a constructed dominant lesbian identity and how it can lead to a feeling of non-belonging in a lesbian space. But it is not only not seeing one's reflection in the faces inside the spaces. A sense of exclusion is also created when there is no reflection in any faces on flyers promoting certain events.

It is the gaze of the bouncers in combination with a dominant lesbian image embodied in the bars and represented on flyers that constructs the somatic norm. The spaces often are lived as such; black and Asian women might be present in *Vanilla* and *Coyotes*, but they occupy a liminal position. In my fieldnotes I sometimes referred to black and Asian women I had seen before and found out very quickly who was a regular in the lesbian bars. One night I got a text message from a friend telling me that her housemate was in the Gay Village. I had never seen this friend before, and all I knew was that she was black. My friend said, 'Maybe you'll see her, white shirt, jeans'. As she was writing that text, she must have imagined the lesbian spaces to be very white; otherwise she could not have given that description. But being black was the decisive marker, as in those spaces on a busy Saturday night there are usually many women who are wearing jeans and white shirts.

The bouncers' gaze, in combination with the representations of a dominant lesbian image, constructs the somatic norm in the lesbian bars. 'Race' is one marker of this norm. As I show in the next part of this chapter, it is not only the bouncers' looking practices but also the customers' looks that contribute to construction of the

somatic norm in particular ways. Before I focus on ‘the look’ as a looking practice racialising bodies, however, let me explore some other looking and non-looking practices that shape the somatic norm.

The somatic norm and looking practices

As I have already argued, in *Coyotes* and *Vanilla* looking is a key spatial practice. Looking is a form of addressing someone and is often used as a first step in a flirtatious encounter in the hope that the other woman looks back. As illustrated by Munt’s (1995) account of Brighton, there is a desire to be looked at and to exchange glances. Those looking practices can construct one’s lesbian identity. Although Munt describes a dynamic relationship between a claimed and an ascribed identity, her account raises the question of whether you have to look and present yourself in a certain way to be recognised and acknowledged as a lesbian. What affects does it have if a woman who identifies as lesbian does not receive any ‘identity acknowledging’ looks?

In her PhD thesis, *Lesbian Landscapes*, Alison Rooke (2005) describes how she undertook a journey from London to Brighton with three participants of her study to spend a day in the ‘gay city’. They were all excited about the trip and expected to experience it as a particularly sexualised space. Like Munt (1995), they thought that they would experience the lesbianisation of the space through cruising and that cruising would confirm their lesbian identity. Their expectations were unfulfilled. They were disappointed because they felt that no women had actually looked at them, neither in the lesbian bar they visited nor on the street. Though they had tried to cruise, their look was not met. Rooke (2005: 169) speculates that it was her

participants' purple sundresses and their 'feminine appearances' that rendered them invisible as lesbians.

Both Munt's and Rooke's accounts illustrate that looking practices play an important role in sexualising space and that some sexualised spaces raise certain expectations of looking while at the same time those spaces seem to be shaped in particular ways so that some bodies seem to be more entitled to receive looks than others. Looking (and smiling) can be used as practices of inclusion, of addressing people so they feel they belong to the space. One night in the early stages of my research, for instance, I was on my own in *Vanilla*. It was really busy and lively, and there were many women in there. I felt a bit tense being there on my own and tried to communicate with women through looking. Nobody returned my looks. This somehow made me feel excluded, as if I were not part of the space.

If power relations are inscribed in looking practices and if those power relations are place-specific, as I have argued above (Kaplan 1997), then the construction of space, including the construction of a somatic norm, entitles some people more than others to receive certain looks at the same time that it also entitles some people more than others to look and gaze. I have identified some markers of the somatic norm in *Vanilla* and *Coyotes*, such as dress, hair, and skin colour. As *Vanilla*'s flyers (see image 3) suggest, other markers are being young, in good shape and able-bodied. Women who meet this dominant representation seem to have more entitlement to the space and to gaze at other women. For instance, one night when I was upstairs in *Vanilla*, I saw a woman who met the image leaning over the railing and taking pictures with her mobile phone. When I asked her what she was doing, she said, 'Taking pictures of these fatties down there'. There were two women on the dance floor downstairs who might have been perceived as being overweight. The gaze

of this woman through her camera was similar to the cinematic gaze. She was objectifying those women. Her actions indicated that she seemed to assume that she has the right and entitlement to do so.

Munt described how she ‘learned to dress for the occasion’ for the exchange of looks in Brighton. Women might learn to dress in certain ways to conform to the somatic norm of a desired space so they do not get any unwanted looks. This was indicated in Tania’s account when she told me that she was quite disappointed when she started going out in the Gay Village. Unlike the North American city where she lived before, she found the Gay Village unfriendly. She felt uncomfortable and found it very difficult to make friends for a whole year. She told me about the first time she went into *Vanilla*:

Tania: When I first went in there, I was a, I was a total hippie, I wasn’t just dressed like this [points to her clothes and laughs], I was a total hippie. I went inside, everybody just ‘wrusch’ [turns her head], looked at me, like ‘oh, new face in the town’ or something like that and then sssccchhh [makes noise, like lots of talking], they started talking, ignoring [me].... I was like ... I didn’t even go to the bar, I just saw there are some flyers, I just got some flyers out and I left. I said ‘aaaah’, if people are gonna just ‘wrusch’ at me, look at me like some kind of idiot, ‘who the hell is this?’, you know, dressing up like [laughs] ...

Nina: So what did you wear?

Tania: I had a, a really, like, a hippie flair trouser and I had a, like, a hippie, a bit of a, like, hippie hair, bit of a dreads, on the side and I was wearing hippie clothes, you know a jumper, and stuff like that. And they were all like ‘ah’. It’s like you’re not welcome, your type is not welcome kind of thing. I think that’s maybe the reason why I have changed it, because I want to get to, get to that circle, I want to get to know these people, because as far as you’re researching, I am researching upon myself as well [laughs]. You know what I mean. Maybe there’s another way I can actually be friendly because if you are in a place like this all by yourself, it’s not good to be alone, you know what I mean, you gotta have friends.

Tania had a very different experience than that described by Pritchard et al.'s (2002) interviewees, one of whom described *Vanilla* with the words: 'This is a safe, friendly environment to come into. Also, if you're new on the scene, you know you can come in here and it's going to be all right' (Pritchard et al. 2002: 117). While Tania seemed to feel excluded on grounds of her hippie dress and hair, it was the look she received that constructed her feeling of not belonging to the space. No looks were exchanged, so Tania's lesbian identity was not confirmed. She thought she had to make a decision: either be a hippie *or* a *Vanilla* lesbian. As she felt the need to change her style (and did change it), her account is a powerful example of how practices of looking – alongside the gaze of the bouncers and dominant representations of a lesbian image – shape a certain lesbian somatic norm in lesbian spaces.

Such forms of looking sexualise and racialise the spaces. In Tania's account, 'race' seems to be silent. She did not experience the look as a racialising one, or at least, she did not express it that way. Tania was the only black participant who did not give an account of 'the look' that I discuss in the next part of this chapter. 'The look' further racialises both the bodies in the spaces and the spaces themselves.

'The look'

As I argued above, Fanon's account is important because he ascribes a history to 'the look' and situates it in a system of power relations. One might argue that when Fanon wrote about the look he received on the streets and in other spaces in France, it was in a particular time context (colonised subjects had just arrived in France) and that things have changed in France and elsewhere since the 1950s. However, accounts by other critical 'race' scholars such as Ahmed (1997), Lewis (2004), and Lorde

(1984a) reveal that the ‘look’ is experienced in various times and places. When Lorde (1984a) was a child in the 1930s and riding the subway in New York, a white woman kept looking at her. (A further discussion of her account is given below.) Two white policemen stopped Ahmed (1997) when she was a teenager walking through her neighbourhood in Australia in the 1980s. They looked her up and down in a way that suggested that they thought she was in the neighbourhood for the purpose of committing a robbery. Lewis (2004) and a friend received looks from a white waitress in a café in London who was worried that they might not leave the right amount of money on the table as they left. All three authors describe situations in which their bodies become racialised in those moments, when looking practices make them into black women.

In Lorde’s and Lewis’ examples, it is white women who are the perpetrators of ‘the look’. Like the examples I discuss below (in which it is assumed that lesbians are doing the looking), the incidents happened to Ahmed, Lewis and Lorde at different times and in different places, but they all seem to refer to spaces (and the bodies of the onlookers) constituted as white. While Fanon, Ahmed, Lewis and Lorde all write about ‘the look’ in sexually unspecified spaces, ‘the look’ Firth, Natasha and Joanne describe occurred in explicitly sexualised spaces where, paradoxically, looking is a major spatial practice. While all three of my interviewees described ‘the look’ as a racialising practice, they gave slightly different accounts of how ‘the look’ functions and how it is experienced. I call the three kinds of looks the ‘piercing look’, the ‘fearing look’ and the ‘hating look’. Let us first visit the three accounts individually, and then I will analyse them in more depth.

The piercing look (Natasha)

Natasha was the first participant who described ‘the look’ to me. I was with her when she experienced it during her first and only visit to *Coyotes*. Before we went to *Coyotes*, we saw a performance in the *Green Room*⁶⁰ by *Sphere*, a theatre group for South Asian bisexual, lesbian and transgender women that mimicked white lesbian culture in a very funny way (at least that is how I interpreted it). The audience consisted mostly of women and it was ‘mixed’ in terms of age and ‘race’. Members of the audience looked different to the women I was used to seeing in the Gay Village. This mix and the space’s racialisation made the ‘unmixedness’ of *Coyotes* and *Vanilla* even more noticeable.

When we got to *Coyotes*, Natasha remarked that the lights were rather bright for a club. I went with her partner to the bar to get some drinks, and then we all made our way towards the dance floor. Although I had been feeling tired, the energetic atmosphere woke me up again. Natasha and her partner joined me and my girlfriend on the dance floor for a short while, then Natasha returned to the edge of the dance floor and commented on the music. The DJ played some RnB and HipHop mixes which were not performed by the original artists. When we met up three days later to discuss our experiences, we talked about the music and the DJ⁶¹:

Nina: But for a while he played ’80s music

Natasha: Yeah, which was fine... and then he changed back and then he went back to ’80s music, like, five minutes later. He played one Beyoncé song and then was sort of playing ’80s music. It was, like, what? Did you plan this up before you came here or you just picking the albums alphabetically or as they reach your finger? So it was, that was ... that for me was irritating ’cause it just ... it just felt confusing. It was like trying to follow an essay that was just all over the place. So ... and I just, I mean, I don’t know, if you’re looking at colour for one thing, I

⁶⁰ *Green Room* is a theatre venue in the city centre, near Oxford Road station.

⁶¹ We recorded this conversation, which I use here in addition to the interview we had conducted a few months before.

noticed the colour as soon as I walked in there, the *lack* of colour. There was the bouncer at the door, there was, I think, one Asian woman and the two black bouncers, two or three black bouncers inside, and that was it. And when you guys were at the bar, this woman kinda ... she looked at me and started laughing and then kinda went and said something to her friend.

Before Natasha described the experience with the look, she referred to the music and how she perceived the visual racialisation of space in terms of bodies in the space. She recognised immediately when we got in that she was the only black customer. This might have already made her alert for the processes of racialisation. In our further discussions of ‘the look’, she described it as ‘piercing’ – as not just a matter of looking at her, but that it ‘felt as though [the woman] was trying to tell me something with that look, which felt like she was questioning my presence in the room’. While Natasha was aware of this piercing look, she did not notice other looks she and her white partner received. (Her partner told her later about them.) She and I experienced the night quite differently. While my mood changed for the better, after receiving ‘the look’ Natasha wanted to leave the place straight away, although she endured it for about an hour. She told me that the space would probably have felt differently for her if more black customers had been there.

Natasha never went back again, as she said she has no reason to go into places where she feels uncomfortable. She said that as she now lives in a different country with a different culture to where she was brought up (North America), it is important for her to be comfortable, ‘and just kind of let my hair down, not be stared at, not being given dirty looks’. She therefore avoids going to places like *Coyotes*, where she does not feel what she wants to feel (see Kawale 2004, for more on ‘emotional labour’, which I examine in chapter 6). While Natasha highlights ‘race’ and ethnicity as shaping her experience, sexuality seems to be rather silent in her account.

The fearful look (Firth)

I went out with Firth a few weeks after the night with Natasha. We had got to know each other the previous week, and this was the first time that just the two of us went out. As it was 'early' (9pm) for a Saturday night out, it was still quite empty in *Coyotes*, and the music was not too loud to prevent a conversation. We sat down on one of the sofas and talked about *Coyotes*, if we liked it and how it differed from other lesbian spaces. When we looked around, Firth said she found it 'quite boring' in there, and that a reason for that feeling might be that she had visited lesbian and gay spaces for so many years that she had had 'enough of it' by now. She further said she felt as though everybody looked the same and there was no individuality. She began describing a place in Miami, where, according to her, 'no barriers' exist and where a lot of black women, Hispanic women and white women come together in a very chilled out atmosphere. Her eyes sparkled when she talked about *Black Angel*. She said it was 'brilliant', that there was always 'a mix there' (black and Asian women). Now that *Black Angel* would run only very irregularly, she believed that nothing would be provided in Manchester for black women.

When I asked her why she thought a 'racial mix' mixture did not occur in places like *Coyotes*, she immediately replied, 'OK, can you tell me how many black women you can see in here?' I had already done my usual scan and knew that the second one had just walked in. I said it might be that the Gay Village is just a very racist place, and she said, 'Yes, of course', and asked why they all (the white clientele) look at her when she comes in as if they had never seen a black woman before. 'What are their *fears*?' she asked. She seemed quite pessimistic and said she did not think it will change in the near future, and even on the male gay scene, black

men seem to be more included. Lesbians try to ignore the issue of ‘race’ and maybe think by ignoring it; the ‘problem’ will just go away. We were watching the young white stylish lesbians in front of us, and Firth said, ‘But they listen to *our* music, RnB’.

When we recorded an interview a few months after that night in *Coyotes*, I asked her whether she had ever experienced overt racism in lesbian and gay spaces. She said not so much in London, where she had lived before, but in Manchester, yes. It was not that somebody says something, she told me, ‘but it will be a look or there’d be somebody make an offhand remark and I probably never heard it but somebody else has heard it’. She then said that there are many different forms of discrimination going on in the lesbian and gay scene and that it would not ‘bother’ her. If she were ‘that kind of sensitive then I wouldn’t go out to the Gay Village’. Firth was not giving me concrete examples of racism, so I probed further:

Nina: Mhm, but I mean, do you, I mean, when you are in these white spaces like *Coyotes*, yeah, I mean, I don’t know, I mean, do you, do you think kind of, don’t know that interactions are different or that people treat you differently or that...

Firth: Why would someone treat me diff? If I got two heads, have I got two heads or what? And ... just because of the colour of my skin, why would you treat me different

Nina: People do, don’t they?

Firth: But do they? No....

Nina: No, you don’t think so...?

Firth: No. Why would the colour of my skin make you treat me different...?

Nina: Ah, me not [laughs], but ... I, hopefully, not, but there are a lot of people who probably see a difference and then make a difference out of it.

Firth: Well, if they, *pfff*, well, then, then again it’s their, that’s their opinion or their perception, I don’t give a monkey’s, if you gonna judge me any

different, well, then you do that 'cause I'm not judging you, I'm just seeing you as a woman, a gay woman. But I'm not judging you. I don't even know you to judge you.

Nina: But before you said something about a look, how is that...

Firth: Ah, yeah. [Raises her voice] You get sometimes ... you get a look, you know, you get, like, a look of thinking 'are you or aren't you?', they're not sure, I don't know.

Nina: So they look and they're not sure if you're gay?

Firth: Not sure or they are or ... I think ... I don't know people's perception of black people. They find us intimidating, sometimes threatening, God knows why, but that's people's perception of black people. They think we're, I don't know, stupid or ... people have different perceptions of black people. It's interesting to know what it is. I think they're just scared of the unknown, that's what it is, they're just scared.

Nina: And you think that this is the, I mean, this look describes it or that comes out of that look?

Firth: They just don't know. They don't know how to take you. I'm just like anybody else.

I was clearly struggling as I asked Firth if she feels differently treated in white lesbian spaces. In my own ways of 'race' making, I could not accept her account but assumed that, just because she is black, she would give me concrete examples of being treated differently. This resulted in a highly emotional discussion which was clearly upsetting to Firth. From an ethical perspective, I must admit, my approach was highly problematic. Although Firth immediately rejected the idea that she is 'treated differently', through my probing I implied that the colour of her skin in fact makes people treat her differently.

In this interview moment, we circled around the discrepancy between 'race' as something that should not matter and 'race' as having real-life effects (see Gunaratnam 2003). While I meant that 'race' matters, Firth seems to suggest that it does not. She kind of turned it around and made me feel uncomfortable. Her switching from 'someone' to 'you' led me to defend myself, to say that I do not treat her

differently, and as I added ‘hopefully’, while her account suggests that she does not seem to be entirely sure if she can trust me on this. While I refer to racial differences, she refers to similarities on grounds of gender and sexuality and suggests that we meet as women and lesbians and that ‘race’ should not matter.

As I wrote in chapter 3, my probing was based on the assumption that ethnic minority people do not ‘have “the privilege” to be able to avoid the issue of race’ (Twine 2000: 21). However, when I probed Firth about ‘the look’, she gave a very powerful account of ‘people’s perceptions of black people’ and strongly contradicted her previous words. She speaks powerfully of the relationship between perceptual practices and ‘the look’. In trying to find explanations for these perceptions, she almost seems to defend the people (women) who do the looking. ‘What are their fears?’ she asked when we were in *Coyotes*. Here she assumes that they are afraid of her.

The hating look (Joanne)

So far, I have explored ‘the look’ as piercing and fearing. Joanne used a different word and gave a very telling account of what I call the ‘hating look’. I probed her about her experiences with racism in lesbian and gay spaces.

Joanne: Ehm... one of the things what’s difficult and different about racism which is, like, really hard to explain for some people ... sometimes, like, this is hard for people to grasp, but sometimes – other than the people who have experienced it – sometimes it’s just the way that someone looks at you and you can tell by the way that they look at you that they are racist. They look at you like an insect that wants to be squashed, you know. So when you go into that sort of environment, if you are with a black person ... if you are on your own and you say to another white person, Bblah-blah, I don’t like that person, that person doesn’t like me, they are racist”, they’re, like, “No, don’t be silly”. But if you are with another black person, they will know instantly because they all had that feeling before. You know what I mean? I am not saying that it happens all the time, but it’s quite common. It is just, you

know, there is something and there's, you know, people cannot like you for a variety of reasons, but there is a certain look and there's, you know, what I mean? You can just tell the difference. Sometimes I can meet people and I think, "Ah, that person doesn't like me and I don't know why", but they don't like me and, you know, it can be like that with some people. But some people, they just give you a look and ... you can just tell instantly that they are racist.

Nina: Can you describe that look?

Joanne: Eh? No, I can't describe that look, other than some [people] look at you like an insect that wants to be squashed.

Joanne's words powerfully illustrate the difficulties of explaining 'the hating look' to a white person who might dismiss it as any kind of look. She is very careful here how she frames it, how she explains 'the look' to me. While attempting to explain that there is a particular racist look that is different from other looks, Joanne stopped several times. As she perceived me as a white researcher who has never experienced the hating look, she seemed to struggle to find the right way to express her feelings in a way that I would be able to 'hear them' (see Lorde 1984a: 125). She mentions several times that it happens only occasionally that people look at her and in the moment of looking express their dislike of her.

One might ask a significant question here: If *Coyotes* and *Vanilla* are spaces where looking is a key spatial practice that is assumed and even expected, how then can we distinguish 'the look' described by Natasha, Firth and Joanne from other kinds of looks? Might they are not similar looks?

This was suggested by Kathryn. When I talked with her about the racialisation of the lesbian spaces, she said she would be interested to know why there are not many black women in them. I said that I had heard about a few things that make black women feel excluded, for instance, a certain kind of look. I told her that a black friend had once told me she has the feeling that everybody looks at her when comes into

Coyotes. Kathryn replied that it might be her ‘own internal issues’ about that ‘because it turns out that everyone gets that when you walk in the door, everyone gets stared at, it’s just the rule of the game.’ Kathryn here implicitly denies racism in lesbian spaces. As Joanne predicted, Kathryn does not take the descriptions of ‘the look’ seriously. For her, ‘the look’ is only sexualising, not racialising, bodies.

I remember that when I first heard about ‘the look’ a few years ago, I asked my friend how she knew it was ‘meant’ to be a racist look. I thought she was too sensitive and did not take it seriously. I might have unconsciously defended the white woman who looked at my black friend. I only started to think differently about the issue when I learned about the more subtle forms of racism and gained a better understanding of how ‘race’ works in everyday interactions. It was also necessary for me to get out of my state of constant denial. But hearing many black women talking about ‘the look’ showed me that it is unlikely to be just an individual’s ‘internal issue’. ‘The look’ is part of a complex system of looking practices that are inscribed with power. Although ‘the look’ might not be experienced only in lesbian spaces, in those spaces where sexualising looking practices are expected and often desired, it has particular affects. The power of looking is structured by the space. Natasha, Firth and Joanne all experience the Gay Village as a space constituted as white.

Natasha described ‘the look’ as a piercing look, which seemed to ask, ‘What are you doing here?’ and signalled to her that she did not belong to the space. Firth also described the look as a questioning look, but as asking a different question: ‘Are you or aren’t you?’ It is not clear what this question really refers to, what people are not sure about. Natasha and Firth’s descriptions of ‘the look’ are similar to a senior civil servant’s account in Puwar’s research. This civil servant commented on how his presence was constantly questioned: ‘You feel that they are noticing you and can’t

quite work out what you are doing there. It's like going into a pub in Cornwall. Every one turns around when you open the door... [It's] that sort of feeling.' (Puwar 2004: 43)

In Firth's account the look also expresses fear. She seems to distinguish being looked at from being differently treated. In the documentary, *Frantz Fanon Black Skin White Masks* (Normal Files Production), directed by Isaac Julien and produced by Mark Nash (1996), Stuart Hall distinguishes Fanon's account of 'the look' from how people treat him.

You have to think about, a West Indian intellectual formed very much in relation to France, by a French education, coming to Paris expecting to be accepted, who comes sharply up against metropolitan racism. And this is not just in how people treat him and so on but is actually in how they look at him. He sees himself being seen by a French child and its mother, and this look from the place of the other completely destroys him, because what it destroys is this false, what Fanon called 'depersonalised self', the colonial self which has been built up in sort of imitation of the coloniser over many years, it fractures.

When Firth comes into *Coyotes* she expects to be accepted. Although she rejects the idea of being treated differently, she receives 'the look', which signals that she is different from the other lesbians in there. Her account illustrates that the look she receives is different from the cinematic gaze. In contrast to the cinematic gaze, in these real, everyday, bodily encounters, 'the look' has an effect on both the looker and the looked at. Here, in an actual physical encounter, 'the look' might be structured by power and Firth's looking back might not have the same authority in this space constituted as white; nevertheless, 'the look' or rather Firth's body, has a powerful effect on the woman who looks at Firth (the authorised looker). Similar to how Fanon described the reaction of the child on the street, Firth described the affect of her body as causing fear. In that sense, this looking practice constructs not only

Firth's body as black but also the other woman's body as white. As Ahmed (2002: 57) argues, referring to Fanon's encounter with the child on the street:

in seeing the bodies of others, we are always engaged in practices of both recognition and reading that fails to grasp the other. The perception of other as "the black other" involves wrapping the bodies of others in fantasy. Indeed, the monstrous black body is represented here precisely as a white fantasy, or as a fantasy that works to constitute whiteness in the first place.

It is a dialectic relationship, and so 'the look' described by Firth connotes 'a process, a relation' instead of a 'one-way subjective vision' (Kaplan 1997: xvi). This dialectic relationship is also powerfully illustrated in Joanne's account.

To Joanne, 'the look' signals dislike, even hate and disgust. Joanne's framing of 'they look at you like an insect that wants to be squashed' is confusing, as it does not clearly define who wants to be squashed and who wants to do the squashing, Joanne or the looker? Nor is it clear why she used 'want' here, why would you have a desire to be squashed? She uses this metaphor of squashing to describe the look she sometimes receives that indicates to her that the people who are doing the looking are racist. The looker has a similar reaction when seeing her body to seeing an insect and projects the desire to violate her body onto her. This ambiguity in desire might indicate that 'the look' is not only a racialising but also sexualising practice which is also addressed in Fanon's account. According to Hall, Fanon saw

the sexualised nature of the look. Looking always involves desire, there is always the desire not just to see but to see what you can't see, to see more than you can see, to see into, to see beyond, to see behind. The reaction in racism between black and white is partly, partly arises when the white looker becomes aware that he is, as it were, attracted to the black subject. The act of racism is a denial of that desire which is in the gaze itself.

A psychoanalytical reading of Joanne's account would be that the white woman who looks at Joanne might desire her (this might not be straightforwardly erotic) but then splits this off and projects hatred and disgust onto Joanne. Joanne's interpretation of 'the look' reminds one of Maya's expressions of her sexual desire discussed in chapter 4. Although she explained that black women are just 'not her type' 'the look' she gave them when thinking about erotic encounters signalled disgust. Thus, Joanne's account in combination with Maya's illustrates that in those sexualised spaces 'the look' is sexualising and racialising at the same time. Similar to Fanon's account, Joanne's metaphor of the insect presents the black body as a non-human body, or rather as being seen as non-human by the white looker.

Lorde (1984a) also uses an insect analogy for her body in her description of 'the look'. When she was a child, she was riding the subway in New York one Christmas with her mother. When she sits down in a 'tight "almost seat"', the woman sitting beside her stares at her, twitches her mouth, and pulls her own coat away from young Lorde. She 'communicates her horror' and displays hate in her eyes (Lorde 1984a: 147). Not understanding that the woman does not want to touch her, the young Lorde thinks there is a roach on the seat and pulls away her coat, too. This angers the woman, who stands up and holds on to a strap handle. Wondering what she did wrong, Lorde secretly looks to see what is there, only to realise it is *her* the woman does not want to touch. The girl takes away from that encounter "her eyes. The flared nostrils. The Hate." (Lorde 1984a: 147-148) She saw the hatred in that woman's eyes because the woman wanted her to see it. She wanted the young black girl to know 'that I don't belong alive in her world' (Lorde 1984a: 172).

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have explored looking practices in spaces where sexualised looking is an everyday practice. Looking practices sexualise the spaces and create them as lesbian space, but also as white spaces. Women who receive ‘the look’ might not come again. As my examples show, the Gay Village bouncers’ gazes performatively construct a somatic norm through stopping and interrogating some bodies but not others. While their gazes often seem to be inherently racialised, it is difficult to pin down what the exclusion is based on. This raises questions of visibility and invisibility: only those lesbians who represent the somatic norm are recognised as lesbians and are thus visible. It is easier for them to gain entrance to lesbian bars. Those who do not fit into the scheme remain invisible inside but highly visible at the door. It seems that certain bodily markers determine whether you are *stopped* at the door or not. This act of being stopped and questioned, although you may be allowed in, can be seen as signalling that certain of your bodily markers are *not* right and that you therefore have to be scanned more thoroughly (see also Ahmed 2007 about the effects of being stopped (at the airport)). These moments construct a certain bodily norm and a field of experience. The stopping and questioning by the bouncers can be seen as performative acts through which imaginations of what a lesbian and gay body *looks like* are constantly re-produced. In addition, it is not only their final decision-making but also the questioning itself that impacts on whether the people being stopped at the door and questioned are going to visit these bars again. Now it impacts what kinds of bodies are actually inside those spaces.

What distinguishes ‘the look’ from other kinds of looks is that a colonial history is inscribed in it. ‘The look’ black women receive indicates that they might be insiders, ‘to be of and in a space, while at the same time not quite belonging to it’

(Puwar 2004: 8). 'The look' is one practice with which this being out of place is signalled, having its tangible effects on the 'read' body and constructing space in certain ways. At the same time, seeing the black body has an effect on the person who looks and constructs the body of the looker. As those looking practices shape the way spaces are experienced, they also contribute to how bodies become 'raced' through their lived spatiality (Sullivan 2006). My interviewees' accounts of 'the look' illustrate that it is an everyday practice through which the boundaries of (racial) belonging are constructed. Therefore, like the touch I explored in chapter 4, 'the look' is one of the 'practices of the skin' that Lewis (2004, 2007) writes about.

Through looking practices, bodies are made into sexualised and racialised bodies. Not only does 'the repetition of racialised perceptual practices produce bodies and subjects that are raced' (Byrne 2006: 16), but the repetition of sexualised perceptual practices also produces bodies and subjects that are *sexualised*. 'The look' experienced on the body renders bodies visible or invisible in these spaces. Receiving looks or not receiving looks can make you feel out of place. I argue that 'the look' is a practice which works to mark specific spaces as white and specific bodies as black or white, thus marginalising all those who are marked as not belonging to that space. This looking practice keeps space white and marks non-white bodies in it as out of place. The white body is established as the normalised body in the space, as constructed by 'the look'.

The examples presented in this chapter illustrate how looking practices produce certain emotional states (excitement when the look is wanted and received; fears and hatred when it is not), especially how it can produce moments of extreme discomfort for both looker and looker (see also Maya's example in chapter 4). As Natasha said after receiving 'the look', she has no reason to go into places where she

feels 'uncomfortable'. Bodies and spaces become not only sexualised and racialised through looking practices, but also through the emotions triggered by those practices. The next chapter explores the relationship between sexuality, 'race', emotions and space by focusing on comfort and safety as emotional states.

Chapter 6: Safe and comfortable lesbian spaces

Introduction

It's still, it is still gay, but I can totally see what people say. I used to get very, I used to get quite annoyed with it, with ... and people turn around, they go, 'oh, why do you need your own space and why can't you just share?' I'm like, 'Dude you've got all the straight town. Why [have] you gotta take this tiny little part that we have to go out and *feel safe* and *feel comfortable* in? Like, why have you gotta dominate that as well? (N: yeah yeah). Like come and be gay for a day in a straight club and tell me if you want your own space or not. (Kathryn, my emphasis)

Over the last ten years we have been building a "women's community": festivals, yearly conferences, political organizations, land groups, businesses, magazines and newspapers. But if we are from families and a culture that enforced, either overtly or subtly, separation by skin and blood, I believe we need to look seriously at what limitations we have placed in this "new world" on who we feel "close to," who we feel "comfortable with," who we feel "safe" with. [...] I believe we can question what pressures we may put on women in our communities to be *like* us, to assimilate to our culture, be like our family, so we can feel comfortable, "at home". (Pratt 1988: 49, original emphasis)

Issues of comfort and safety play an important role in the spaces of the Gay Village. This became apparent as I reread my fieldwork accounts by lesbians who were concerned about feeling safe and comfortable in different spaces, in the participants' descriptions of their dream spaces, and of their real-life experiences in the Gay Village. This should not be surprising, given the fact that my participants belong to a marginalised group that, despite all of our social and legal achievements, is often still the target of homophobic violence. As some examples given in the previous chapters have indicated, however, women do not always feel safe and comfortable in the Gay Village. So the question is: Who does the 'we' in Kathryn's

account refer to? *Who* feels comfortable and safe in the Gay Village? Are comfort and safety merely given? If not, how are those emotional states produced?

The previous chapters have indicated that *Coyotes* and *Vanilla*, plus the Gay Village in general, are emotionally charged spaces. In Chapter 4, I presented accounts dealing with emotions – jealousy, excitement, sexual tension, emotional bonding between group members, disgust, being hurt – that were those linked to sexualising and racialising practices. Chapter 4 also indicated that practices such as kissing and touching can produce not only comfort (as one might expect) but also discomfort. In Chapter 5, I examined how looking practices, and especially ‘the look’, can lead to moments of extreme discomfort.

This chapter further explores issues of comfort and discomfort, brings them together with issues of safety, and looks at their relationship to space, sexuality and ‘race’. I also explore theories developed in the field of ‘emotional geographies’ (see Bondi et al. 2005) and bring them together with Sara Ahmed’s (2004) approach to emotions as performative. Taking comfort and safety as emotional states, I ask: What work do comfort and safety do in shaping lesbian spaces? How are feelings of comfort and safety constitutive of sexualised and racialised subjectivities and spaces?⁶²

Feelings of comfort and safety can be evoked, disrupted or threatened by people who are perceived to be in the ‘in-group’ or by those perceived to be in the ‘out-group’. Because the Gay Village is a sexualised space drawn around the distinction that gay equals the in-group and straight equals the out-group, it seems that issues of comfort and safety were constitutive right from the beginning (Whittle 1994). When the first bar, *The New Union*, opened on Canal Street in 1959,

⁶² We might question whether comfort and safety are ‘emotions’. They might also be ‘feelings’ or ‘affects’. For the purpose of this chapter, this distinction is not important. Like Bondi et al. (2005) and Ahmed (2004), I will use ‘emotions’ and ‘feelings’ interchangeably. Like Ahmed (2004), I am not interested in what comfort and safety ‘are’ but in what they ‘do’.

homosexuality was still illegal in Britain.⁶³ The area around Canal Street was known for cottaging and as a secret meeting place for men, but men who were caught having sex in public could be arrested and imprisoned. Policemen and others also subjected gay men to physical violence. Because of this fact of life, bars were often located in cellars and regulated by strict door policies that often included certain knocking codes (Miyake 2007: 60; Quilley 1997). While in those early days, the safety of gay men (and lesbians) was threatened by members of the police force, nowadays special police units exist that are responsible for ensuring safety of the Village's users. Nevertheless, a sense of heterosexuals invading the space remains an issue. Straight men and women are often seen as a threat to comfort and safety.

For Kathryn, comfort and safety are produced by an imagined sameness and claimed on the basis of sexuality and sexualised space – the Gay Village was created for 'us' and it is the only space where 'we' can feel comfortable and safe. She claims some ownership of space based on sexual identity by linking a lesbian and gay subject ('we') to an object ('the village'). This is similar to the findings of the research project *Sexuality and the Politics of Violence and Safety* (2004) conducted by Leslie Moran and Beverley Skeggs (with Paul Tyrer and Karen Corteen). As those researchers argue, "The Village" is perceived as a possession and a place of belonging that gives shape and location to particular needs; identified with that space.' (Skeggs et al. 2004: 57) Skeggs, et al., point out that the Gay Village becomes a property not just in relation to the lesbian and gay subject but also as a relation between the lesbian/gay and heterosexual subjects (Skeggs et al. 2004: 59). Research participants quoted by Skeggs, et al. say that 'ownership is used not only in terms of individual property, but in the context of a claim of collective possession and belonging, one that incorporates

⁶³ Homosexuality was illegal in Britain until 1967, at which time it became legal only in private for two men over 21 years of age.

the speaker' (Skeggs et al. 2004: 63). Kathryn echoes the earlier participants when she constructs a homogenous lesbian and gay subject and a homogenous heterosexual subject which is its antithesis. While gay people own the Gay Village, that is to say, heterosexuals own the rest of town. She draws clear boundaries between the 'in-group' and the 'out-group' and asserts that only the latter (heterosexuals) can threaten the safety and comfort of the lesbian and gay subject (and I support her here, as my 'yeah yeah' indicates). There seems to be an underlying assumption that lesbians and gay men cause less of a threat to comfort and safety to other lesbians and gay men than straight men (and women) do.

This assumption can also be found in Skeggs et al.'s (2004) work. Their research project focused on experiences and practices of safety as opposed to violence. The researchers distributed questionnaires in venues in the Gay Village. One of the questions they asked was: 'How safe would you say the Village is at moment?' (Corteen 2002: 265). The researchers linked this question and the answers they received to sexuality and the sexual identities of those who answered that question. Because the research project focused on safety in relation to homophobic violence, heterosexuals somehow, and inevitably, became the focus of threat of safety. Skeggs et al. (2004) do not give any examples of feelings of being unsafe or uncomfortable in the presence of and interactions with other lesbians and gay men. Nor do they provide information about the racial identification of their interviewees (with one exception). It seems to me that these researchers did not take into account the intersecting identities of the people who filled in the questionnaire and who therefore might have answered the question not in relation to sexuality but in relation to other identifiers. In this chapter, I explore the idea that the Gay Village's comfort and safety are produced through sexuality *and* through 'race' and show that it is partly the spaces' orientation

around whiteness (see Ahmed 2007) that produces the comfort and the safety for white lesbians and gay men.

As Minnie Bruce Pratt (1988) writes in her essay, *Identity: Skin Blood Heart*, feelings of comfort and safety are not just 'individual' emotional responses; they are embedded in a wider discursive frame and are linked to the past (e.g., the history of enslavement). In the extract above Pratt challenges notions of safe and comfortable Women's Spaces and urges white women to examine their feelings of comfort and safety. Throughout her essay, she reflects on her own emotional responses and writes that she is aware that she needs to overcome her own fears, which result from having 'learned' in the late 1960s she drove through a 'black neighbourhood' in a town in North Carolina to distribute flyers for a Women's Movement's event. What she learned was which areas were 'safe' for white women and which were not. When she lived in a predominantly black neighbourhood in Washington, D.C., some years later, she became conscious of her perceptual practices and paid attention to which 'figures' on the street made her feel safe or unsafe. As she wrote (and lived), she constantly tried to challenge her fears. Her narrative points to the complexity of 'reading' bodies and emotional responses in space. Sometimes it is the white man on the street at night who makes her feel unsafe. Living in a black neighbourhood makes her feel comfortable because the voices she hears around her remind her of her 'home'. But she also describes some painful encounters that arise because of the racial history inscribed in those encounters.

Pratt's essay, which is a powerful illustration of the relationship between perceptions, emotions and space, demonstrates how we can think of comfort and safety as constitutive of racial and sexual subjectivities. Because she grew up in Alabama in the 1940s and 50s, comfort and safety were constitutive of her white,

gendered, heterosexual subjectivity in a region of the U.S. where black men were lynched by white men who believed they needed to ‘protect’ white women. Pratt came to realise that she had assumed the comfort and safety of a white, middle-class, Christian-raised woman when she lost those emotional states by coming out as a lesbian. (And when she came out, she also lost the custody of her children, which commonly happened and still does happen.) As she suggests, comfort and safety are relational, and it needs to be asked how they are produced, how they are achieved, and what people might expect from others in order to feel comfortable.

In lesbian spaces, it seems that if they want to feel safe and comfortable, some women need to do ‘emotional labour’, a concept developed by Arlie Hochschild (1983). Arguing from the perspective of the sociology of work, Hochschild wrote that emotional labour is crucial to the performance of gender in the service industry. She argued that cultural ‘feeling rules’ exist and that by doing emotional labour women (or, more specifically in her research, flight attendants) adopt an emotional disposition that ensures they feel what the job demands they should feel. Emotional labour involves shaping one’s own feelings to feel what ‘should’ be felt and expressing this ‘should’ with specific facial and body appearance. Feelings are shaped by both ‘surface acting’ and ‘deep acting’. The first means deceiving others about one’s own feelings on the surface, while the latter is about inducing or suppressing one’s ‘real feelings’. Rani Kawale (2004: 577) uses Hochschild’s concept of ‘emotional labour’ in her analysis of the ‘emotional aspects of sexual geographies and how these are structured by “race”’.⁶⁴ She argues that not enough attention has been paid to the emotional experience of sexualised spaces. Drawing on Hochschild’s concept, Kawale

⁶⁴ Yasmin Gunaratnam and Gail Lewis (2001) have argued that bringing intersections with ‘race’ and other social categories into the analysis fundamentally challenges Hochschild’s concept. Hochschild developed her concept by looking at the gendered labour market without taking into account how the gendered labour market is also racialised, plus and what implications this has for black women and for the public/private divide.

argues that ‘the performance of emotion work is a key feature in performing sexuality and crucial to the construction of sexualised space’ (Kawale 2004: 565). She also shows how emotional labour is performed by her bisexual and lesbian participants ‘to comply with heterosexualized feeling rules in everyday places’ like the family home, the street, and the workplace (Kawale 2004: 572). She argues, however, that her participants also have to perform emotional labour in lesbian and gay spaces by negotiating wanted feelings and actual feelings, for instance, feeling nervous, shy or shocked when entering (and being in) lesbian and gay spaces, feeling pressured to look like a lesbian (hair, clothes), and feeling anger about men or transsexuals in lesbian spaces or not being “read” as a lesbian.

While Kawale illustrates how both her white and South Asian participants perform ‘emotional labour’ on ‘the scene’ in London, she explores only how the South Asian women’s emotional labour is related to the racialisation of space. Although my research does not focus on South Asian women, some of my participants’ accounts of experiencing lesbian spaces as white are similar. The emotional labour involved is indicated in Joanne’s and Firth’s accounts of not going out in the Gay Village if they feel too sensitive. Natasha, for her part, refuses to do any emotional labour. After the incident with ‘the look’, she said, she has no reason to go to places where she feels uncomfortable.

But what about white women and their emotions in relation to the sexualisation and racialisation of space? As I argued in chapter 4, white women tend not to reflect on the unequal distribution of emotional labour. In our group, for instance, there was no awareness of why Joanne might not feel comfortable in *Vanilla*. Instead of looking at performances of emotional labour, this chapter explores the performativity of comfort and safety and how those emotional states constitute gendered, sexualised and

racialised subjectivities and spaces. I start my exploration by briefly introducing the field of emotional geographies in research on night-time leisure spaces.

Emotional geographies of night-time leisure spaces

There has been an increasing interest in the relationship between emotions and space in recent years which has led to the new academic field, ‘emotional geographies’ (see, for instance, Bondi et al. 2005 and a journal titled *Emotional Geographies*). Here emotions are not understood as entirely interiorised mental states but in terms of their ‘socio-spatial mediation and articulation’ (Bondi et al. 2005: 3, original emphasis). Work in this field takes a ‘spatially engaged approach to the study of emotions’ (Bondi et al. 2005: 2) and looks at the relationality of emotions as ‘produced in the interplay between and among people and environments’ (Bondi et al. 2005: 9). Research conducted in this field explores different emotional experiences in certain spaces and endeavours to show how spaces have certain emotions attached to them. In what follows, I also explore the relationship between emotions and space; my approach, however, is fundamentally different. In the edited collection, *Emotional Geographies*, some of the articles focus on social differentiations such as gender, age and illness and how different social groups emotionally experience certain spaces. I am not seeking to describe how lesbians emotionally experience the Gay Village and other sexualised spaces, nor am I analysing differences in those experiences between white and black lesbians. Rather, by focusing on comfort and safety as emotional states, I want to look at how those emotions are *produced* through the reading of bodies and spaces and how they *produce* bodies and spaces and the relationality among them.

In making a claim for geographers to investigate the emotional experiences of night-time leisure spaces, Phil Hubbard (2005: 132) argues that the

idea that evening and night-time leisure is emotionally-charged has not been widely explored, but offers massive potential for understanding people's participation in an evening economy that is increasingly important part of the urban economy.

Hubbard looks at 'emotional experiences' of night-time leisure spaces in Leicester's city centre in comparison to emotional experiences of leisure spaces outside the city centre. He analyses how his interviewees emotionally experience those spaces and how those spaces are associated differently with forms of managing emotions. The main finding of his research is that many of his participants preferred visiting peripheral leisure spaces because the urban spaces were associated with negative emotions like fear (Hubbard 2005: 131). Multi-leisure parks outside the city centre felt more comfortable and safer for his interviewees.

As the opening account of this chapter indicates, 'gay' spaces were experienced by Kathryn as more comfortable and safer than straight spaces. I want to illustrate this further with a few examples.

Kathryn said that she feels a 'hundred times more comfortable in the village than I do ... I feel quite threatened sometimes when I go out to hetero places, I feel really uncomfortable, depends on the bar'. She emotionally experiences the Gay Village differently than straight spaces in Manchester. While she first gave a generalising account of straight spaces, she soon said that there are specific differences in feeling comfortable, depending on the space. When I asked her what actually makes her feel comfortable in the Gay Village, she said it was knowing that there are people who 'have that really massive thing in common with you'. She added

that she sometimes realises how comfortable she feels in gay spaces when she experiences the feeling of discomfort in straight spaces.

Anja clearly distinguished between ‘straight’ and ‘gay’ places, but in her account this separation had a gendered dimension. Drawing on her experiences with door policies of straight clubs, she said that:

the straight and the gay places are totally separate and, you know, as a, as a gay woman if you don’t look really feminine, you know, and [don’t] hide your being gay, well, you can’t really go to any straight places. [...] If you’re not dressed in a feminine way, you don’t look feminine enough, you look a bit butchy and a bit gay, and then that’s it, you know, you just can’t get in.

Anja speaks to the relationship between gender and sexuality and reflects what Judith Butler has argued, that ‘policing gender is sometimes used as a way of securing heterosexuality’ (1999: xii, also see my chapter 2). Anja interprets her experiences not in relation to a certain sexual behaviour, but to her gender expression, as if her sexuality is visible on her body. Gill Valentine has argued that in certain spaces lesbians often police themselves – their dress, behaviour and desires – in order not to be perceived as lesbians and not to become the target of (male) heterosexual gazes. In addition, she argues that ‘you don’t have to *be* “one” [a lesbian] just to *look like* “one” to be seen as a threat to the heterosexuality of the street’ (Valentine 1996: 149). Sometimes, she adds, not claimed but ascribed identities sexualise space. This is another example of how we can think of perceptual practices (Byrne 2006) as not only racialising bodies but as also sexualising them and the spaces they are in.

The gaze of the bouncers of ‘straight places’ reproduces the identity of the space in the same way the identity of gay spaces is regulated. As Anja further explained, lesbian and gay spaces are important in the sense that they offer ‘moral support ... because usually you do face quite a lot of homophobic comments and

homophobic environments constantly'. Like Kathryn, Anja sees lesbian and gay spaces as primarily important in relation to straight spaces, although she also said that in general she does not like the concept of the Gay Village in terms of being a separate 'gay area' and 'as soon as you exit the Gay Village, you have the feeling you are in a totally straight world'. She would prefer having lesbian and gay spaces spread throughout the city instead of being clustered together. Lesbian spaces, she said, offer 'relief' from homophobic environments and in contrast to heterosexual spaces, here 'you can be yourself'. In the next part of this chapter, I relate that she also suggested that 'being yourself' in lesbian spaces is not unconditional. She argued that because lesbians do in general feel more comfortable in lesbian spaces than they do in straight spaces, there is more pressure to conform to a certain lesbian identity which is created in those spaces.

Danielle gave the strongest account of feeling safe in the Gay Village, although she did not directly link this feeling to her sexual identity or the sexual identity of the space. Lesbian and gay spaces as such are not important to her. She said she would prefer sexually mixed spaces. When I asked her why she goes out in the Gay Village if she is not particularly interested in the sexual identities of the people in the space, her explanation was based on issues of safety:

Because I found that there was no trouble. Every time I went to a straight club in Manchester there has been trouble. I've never seen any in the Village. I go out on my own, so I like to feel safe.

Danielle based her account of feeling safe on the distinction between 'straight' and 'gay' spaces but she presented this distinction as arbitrary. Safety means the absence of violence or threat of violence, partly because she has 'never seen a fight' in the Gay Village. Although Danielle differentiated spaces sexually, she did not relate

the difference in safety to the sexual identity of the spaces. Her account of safety was unique. Unlike my other participants, when she described her first visit to the Gay Village, she said nothing about the bars or the people or the 'atmosphere', but mainly talked about feeling safe there. She told me that the first time she went to the Gay Village she was quite surprised that 'you could get a place for going out that would be so varied and so safe in such a big city because I could feel straight away that you are safe in that place'. She based her feelings of safety on the scale of the city; she felt safer in the Gay Village than in a similar-sized south European city where she had lived before and where it was 'likely to be dangerous at night-time, [where] you're likely to be insulted coming out of a club'. When I asked her what 'safe' means for her, she said:

Safe means that you can walk down the street completely on your own, even speak to a complete stranger as you're walking down the street, but at no moment you feel like they're likely to turn around and ask for your purse.

Danielle thus ascribes her feeling of safety in the Gay Village primarily to the door staff who 'have all got that thing that is really reassuring'. When I tried to challenge her and said that I had heard different accounts and that the Village does not necessarily feel safe for everyone, she replied, 'I am not saying that it is actually safe in reality, I am saying that it feels safe'.

So here we have three examples of emotional experiences of the Gay Village and other (straight) spaces in town. Like Hubbard's comparison of city centre spaces and out of town leisure centres, Kathryn's, Anja's and Danielle's accounts suggest a preference for the spaces of the Gay Village because the other spaces have negative emotions attached, namely discomfort and feeling unsafe. Danielle's account was

centred on ‘safety’, while Kathryn and Anja expressed their emotional experiences in terms of discomfort.

While my participants often used comfort and safety in combination (see Kathryn’s opening account), these two emotional expressions seem to ‘do’ slightly different things. Skeggs et al. (2004), likewise point out differences between comfort and safety. These researchers describe being surprised by their interviewees and focus group participants’ use of ‘comfort’ when talking about experiences of safety (Skeggs et al. 2004: 83). They found that notions of ‘comfort’ and being ‘comfortable’ were much more common than notions of being ‘safe’ or ‘secure’ (83). Danielle’s account also suggests that issues of safety are expressed in relation to immediate physical danger (being beaten up for instance). As Skeggs et al. further argue – and as illustrated in Kathryn’s and Anja’s accounts – comfort is defined against a wider experience of danger and insecurity than from physical violence in contrast to a more diffuse form of threat, a wider spectrum of insecurity, danger and loss for safety (Skeggs et al. 2004: 84).

Skeggs et al. (2004) found multiple notions of comfort in their research, including a sense of belonging and being. The notion of comfort includes an ontological dimension, of ‘just being’, and an ontological security, as an experience associated with the ‘true self’ (Skeggs et al. 2004: 87). This is also illustrated in Anja’s account of being able to ‘be yourself’ in lesbian and gay spaces in contrast to straight spaces. My other participants’ accounts were also strongly linked to issues of identity. Some of my participants said they feel comfortable with their sexuality, with ‘who they are’. Phoebe said that her sexuality is important to her, but that she wished it were not because ‘it only becomes an issue for me when somebody else is oppressing me or making me feel uncomfortable about it’. Her account illustrates the

relationality of comfort/discomfort, how her sexual subjectivity is constituted through that relationality, and how those feelings of discomfort are constitutive of it.

A crucial difference to Hubbard's research is that the negative emotional attachment to certain spaces is closely linked to my participants' sexual identity, their (imagined) belonging to a sexual marginalised group. While Danielle's account of safety is not so much related to her sexual identity, it is quite clear that Anja and Kathryn use comfort as the link to identity. Hubbard does not look at how his interviewees' different identities impact on their emotional experience of night-time leisure spaces. Although he mentions (2005: 127) that 'encounters with social difference' led especially to negative emotions in city centre leisure spaces, he does not explain those differences. Nor does he lay out whether there were any differences in his interviewees' responses in terms of age, 'race', ability, class and sexuality, although he theoretically draws attention to those differences (see below). He points out that for further analysis it would be important to look at how different social groups negotiate emotions in the city (Hubbard 2005: 132). However, such an approach fixes social identities. I suggest that it is actually more fruitful to analyse how emotions constitute those social identities because, by tracing the shifts in emotional registers in the dynamics of spatial interactions, it is possible to discern the intersectional relation among different dimensions of difference. So instead of looking at the differences between straight and gay spaces in fixed or absolute terms, I suggest that we look at how comfort and safety are used to construct this difference.

While I do not intend to deny that the Gay Village feels more comfortable and safer for some of my participants, these questions nevertheless need to be asked: On what is the comfort and safety based? Is it solely sexuality? And who can disturb or

threaten the comfort and safety? I next argue that comfort and safety are indeed complex issues.

The complexity of comfort and safety

It is apparent that the inscription of bodies with gendered, classed, aged and sexed meanings shapes the relation between people and place in powerful ways (so that, for instance, some bodies may be coded as ‘out of place’ in certain sites). (Hubbard 2005: 121)

Hubbard’s disregard of ‘race’ is very surprising, considering the fact that Leicester, where he conducted his study, might soon be the first city in England where the majority of the population is defined as ‘ethnic minority’. As I have learned through my research, the relationship between people and places is significantly shaped by the way bodies are inscribed with racialised meanings. I argue that it is important to not only focus on the bodies that appear to be ‘out of place’ but also to look at how the bodies that are ‘in place’ are constituted by the relationship between emotions and space.

However, there might not be a clear boundary between being ‘in place’ or ‘out of place’. In Kathryn’s case, comfort and discomfort are relational – when she feels the discomfort in some straight spaces, she realises how comfortable she feels in gay spaces. Danielle’s account illustrates the relationality of safety. As in other urban spaces, she feels unsafe in straight spaces in Manchester, whereas the Gay Village feels safe to her. In both accounts, both the distinction between the spaces and between comfort/discomfort, safe/unsafe seem to be clear-cut issues.

But this is rather complex. In the account that opens this chapter, although Kathryn claims ownership of the space on grounds of comfort and safety, she does not seem to feel safe everywhere in the Gay Village. As I wrote in chapter 4, she told me that she had not experienced the ‘black nights’ in Mantos as a safe space and that although it was supposed to be a gay night she ‘did not really get that vibe’. This particular space in the Gay Village, which Kathryn perceived to be ‘90 percent black’ and heterosexual, triggered the emotional response of feeling unsafe. When I asked her what it was that made her feel comfortable in lesbian and gay spaces, she said ‘it’s your people’. In our discussions about why the Gay Village is predominantly white, she said that it is ‘human nature’ to be exclusionary and ‘to mix with people that you have most in common with, that you can instantly relate to’. She added that black and Asian lesbians might not feel comfortable in predominantly white spaces and that she would not feel comfortable if she were to come into a room full of people of Pakistani origin, where she would instantly feel a difference. Kathryn’s account indicates a complex relationship between seeing, ‘reading’ and feeling space. Perceptual practices and emotions might indeed be intertwined with each other. As Paul Rodaway writes, the Latin term *percipere*, ‘perception’, means ‘to take hold of, *to feel*, comprehend’ (Rodaway 1994: 10, my emphasis). This illustrates what Ahmed (2004) has also argued, that emotions are not just something inside of us that we personally ‘own’ or ‘have’, and neither are they just socially constructed from the outside. Rather, as she suggests, they

create the very effect of the surfaces and boundaries that allow us to distinguish an inside and outside in the first place. So emotions are not simply ‘I’ or ‘we’ have. Rather, it is through emotions, or how we respond to objects, and others, that surfaces or boundaries are made: the ‘I’ and ‘we’ are shaped by, and even take the shape of, contact with others. (2004 10)

In Kathryn's case, just the seeing of Pakistani bodies would make her feel uncomfortable. In an interactive relationship, feeling discomfort also shapes those bodies. Whilst Kathryn's feelings of comfort and safety in lesbian and gay spaces appear to be primarily based on sexuality, they are based on 'race' at the same time. Her account suggests that comfort and safety are not only produced on the basis of imagined sexual sameness, but also through an imagined racial sameness and/or presumed cultural familiarity. Thus, while in Kathryn's accounts comfort and safety are closely linked to the sexualisation of space, they are also linked to the racialisation of space. She does not, and would not, feel comfortable (and safe) in spaces that are predominantly black or Asian including, presumably, the Gay Village if it were predominantly Asian. Therefore, the lesbian and gay subject that she constructs in her accounts is inherently white.

Danielle differentiated between actually 'being' safe and 'feeling' safe, which further illustrates the relationship between perceptions and feelings. She told me that she felt particularly safe in *Coyotes*, where the door staff 'tend not to let people in if they know they caused trouble previously'. I was quite surprised, when a few weeks after Danielle's, Louise told me about an incident that had happened in *Coyotes*. She was with Danielle on a night out in *Coyotes* and a woman came up to Danielle in an aggressive manner and got very close to her face. Louise said that she had never seen Danielle so intimidated. Danielle told Louise that this woman had 'beaten her up' a year earlier, and Louise told me not to mention it to Danielle, as she did not seem to want to talk about it. In subsequent visits to *Coyotes*, I witnessed the impact the presence of this woman had on Danielle's emotions. She always seemed to be quite tense. Her girlfriend, Carol, was worried about Danielle's safety and always asked me to look after Danielle when she went to the toilets or to the bar. It seemed the woman

in question was trying to threaten Danielle by constantly looking in her direction. On one of those nights, Danielle finally told me about the incident and that this woman, who she did not even know, had beaten her up a year earlier for no particular reason. She reported the incident to the police and told them that the woman was still threatening her, but there was some difference in Danielle's statement and the other woman's statement and the police did not seem to be interested in following up.

Of all my participants, Danielle gave the strongest account of feeling safe in the Gay Village, and yet she seems to have faced the most unsafe situations. She felt justified in going to the Gay Village because, in contrast to straight spaces, she had never 'seen any trouble', but sometime before the interview she had actually been actively involved in 'trouble'. Her account thus contradicts the discrepancy Skeggs et al., found in their research. Their survey data suggest that fear of violence is greater than actual experience with violence (2004: 159). As I pointed out above, these researchers focus on homophobic violence perpetrated by heterosexuals and do not seem to mention violence from someone in the 'in-group'. I can think of two possible explanations for the disjunction in Danielle's account: either the incident with this woman made her aware that she only 'usually' feels very safe in the Gay Village or this incident did not disrupt her feelings of safety, as her safety could only be threatened by someone from the 'out-group', people she perceives as 'different' ('the stranger'). Her account generally highlights the importance of safety in night-time leisure spaces for women. It also seems to be gendered, as the 'stranger' is usually male.

Despite the apparent discrepancy between Danielle's account and Skeggs et al.'s findings, feelings of safety and actual crime statistics are often not congruent with each other. One of Skeggs et al.'s major findings is that their data 'challenge the

assumptions about the role of commercial gay space in providing spaces of safety, a haven from heterosexual violence. Rather it seems to increase the perception and fear of danger, as if constantly under threat' (2004: 8). The most frequent users, gay men, reported feeling least safe. However, the fear of violence was actually greater than the actual experience with violence (2004: 159). In his research project conducted in a predominantly white 'gay neighbourhood' in Washington, D.C., Wayne Myslik (1996) found the opposite to be true. In the neighbourhood he studied, homophobic violence was statistically more likely than in other parts of the city. But the gay men he interviewed still identified it as a safe space. Myslik concludes that gay men define 'safety' more in terms of 'living openly as a gay person' or 'feeling comfortable in my sexuality' than in physical terms, and it seems that his respondents interpreted their feelings more in terms of comfort than of safety. 'Community spirit' and the emotional support of the neighbourhood create this feeling of safety. As Myslik (1996: 168-169) points out, some of his respondents explained their feelings of safety in the sense of 'safety in numbers', so in that respect these kinds of spaces create a strong sense of empowerment. He argues that the:

safety they feel, therefore, is clearly an emotional and psychological safety that comes from being in an area in which one has some sense of belonging or social control, even in the absence of physical control (168).

Again, feeling safe is defined against an 'external' threat of an out-group and does not seem to include threats of safety from somebody of the in-group, as in Danielle's case. As I have pointed out, Danielle has no great sense of belonging to any sexually defined 'community' (or, at least, that's how she presented herself). Her definitions of safety seem to focus more on safety in physical terms than in terms of 'emotional and psychological safety'.

We might ask, then, how the racialisation of space might impact on Danielle's feelings of safety. She said that she could feel 'straight away' that the Gay Village is safe, suggesting that she based her judgement on the visual appearance of the bodies she saw in the space (and on their performances). Myslik (1996: 166) argues that one reason for his white interviewees' sense of safety was the racial homogeneity of the neighbourhood: 'Not surprisingly, then, one does not find a high degree of fear over general crime'. He states this quite uncritically, as though a higher fear of general crime when the neighbourhood is racially mixed is justified. Although Myslik writes in the context of the U.S., in the UK there is also a link between racialised areas and perceptions of crime (Fortier 2008). It seems, however, that it is actually 'white Englishness' (implicitly coded as working-class) that triggers Danielle's feelings of being unsafe, as I will show in the next section.

Gendered discomfort

While white lesbians do not seem to be able to threaten Danielle's sense of safety in the Gay Village, even when they carry out physical violence against her. They can, however, threaten her sense of comfort. When describing her 'dream lesbian space', Danielle drew on a butch/femme discourse by explaining that her dream space would look 'less stereotyped' than in the Gay Village, where too many women would be either 'trying to look like men' or 'trying to look as girly as possible'. While Danielle does not like either of these 'stereotypes', it is the really butchy women who make her uncomfortable. She said she prefers *Coyotes* to *Vanilla* because

you get less of the stereotypes. You get the girly stereotypes, but you don't get as much as the other stereotypes, the really butchy kind, doing too much. That's the kind of thing that makes me not like *Vanilla* for example... Some people in there are scary. They make me uncomfortable.

'Doing too much', as Danielle says, indicates an 'over performance' of gender which is immediately noticeable. Danielle seems to draw on a general image attached to *Vanilla*. As Sarah told me, the bar has a nickname *Gorilla* – which I actually heard several times. As she said, 'It's not as much Gorilla any more as it used to be, but you used to find stereotype women, quite butch, short haired, boyish looking' going in. Danielle also described the women in *Vanilla* as 'a lot more English', even 'Mancunian' than the women in *Coyotes*, and she could tell this 'because of their behaviour':

there is like, you know, that extreme of the English, very, very extremely butch, like, utterly aggressive and obviously drinking too much. [The] kind of person, you get more of that in *Vanilla*.

The gendered performance that makes Danielle uncomfortable is ethnicised through the reference to 'the English'. The Mancunian butch woman symbolises the 'extreme of the English' through being aggressive and drinking too much. Danielle's use of 'obviously' indicates that she draws on a stereotype, a figure she thinks is well known. It is significant that this knowable figure seems to be implicitly classed, too. We carried on with our discussion:

Nina: OK, so you think it's more the butch women in *Vanilla* who kind of drink.

Danielle: Mhm, it's the one thing that just jumped to my, to my eyes the first time I walked into *Vanilla*, and made me very uncomfortable straight away.

Nina: So how was it? Can you explain it the first time when you walked into *Vanilla*? When was that?

Danielle: It was summer, two years ago, and it was Pride, and it was the middle of the afternoon. I walked in there, and it was completely dark and completely packed and everywhere I looked around me was women trying to look like men, I was very uncomfortable. I walked straight back out, I didn't even order a drink..

Thus, whilst the first time she went to the Gay Village, she could feel 'straight away' that it is a safe space, her first time going to *Vanilla* was accompanied by feeling discomfort 'straight away'. In talking about safety, she did not clearly specify on what grounds her feelings were based, but now she describes explicitly what produced her discomfort: butch appearances and performances, which in her view are excessive gender expressions. Danielle's discomfort is produced through the visual, that is, through the women's appearances (their 'look') and through her own looking practices. She suggests another dimension of her discomfort:

Nina: OK, and what did they do?

Danielle: They were just standing there and being there.

Nina: That was enough? [laughs]

Danielle: Yeah

Nina: But did they look at you or...?

Danielle: Probably did, but there is a kind of, I mean, the feeling I got from the place was like, "oh, there is a stranger coming in", like "you're not welcome, we don't see you usually in here", that kind of thing.

Nina: And how did they look like? I mean, were they all just young and white (D: yeah) and butch?

Danielle: Probably all around between 25 and 30, 30 odd, but all very stereotyped butch, and they were all, like, they owned the premises. I don't like that kind of feeling. I like to feel welcome in a place, and if I don't, I walk out.

Nina: Mhm, and was it mixed? Was it just white or...?

Danielle: Nah, it was mainly white and blonde.

Nina: White and blonde? [Laughs] OK.

Danielle: Yeah, yeah, that's what made me think they were mainly English

Danielle's reaction seems to echo accounts of looking practices discussed in chapter 5. She especially echoes Tania's account of being looked at as if she were 'a stranger coming in'. Danielle's discomfort is produced through looking and also through an interactive process of seeing/reading/performing. She sees blonde women who perform in certain ways and 'reads' them as white, butch and English. She uses white and blonde as an indicator for Englishness, showing that she imagines England to be a white nation. Her particular reading of this stereotypical figure (aggressive, owning the premises) made her feel uncomfortable. Her discomfort is, on the one hand, produced by the women's gender performances and her particular reading of it, but this is, on the other hand, also linked to a feeling of not belonging. It seems that in this example, a particular classed and gendered (butch working-class) whiteness threatens her comfort and here she draws on a very stereotypical image of whiteness, even though she generally does not like the idea of racial identifications. It is significant that she was reluctant to define herself as white. She said that she is not sure about those categories and that her grandfather 'looked darker than a Moroccan person' although he was from the south of Europe, 'so I don't really know if you can say white, or whatever, [and] that's why, that's why I don't really like that kind of thing'.

Danielle's father and her mother are from different nations in the south of Europe, and she grew up in her father's land. She told me that, like her mother, she 'got bullied' in school because of her dark skin and because she did not look like the

citizens of that country, ‘and, funnily enough, my brother, who took after my dad and is very pale and nearly ginger and that, never got bullied’.

I was surprised by Danielle’s description of herself as being ambiguously white, as I had perceived her skin colour ‘clearly’ to be white. She might have felt different to the women in *Vanilla* because of her dark hair and dark eyes. She had negative experiences in school because her body was marked as different, as not belonging. Her experiences in school may have shaped her experiences in *Vanilla*.⁶⁵

Phoebe gave a similar account of gendered performances, but in her case they threatened not her comfort but her safety. She described her dream space as ‘open and safe’ and said that spaces feel safe for her when she is not getting ‘dirty looks’. When I probed her further about how space can be safe, she said:

Phoebe: It, I suppose, we talk about ‘safe’ in lots of different respects, I mean, obviously, there’s homophobia, there’s hate crime, not just homophobic hate crime, but in terms of race, etc., all types of hate crime. But what I’m really talking about here is the self-oppression within the community. I mean the intimidation that’s felt on the women’s scene ... and that’s what I mean by safe. I find the scene very ehm intimidating and threatening because there are various cliques, you know. A typical example is, you’re going into a bar and there is a gang around the pool table and they can make, you know, another woman coming in feel very isolated, and it’s quite intimidating and threatening. And if you’re not part of that group, if you don’t dress like them, if you don’t play pool, ehm you’re quite marginalised within our own community. There’s also, I guess, like any [inaudible] premises, issues of aggression and violence within those social spaces. I’d like that to improve as well. I don’t care, really, if it’s just the same average as the heterosexual scene or whatever. I’m not bothered about that. I’m bothered about the women scene, and I think we can improve on ... the atmosphere and the safe environment that we create in our own spaces.

Nina: So you would define safety more, quite broadly, kind of, what it’s like to come into a space and to feel comfortable in a way.

Phoebe: Yeah, yeah.

Nina: Not threatened or having feelings of being.

⁶⁵ In chapter 7, I draw out more thoroughly how experiences in growing up spaces and other spaces might impact on the experiences in lesbian spaces.

Phoebe: Yeah, or not fitting in or feeling isolated, so, yes, safety in terms of that environment an emotional impact it can have on you, right to the kind of more traditional ideas when we think about safety of being safe walking down the street or going to the cash point, but it is safety within our own communities as well. It is quite threatening sometimes.

In her definitions of safety Phoebe starts and ends with common understandings of crime as opposed to safety. While she initially refers to hate crime on grounds of sexuality and 'race', when she speaks of exclusionary practices, which she defines as 'self-oppression within the community', 'race' does not seem to play a significant role. Her imaginations of 'community' seem to be based solely on gender and sexuality. In contrast to Danielle, who, when talking about safety referred to 'physical safety', Phoebe speaks of 'emotional safety'. Her sense of feeling unsafe includes feelings of intimidation, threat and isolation. The intimidation and threats are mainly triggered by 'tight-knit groups' or cliques and their exclusiveness (see also Wilson and Zisman 1992). To strengthen this meaning of exclusiveness, Phoebe uses the term 'gang'. Her use of the word seems to be congruent with Hanish Canham's definition (2002). Canham (2002) argues that a gang is characterised by a state of mind in which there is a predominance of destructive forces mainly evoked through anxiety and vulnerability projected onto others. These destructive forces lead to aggression towards others outside of the gang. This aggression can be expressed physically or emotionally by drawing close boundaries around the insiders to the exclusion of those deemed outsiders.

Phoebe's account powerfully illustrates the relationship between emotions and space. She talks about the emotional impact of an 'environment' and how feeling included and fitting in would trigger the desired emotional impact – which she defines as safety. Her articulation of safety is similar to how Myslik (1996: 165) interprets his participants' accounts of feeling safe: 'emotional and psychological safety that comes

from being in an area in which one has some sense of belonging or social control'. Although Phoebe switches from a personal statement ('I find the scene') to a general one ('another woman coming in'), later in the interview it became clear that she was indeed talking about her own experiences and feelings. Unlike Danielle, who referred to women in *Vanilla*, Phoebe referred to women in *Coyotes* and said that to be part of 'those groups' you need to conform to a certain image, i.e., have a Mohawk haircut and wear 'the baggy jeans, the belt, the kind of quite, I wouldn't say aggressive, look but it's a defensive look, it's quite an angry look with lots of attitude'. Like Danielle, Phoebe seems to be referring to 'butches'. She told me that she got 'loads of grief' in lesbian and gay spaces when she was younger 'because I used to wear a leather skirt and I always wore make-up and I used to get things shouted at me, you know, "you fucking lipstick dyke" and all this shit'. Her account reflects a familiar critique of lesbian spaces that butch women represent a more authentic lesbian type than femmes. Again, past experience might contribute to constituting a certain bodily awareness *before* Phoebe came into lesbian space. This is a point I return to in chapter 7.

The performativity of comfort

Anja thought that lesbian and gay spaces were important because, in contrast to straight spaces, 'you can be yourself'. However, she later contradicted herself by saying there is an 'identity creation' going on in the lesbian scene which

leaves less room for individuality because you have so much pressure from outside. [It's] so much homophobic, you know, things going on outside that you make more effort to adapt yourself to the gay scene and to become one of them because that's where you feel comfortable and that's where you want to be part of ... rather than being yourself because, you know, you can't go to straight places. It just doesn't mix.

Anja argues that lesbians adapt themselves to follow certain styles in lesbian spaces. Other participants also expressed this. Maya said that she feels comfortable the way she is and that she never wanted to look like a 'typical lesbian', as she likes 'the girly-girly side' in her. Maya presented herself as having her 'own style', in contrast to butch women who would only 'try to be someone different' by adopting or copying a certain style. Lesley said that 'there's something that's comfy' about putting a certain lesbian image on, which she described as jeans, a vest and trendy hair. The comfort, she said, is produced through being desirable and would be an image that people fancy, 'what they like to look at'.

As chapter 5 suggested, looking practices can produce both comfort and discomfort. Receiving the 'dyke stare' (see Munt 1995) can produce comfort, while not receiving it or receiving other kinds of looks because of not conforming to the dominant desirable lesbian image (looking like a hippie, for instance) can lead to discomfort. To Anja, comfort in lesbian spaces is not produced through being desirable, as Lesley suggested, but through being undesired (or, rather unwanted) in 'straight' spaces. For Anja, lesbian and gay spaces are generally more comfortable because 'you can actually be yourself' and show sexual affection without having to worry about heterosexual looks or comments.

The awareness of that comfort is produced in relation to other spaces where homophobia is experienced. The comfort in lesbian spaces is not unconditional, however, but needs to be achieved through adaptation. Leaving 'less room for individuality' at the expense of 'just being yourself' also suggests that you need to compromise something in order to be comfortable. In Anja's view, lesbians do not challenge the pressure to conform to this image because of their experiences of being

excluded in straight spaces. She clarified this when I asked her what she meant by ‘identity creation’:

Yeah, I mean like it’s more like if you go, I mean, if you feel so excluded from the rest of, you know, the non-gay spaces, then you go to the gay space and it becomes more important to be lesbian, rather than anything else, I mean. to attach that label to yourself and also wear a certain type of clothes, to behave in a certain [way] just to really make sure you fit in, rather than just being yourself, and maybe. you know, in some aspects, maybe you don’t fit in because you don’t wear these sort of labels, you don’t do drugs, you don’t do alcohol or ... I don’t know....

Anja’s account is a great example of how emotions performatively constitute bodies (see Ahmed 2004), in this example, sexual bodies. The discomfort and felt exclusion in heterosexual spaces produces not only distinct spaces based on a lesbian and gay identity (as Kathryn suggested), but also the pressure to conform to certain norms in lesbian spaces because here you can potentially feel comfortable. Thus, she might be saying that the sexual identity on which the Gay Village is constructed is constituted through comfort, which includes the desire for and imaginations of comfort. What is interesting here is that Anja defines being a lesbian not only in terms of becoming, and thus as performative in Butler’s (1990) terms, but also that comfort is constitutive of this performative ‘identity creation’. Whilst to Kathryn, comfort (and safety) produced seemingly distinct spaces (gay/straight), to Anja, it actually constitutes sexuality. In Anja’s view, in lesbian spaces comfort and safety (and being yourself) are not unconditional, but need to be achieved.

As Danielle and Phoebe suggest, it is not easy ‘to fit in’, so lesbians might feel excluded not only in ‘non-gay’ spaces but also in gay spaces, which then produces its own discomforts. Anja’s descriptions are based on sexuality and gender. It raises the

question of whether the specific sexual category she constructs, and which according to her is constituted by comfort and safety, is racialised at the same time.

How can we understand her argument that ‘it becomes more important to be lesbian rather than anything else’ in light of intersecting identities? For whom does it become more important to be lesbian rather than anything else? Is the ‘lesbian’ she describes implicitly white? I suggest that Anja constructs her argument solely on the distinction straight/gay; and only sexuality intersecting with gender figures as a reason for exclusion. The assumed discomfort in straight spaces and comfort in gay spaces does not necessarily hold true for women who feel excluded on basis of other identifiers. Next, I give an example of how ‘race’ can disrupt an assumed comfort in the Gay Village.

Racialised discomfort

The Gay Village is constituted as a ‘gay space’, that is, primarily as a space for people who identify as gay or lesbian and occasionally a place that is exotic or cool for heterosexuals to visit. As I said in the introduction to this chapter, issues of comfort and safety are inscribed in the Gay Village’s history. Since its early days heterosexuals have been identified as the main threat to the Village’s users’ safety and comfort. Keeping heterosexuals out of the area has always been a concern (see Whittle 1994). During my research, I heard some women complaining about ‘hen nights’ and heterosexual men trying to chat lesbians up or making sexual comments. I did not hear any accounts of actual physical violence perpetrated by heterosexual men on lesbians in the Gay Village, and most of my participants generally did not mind if heterosexual men were in lesbian spaces.

Sarah expressed the strongest reservations about excluding men from lesbian spaces. In fact, she said that it is discriminatory and illegal to do so. When I told her that I had heard some women say they were concerned about heterosexual men coming into lesbian spaces and making sexual advances, Sarah told me that she used to work as a manager in a bar on Canal Street, which was known for a high proportion of heterosexual customers. But, she said, this was not really a problem:

We never had any, like, proper obnoxious people in. The majority of people who came there knew it was gay, respected that and what have you, but when I went into *Via Fossier* – it was round about the same period – there used to be loads of ... Asian blokes who had come in ... just to perve at the lesbians.... I remember one time – because I got off with this girl, which was quite funny – but we went and sat downstairs, and we were kissing and stuff and there was just, like, three blokes sat staring at us. They had sat down across and were just staring at us and started asking questions. [...] I had seen a pattern of it when I'd been there. There would always be ... you can always tell when they're straight, I think, [and] what their intentions are, and at that time there was a lot of that in there and it does make you feel uncomfortable. But I've not experienced anything since, or bad, even.

The incident Sarah described happened a few years ago. She contrasts 'proper obnoxious people' in the bar where she worked with 'perve' 'Asian blokes' in the bar next door. After a pause, she racially described the bodies of those who made her feel uncomfortable. It was not just their presence which produced the discomfort, but their gaze and their interactions, in terms of asking questions. Comfort here seems to justify her definition of them as 'perve', although at the same time it is understandable that she felt uncomfortable in this situation. What I would question here, however, is her use of 'loads of' and her comment that 'there was a lot of that in there'. (I will come back to that.) That she exaggerated their numbers, as Puwar (2004: 48-49) writes with regard to organisational spaces (see chapter 4, above), became clear in her further descriptions.

Sarah was generally concerned about the management of the two bars, particularly with regard to door policies, and she said that those Asian men should have not been allowed in, in the first place. When I questioned that and said that it seems to be difficult to judge at the door who is gay and who is not, she told me that there had actually been some concerns in the bar where she worked about the fact that more heterosexual than gay people seemed to frequent the bar. She started observing the door staff and recognised a pattern of not letting ‘Asian people’ in.

Nina: And what is the difference, I mean between these Asian guys and the Asian guys in *Via Fosser*, and how can you tell at the door?

Sarah: No, these were just a bunch of ... because the Asian guys in *Via Fosser* tend to be a bit older and they come in generally by themselves and just observe, but I’m not saying all Asian blokes, but ... there was, like, at the time, there was two or three that would go in all the time.

Nina: Ah, all right. The same guys?

Sarah: Yeah, it was the same guys. It wasn’t just like any Don’t get me wrong, I’m not being racist. Ehm, no, these were Chinese people who tried to get in, because I noticed that they kept ... they always used to stop Chinese people, and I was like, “Why you’re doing that”? And they were, like, “Oh, no, they’re not old enough”, or the bouncers will never say, “Oh, they’re not gay”, or “They’re gay” or this and the other. They’ll say, “Oh, they weren’t wearing the right shoes”. Or something like that. They’ll pick up on what they’re wearing, and I’d be, like, “But I’m wearing trainers. ... Let them in”. They’ll pick up on something. I don’t know, it’s really hard because ... yeah, I could stand on the door with them and say, oh, let them in, don’t let them in. It is ... it is quite a mean job, I suppose, to do because you’re being judgemental of someone before you even know them. You’re never going to know them anyway but....

So here, Sarah changes her account of numbers – from ‘loads of’ to ‘two or three’. What before sounded like an ‘invasion’ of straight Asian men now becomes a tiny number of men in *Via Fosser*’s big physical space, consisting of a restaurant, four levels with seating areas, four bars and a dance floor. Altogether, it can accommodate at least 300 people.

Through my direct questioning, Sarah faced the discursive problem of finding legitimate reasons (see Gill 1996) for her distinction between the ‘Asian guys’ who visited the bar next door and the ‘Asian people’ who visited the bar where she worked. She seemed to realise that what she had said before could be interpreted as being racist, so she had to establish that she is not. She then justified herself by pointing out the differences between the two groups, mainly in terms of age, and that they visit the space either as individuals or as groups. Being ‘older’ is indicative of the Asian men’s intentions, as is the fact that they would generally come by themselves, although she specifically said it was a group that made her uncomfortable. There are also differences in terms of gender; while she gave a quite gendered account of the Asian men (‘blokes’), her account of the ‘Chinese’ customers is neutral (‘people’). When Sarah established that she was not racist, she changed direction from finding explanations for the difference between them to focusing on the practices of the door staff. By the end of her speech, she has presented herself as somebody who tries to challenge racist door policies.

Sarah’s account illustrates how perceptual practices can make some bodies into bodies that threaten comfort and how, as Ahmed (2004) argues, bodies become objects of emotions. At the same time, emotions (here discomfort) create the boundaries of bodies. The discomfort makes some bodies into particular racialised bodies. I suggest that Sarah’s explanation – ‘no these were Chinese people who tried to get in’ – also powerfully illustrates her perceptual practices in terms of making ‘Asian’ bodies into ‘non-gay’ or ‘non-gay-friendly’ bodies, whereas she attributes more gayness or gay-friendliness to the bodies she reads as young and ‘Chinese’.

As I further explore in chapter 7, perceptions of Asian people are often linked to Islam, and this conflation of ‘race’ and religion leads to the assumption that the

person is homophobic, an assumption triggered by the underlying discourse that Islam is a homophobic religion (Haritaworn et al. 2008; Puar 2007). This might be one of the reasons why gay Asian men and women have difficulties in gaining entrance to gay spaces (see chapter 5; also Kawale 2003, 2004).

Conclusion

In this chapter I have looked at issues of comfort and safety that seem to be constitutive of the construction of the spaces of the Gay Village. What 'work' do comfort and safety do in shaping lesbian spaces? How are feelings of comfort and safety constitutive of sexualised and racialised subjectivities and spaces? Comfort and safety are not just produced by certain spaces, I argue, but they also gender, sexualise and racialise bodies and spaces.

My participants' accounts of comfort and safety suggest that the spaces of the Gay Village are constructed around (imagined) sameness. Because of a dominant discourse that comfort and safety can only be threatened by people from the out-group, only people who are perceived to be different can disrupt comfort and safety. However, following Ahmed's (2004) approach, I argue that feelings of comfort and safety actually produce certain bodies, such as 'butch lesbians' or 'Asian guys', and hence construct those differences. Comfort and safety are not just feelings individuals have, but are constitutive of racial and sexual subjectivities. This was clearly indicated by Phoebe's account of her sexuality becoming an issue when she was made uncomfortable about it. Anja argued that lesbians conform to certain dress styles because it is in lesbian spaces that they potentially feel comfortable. So, although in some ways the spaces' orientation around whiteness produces some comfort and the

safety for white lesbians and gay men, this is not unconditional but needs to be achieved through adaptation. Therefore, comfort is performative in the ways it is constitutive of a specific lesbian identity which is continuously reproduced. Byrne argues that ‘whiteness is more than a conscious identity; it is also a position within racialised discourses as well as a set of practices and imaginaries. As such, it plays a part in constructing the identities that white people *do* express.’ (2006: 3, original emphasis)

By focusing on white women this chapter explored how comfort and safety play a part in those practices and imaginations and in articulating a racialised lesbian identity. Comfort and safety are constitutive of sexual and racial subjectivities while space is active in those processes. The next chapter also focuses on white women. By focusing on the accounts of two young white women, I explore how their racial and sexual subjectivities are constituted through space. There is thus a strong focus on the activeness of space in shaping white lesbian subjectivities.

Chapter 7: White lesbian subjectivities and spatialities

Introduction

Account 7

We went back to the dance floor. I had already done my usual ‘scan’ and counted just a few women I perceived not to be white, and now four black women came in together. Carol looked towards the entrance and said that she did not understand that different ethnicities always (have to?) come in groups. She then complained about an ‘Asian night’ held in the Student Union. While she was still looking at the group of black women, she said that it makes her angry. She asked, ‘Why does it have to be like that?’ She said that she does not like all the segregation in Manchester – China Town, Rusholme, and so on – and she repeated that it makes her angry. (*Fieldnotes, Coyotes, May 2007*)

The racialization of space and habits of lived spatiality often reinforces racism and white privilege. Yet the connection between race and space often is not seen because space is thought of as racially neutral. (Sullivan 2006: 158)

The body is not only physical and material, it is also a focus of subjectivity – of how racialised and gendered individuals make sense of their being in the world. (Alexander and Knowles 2005: 13; see also Knowles 2003)

Account 7 tells how in a lesbian space that is primarily structured around sexuality, ‘race’ suddenly matters. This observation is another example of the relationship between emotions and space that I explored in chapter 6. In this chapter, my analytic focus is on white lesbian *subjectivities*. By looking at issues of subjectivity, this chapter brings together some of the themes discussed in previous chapters, including our interactions in groups, our belonging to different social groups, looking and being looked at, and how we see, perceive and feel ‘race’, sexuality and space. All of these form part of our sense of being in the world.

In the previous chapters, I have touched on issues of subjectivity and how my participants’ perceptions of and experiences in lesbian spaces relate to their perceptions of and experiences in other spaces. In chapter 6, I looked at how feelings of comfort and safety in lesbian spaces are expressed in opposition to feeling

discomfort in straight spaces. I argued that comfort and safety are constitutive of sexual and racial subjectivities and that space is active in those processes of constituting sexual and racial subjectivities.

In this chapter, I want to take issues of subjectivity further by contrasting the spaces of the Gay Village to other spaces and by analysing how not only perceptual practices but also ‘race’ and sexuality as *embodied* experiences shape subjectivities. According to Michel Foucault, subjectivity is not the free and spontaneous expression of our interior truth, ‘it is the way we are led to think about ourselves, so we will police and present ourselves in the correct way’ (Mansfield 2000: 10). As I pointed out in chapter 2, the ways in which we seek to create ourselves as subjects are always in tension with what Foucault has termed ‘subjectification’, the ways in which ‘bio-politics’ manifest themselves on the body (Alexander and Knowles 2005: 13). Therefore, subjectivities are never fixed but always in process. As Nick Mansfield (2000: 6) argues, ‘Subjectivity is primarily an experience, and remains permanently open to inconsistency, contradiction and unself-consciousness.’ As I argued in the Introduction, spaces are crucial in the making of personhood (Knowles 2003: 35) and therefore, it is important to analyse spaces when studying the formation of sexual and racial identities and subjectivities.

Although my ethnographic study was conducted in the Gay Village, my theoretical approach and interest lead to questions of space as active and dynamic. Therefore in this chapter, I look at bodies, spaces and movement through different spaces. Spaces are constructed in relational ways, and it is important to look at this relationality in order to gain understanding of their complex relationship to each other.

Claire Alexander and Caroline Knowles (2005: 13) argue that it is important to look at the intersections of ‘race’ with space and the body. The body, they argue, is

central to subjectivities. It is how we make sense of the world. ‘Comparatively little work’, they argue, ‘has been done on either the embodied nature of racial discourse or on the embodied subjectivity of racialised individuals or groups’ (Alexander and Knowles 2005: 12). As I wrote in chapter 2, Knowles (2003) argues from a sociological perspective that spatial analysis is important for gaining understanding of the making of ‘race’. Asserting the importance of space and the everyday in the making of personhood, she argues that in

doing what we habitually do, we make ourselves, and the fine social distinctions composing our lives. This is all part of race making as the making of races and ethnicised subjectivities. Similarly, in producing the spaces through which lives are lived we produce ourselves in certain terms. Space – its everyday use and social relationships – is an important component in the production of the person. (Knowles 2003: 35)

In Knowles’ approach, space is ‘an important component’ in the constitution of subjectivities through the ways in which it is produced, used and lived. In this vein, we might argue that Carol’s ‘habitual’ seeing constitutes her sense of being white, which is spatial: her seeing (or, rather, looking) contributes to the production of the space as racialised. According to Knowles’ definition, it is this form of producing space that plays a role in making subjectivity. However, it is not just the *use* of space which acts upon subjectivities. Space is more active than that. The *perceptions* and *representations* of space also act upon subjectivities.

By focusing on the accounts of two white women, Carol and her friend, Louise, I discuss a few examples that illustrate how perceptual practices not only performatively produce racialised bodies but also racialised spaces and how, in an interdynamic relationship, the perceptions of those spaces act back upon the subjectivity of the viewer.

As account 7 indicates, Carol became aware of the racialisation of *Coyotes*' space only when a group of 'racialised others' disrupted it. This seems to confirm Shannon Sullivan's (2006) argument that space is thought of as racially neutral. The true questions here, however, are: Who thinks of, or sees, space as racially neutral? And what kind of space is seen as racially neutral? While non-awareness of the racialisation of space might indeed be a white privilege, I argue that even though space might be *thought* of as racially neutral, and there might not be an awareness of the racialisation of space, it is nevertheless *seen*, even if only unconsciously. Carol must have seen the whiteness of space to be able to see it being disrupted when the four black women came in. Her seeing of 'race' and the racialisation of space worked in the way that she saw the four black women coming in together as a sign of segregation while at the same time she did not seem to be aware of the fact that the white women were also there in groups. (As I argued in chapter 4, minoritised people are more likely to be perceived as groups rather than individuals). What is not clear in this account is why Carol expressed her feeling as 'anger' and what exactly made her angry. Is her anger directed at the black women because they segregate themselves? Or is her anger directed at the racialisation of space because there is no 'mixing'? Or is her anger directed at racial inequalities in a racially structured society where there is a need for black women to segregate themselves? Carol's girlfriend at that time, Danielle, was with us that night and interpreted Carol's comment as a racist statement. She got quite upset about it and said to me later that Carol is racist and cannot accept black people coming together in groups.

Carol's anger might reflect the discussions in *DIVA* about the creation of Asian lesbian spaces (see Introduction). Here, also white lesbians seemed to be angry about practices of segregation without reflecting on their own spatial practices of

segregation. What is it that makes white lesbians angry about what is perceived to be racial segregation? It might be that the anger is a reaction to underlying issues of rejection. This illustrates ways in which, Knowles writes, ‘to be raced is to be positioned within (racialised) historical processes and their (racialised) political landscapes; and within discourses and practices concerning (raced) corporeality’ (Knowles 2003: 37). Because it is through our bodies that we make sense of our being in the world, Carol’s racialised and sexualised body mediates her experience of being a lesbian and being white. I argue that to gain greater understanding of her account, this particular moment in *Coyotes* needs to be linked to experiences she has had in other spaces.

In this chapter, therefore, I examine Carol’s and Louise’s accounts to gain some deeper understanding of how sexual and racial subjectivities are spatially constituted. Both are young, white, undergraduate students who moved to Manchester for the purpose of studying at the university. My observations and interactions with women during my research suggest that those characteristics represent a large group of *Vanilla*’s and *Coyotes*’ clientele. In my analysis of Louise’s and Carol’s accounts of the lesbian spaces I ask: How do they see or not see ‘race’? How do they perceive and imagine the racialisation of lesbian and gay spaces? How do they view how lesbian space should be constructed? In particular, what is their view of ‘racial mixing’ in lesbian spaces?

Account 7 indicates that it might be difficult to find a clear interpretation of what seems to be a racialised account when we look only at the interactions in the lesbian spaces. I want to take Louise and Carol as case examples of how we might understand the wider discursive frameworks young white women are drawing on so that we can understand how they make sense of their being in the world as sexualised

and racialised subjects. This chapter illustrates how subjectivities are produced in complex ways in and through particular spaces. While the focus is on the constitution of white lesbian subjectivities, hence the intersections of 'race' and sexuality, those intersections are intrinsically gendered, ethnicised and classed, which will become apparent at times. My analysis is not reduced to Louise's and Carol's embodied experiences in the Gay Village, but starts by exploring their growing-up spaces and seeing how 'race' mattered (or did not matter) in those spaces. My analysis next moves to Manchester's urban spaces and explores some of Louise's and Carol's perceptions of racialised spaces before I finally discuss their racialised seeing and issues of subjectivity in lesbian spaces.

Social geographies of 'race'

My argument in this book is that race shapes white women's lives. In the same way that both men's and women's lives are shaped by their gender, and that both heterosexual and lesbian women's experiences in the world are marked by their sexuality, white people *and* people of color live racially structured lives. (Frankenberg 1993: 1, original emphasis)

Account 7 is an example of how 'race' seems to shape white women's lives. Carol's racialised perceptions indicate some of the ways in which, as Frankenberg asserts, white women's lives are structured by 'race'. As I wrote in the Introduction, a major difference between my study and Frankenberg's (1993), and also Byrne's (2006), is that my research looks at a specific group of women who identify as bisexual or lesbian. I am looking at how *both* sexuality *and* 'race' shape their lives. Byrne (2006) and Frankenberg (1993) only marginally explored those intersections. Byrne focused on the intersections of class, gender and whiteness, whereas

Frankenberg attempted to look at intersections of gender, sexuality and whiteness but did this only in ‘preliminary ways’, as she admitted at the end of her study (Frankenberg 1993: 236).⁶⁶ Frankenberg’s study was one of the first studies to examine the intersections of whiteness and gender in the lives of white women. Fifteen years later, France Winddance Twine and Charles Gallagher (2008: 5) pointed out that ‘the study of whiteness and white identities now includes hundreds of books, ethnographies, scholarly articles and reviews’ and that a lot of these works explore whiteness as an intersectional category. Surprisingly, however, they do not mention sexuality as a category intersecting with whiteness.

Both Byrne and Frankenberg discuss how places are racially mapped in white women’s narratives. Frankenberg argues that racialised imaginations of past and present places shape women’s thinking and seeing of ‘race’. She argues that her interviewees’ growing-up spaces played an important role in shaping their ‘senses of self and other’ (Frankenberg 1993: 19). Frankenberg analyses those spaces in terms of what she defines as ‘social geographies of race’:

Racial social geography, in short, refers to the racial and ethnic mapping of environments in physical and social terms and enables also the beginning of an understanding of the conceptual mappings of self and other operating in white women’s lives. (1993: 43; original emphasis)

I am aware that, thanks to different geographical/national contexts, my participants’ social geographies of ‘race’ might be very different to Frankenberg’s interviewees’ racial mappings. Frankenberg undertook her research in California, where most of her participants grew up in a time when spaces were legally and

⁶⁶ Although lesbians were included in her research, Frankenberg does not discuss whether or how their relationship to ‘race’ was different to that of her heterosexual interviewees. It is unclear whether Byrne interviewed lesbians, as she does not disclose her interviewees’ sexualities. This might suggest that she does not think sexuality matters.

officially being desegregated. Although 'race' has a very different history in the UK, as Byrne's research illustrates, here also white women's sense of self is shaped by their imaginations of and experiences in racialised spaces. Byrne's material and analysis will be more useful for my analysis and the following discussion as my participants seem to draw on similar UK-specific discourses when articulating their perceptions of and experiences in spaces.

Because my interviews were semi-structured, my material is very different to Frankenberg's and Byrne's, both of whom conducted narrative interviews (oral histories). I did not ask my participants to tell me about their growing-up spaces, but their growing-up spaces sometimes became important when I asked them questions about their 'identities', how they would define their class background, how they identify in ethnic/racial terms, and so on (see interview guide, appendix 3). As I wrote in chapter 3, I used the interview guide quite flexibly. In some interviews, I probed more about the interviewee's background than in others. Often it seemed that the participants gave only brief accounts of other spaces, as they thought other spaces were not of a major importance as my research focused specifically on lesbian spaces.

This was the case in my interview with Louise, and therefore in the discussion below, at times there is a stronger focus on Carol's accounts. I also sometimes felt that my participants were irritated when we talked about other spaces, so I took care not to probe too much about other spaces. From the beginning of my research, although I was interested in how my participants' experiences in lesbian spaces relate to their different backgrounds, I did not at first consider other spaces to be of any major importance for my research. It was in the interview with Carol that I changed my view. When Carol volunteered rich information about her growing-up spaces and neighbourhood spaces, I became aware of the fact that my participants' subjectivities

are already shaped before they entered lesbian spaces. That meant that those other spaces were significantly important to the women's experiences in and perceptions of lesbian spaces.

Louise's and Carol's social geographies of 'race'

Louise and Carol grew up in different parts of the UK. While Louise grew up in the southeast of England, Carol was born in the north of England and moved with her parents to the northwest of Wales when she was a toddler.

While Louise and her family always lived in the southeast, her childhood seemed to be affected by frequent house moves. She told me that her family had moved to eight different houses within the same town. Although she did not tell me much about her growing up, some of her childhood racial social geographies became apparent in her descriptions of Manchester. When I asked her, for instance, if she had ever thought about herself in racial terms, she said that the first time she thought about this was when she came to Manchester (I explore this further below), which indicates that being white did not play a significant role when she was growing up, or, rather, that she is not aware of what role it played. She said that where she had lived before 'there were not many Asians', in contrast to Manchester, which has a large Asian population, according to her.⁶⁷ In her growing-up narratives, it was sexuality and gender that played a more prominent role in her life, especially when she spoke of her relationship with her mother, who did not 'agree of [sic] it' – her incipient lesbianism – when Louise had her first girlfriend. Her mother defined it as 'just a phase'. At the time of the interview, Louise's mother still was not accepting the fact that Louise is a lesbian and would not allow Louise to tell her younger (half-) sisters about her

⁶⁷ In the borough where Louise grew up, today 86.5% of the population is defined as white (www.neighbourhood.statistics.gov.uk).

sexuality. Louise told me that from when she was young, she has always been quite a tomboy and that her mother ‘tried to force me to wear dresses and I used to cry because I didn’t want to wear them’, illustrating what Judith Butler has called the ‘cruelty’ of gender norms (Butler 1990).

In Carol’s account, it was her problematic relationship to her father that seemed to have shaped her growing up, especially when he found out that she is a lesbian. She described him as a ‘typical British guy’ and drew on discourses of white, British, working-class masculinity as homophobic and racist, which somehow seemed to serve to excuse her father’s views. Interestingly, when she referred to her first girlfriend, her age seemed to be more of a concern for her parents than the gender of her partner. That Carol was only 16 and her girlfriend four and a half years older seemed to be more of a problem than the fact that she was a woman. At least, this is how Carol presented it. Her girlfriend was also mixed-race, but when I asked Carol if this was a problem for her parents, especially for her father, she did not give a clear answer. Carol did not tell me of any difficulties she had growing up as a lesbian in a small village (around 200 inhabitants, according to her account, and the nearest city 25 miles away). What seemed to play a very strong role in her upbringing was her national identity. She was positioned as a ‘national outsider’, i.e., as English, in an area in the northwest of Wales, which she described as very white and anti-English. In fact, according to Carol’s interpretation, the discrimination she faced was due to the racial landscape and to the fact that there were no other ‘others’. She said that she had to face quite a lot of bullying in school and that she got

lot of stick because I’m English, and that’s it, I’m just English, so you know sore thumb sticks out. There’s no black people ... around there, there was no black people to pick on. It’s like picking the next best thing English moving in.

Carol's account powerfully illustrates how national identity and belonging is contested and racialised, and that Englishness often works as synonymous with whiteness (Byrne 2006: 139). Bridget Bryne (2006: 140) argues that:

National identity is one modality through which 'race', class and gender work. To be positioned or to position oneself as English has different implications according to how one is raced, classed or gendered. Englishness can act, like whiteness, as an unacknowledged norm or position of privilege that structures identity and experience.

Because of growing up in Wales, Carol's experience is not structured by an unacknowledged position of the privilege of being English nor does she see her Englishness as having been a privilege in Wales. Rather, she likens it to a minoritised racialised position by alluding to the absence of black people living in the area. However, her reference to this absence also suggests that had there been black residents in her area, they rather than she would have been the subjects of racism. Hence in that way, Englishness, or perhaps whiteness, *is* conceived as a privilege, albeit a contingent and certainly not give or absolute privilege. Byrne argues that 'Englishness is not a legal status, but a construction of belonging, an ethnicity' (Byrne 2006: 143). In a predominantly white racial landscape Carol's experiences were shaped by 'race' and by ethnicity. Although she grew up in a place where she was the same 'colour' as the people living there, she was still marked as different. Language played a central role. She told me that she started learning Welsh at the age of four and got picked on for her 'broad northern accent'.

Carol's account shows how subjectivities are produced in complex ways and that if we focus only on the 'racial' social geographies, this might miss crucial moments of the production of subjectivities. For Carol, it was within the group of white British people that her configurations of national belonging took place. Those

spatial experiences impacted strongly on her identity. When I asked her if she had to identify herself, what important markers would she use, the first identifier she named was English, but a minute later, she said that 'female' is probably her major identification. She added that the anti-Englishness of the area she grew up in 'probably made me feel that I'm more English than I'm Welsh. I keep on pronouncing that, I'm English, I'm English'. As in the accounts presented in the previous chapter, where sexuality was constituted through discomfort (especially in Phoebe's and Anja's accounts), here it is national identity that is partly produced through feelings of being discriminated against. Being in a minority, Carol said her family was isolated with the other English people living in their Welsh village. She does not seem to situate her experiences within a wider historical and political frame or within the complicated and difficult historical relationship between England and Wales (and the potential reasons for the anti-Englishness). While she gave a strong account of experiencing differences on the grounds of ascribed nationality, and those experiences partly constitute her national identity, being white seems to be fixed and assumed. When I asked her whether her ethnic identity has ever played a role in her life, she said:

Carol: Yeah, I think it does because, obviously, I don't have the same ethnic ties as other people do

Nina: You don't have...?

Carol: I don't have the same ethnic ties as say a minority ethnicity do, so I don't have, I'm not, obviously, I'm not the same as Afro-Caribbean, I don't have the same ties, whereas, you know, I've ties, I'm just white, basically, just white [laughs], English, white, very majority kind of thing.

In a similar vein to Byrne's interviewees, Carol here clearly defines white Englishness as ethnicity rather than nationality (see Byrne 2006: 160). Carol's account illustrates

how whiteness is often thought of as a culturally empty category. She draws on discourses of whiteness as being 'just normal', nothing to comment on. Her account powerfully illustrates, as whiteness scholars have argued, that white people often do not see the 'colour' of whiteness so that it becomes the normative device, an unmarked norm (see Back and Ware 2002; Byrne 2006; Cuomo and Hall 1999; Dyer 1997; Frankenberg 1993, 1997). However, we can also see here how whiteness as a racial category intersects with ethnicity. It is not just whiteness but *white Englishness* that is defined as culturally empty by Carol. She defines her ethnic identity in terms of negativity; that is, she does *not* have the same ethnic ties as other people. Although in Wales she was marked as different within the group of white people, in this account, she contrasts being white English with being 'Afro-Caribbean'. A reason for her use of 'Afro-Caribbean' might be that her ex-partner 'is black, Afro-Caribbean, well, half, mixed'. While she gave a quite strong account of 'ethnic differences' (as I will show below), when referring to her relationship, she said that she did not feel any differences between her and her partner:

I just dismissed, you know, I just didn't actually think about anyone's colour, I don't think about anything like that, even though obviously it might be a big issue for them because, you know, they've got a history, their colonial history and all that kind of stuff. It's like their pride to be Afro-Caribbean, Americ, Afro, ehm, yeah, Afro-Caribbean

Carol presents herself as being 'colour-blind' and says that someone's skin colour would not matter for her. Again, she draws on discourses of whiteness as an 'empty' racial category. While 'race' is not important for her, however, it might be 'a big issue for "them"'. She also told me of a woman in her football team 'who is Afro-Caribbean and proud, she loves it'. So in a sense, while there is no 'white culture' or history she can relate to, and while 'race' is important to 'the others' because of

colonial history and so on. The colonial history of descendants of white Europeans is neglected here, as well as the fact that this history is actually a shared history.

Carol's accounts illustrate ways in which whiteness is reproduced as the dominant, normalised and universal category in processes of racialisation. As I wrote in chapter 2, Lewis (drawing on Hesse) argues that parts of those processes are

the inauguration and reproduction of 'whiteness' as the dominant 'racial' and 'cultural' category, whilst simultaneously constructing 'whiteness' in naturalised or 'non-racial' terms. In this process 'whiteness' is also constructed as being devoid of 'cultural' specificity – a move effected by its claim to the status of the universal. (2004: 116- 117)

While Carol gave a very strong account of differences, she moved within a discourse that sees *talking about* racial differences as something bad. When I asked her whether they ever had different experiences on grounds of 'race' in their two and a half year relationship she told me, 'We didn't talk about that, obviously, our different colours or races. We didn't talk about anything like that'.

Louise also told me that she'd had 'a boyfriend who was, who was Mauritian, so he was, like, dark skinned'. She said that she would like to 'go out with an Asian girl or a black girl' because she is interested in different cultures, 'so it wouldn't be a problem'. Louise associates skin colour with culture, and 'colour' stands for differences that would not be 'problems' for her. Carol likewise said that in her football team there were a black woman and an Asian woman, 'but we don't even see it as a problem'. Both Louise and Carol thus seem to be aware of discourses 'out there' that 'race' or racial differences can cause problems or might be problematic for some people. They distance themselves from racist people, and present themselves as more progressive 'whites' who can accept difference and not see 'race' as a problem. Having had interracial relationships did not seem to change Louise's and Carol's

‘perceptual practices’ in terms of positioning themselves in a rather white normative framework.

While not talking about differences might be formulated out of the thought that differences should not matter, this kind of thinking ignores experiences of racism – experiences which often matter. It might be important to recognise someone as being ‘racially minoritised’ and the difference this makes. In ways similar to Byrne’s interviewees’, Carol and Louise

worked within a discourse in which racism, although rarely discussed, was accepted to be a “bad thing”. Yet at the same time, I would argue that they were living in a time and space that was and is highly racialised and which conditioned their perceptual practices. Their thoughts and actions were structured by their whiteness as much as by their class and gender (Byrne 2006: 74).

The social geographies of ‘race’ in Carol’s and Louise’s growing up spaces illustrate some of the ways their lives have been shaped by ‘race’, even though they do not seem to be aware of it. However, Louise’s and Clarke’s experiences of being white are shaped by gender, class, sexuality and ethnicity. While Carol presents herself as being just the norm as a white English person, in Wales being white was not enough. Even though she belonged to the racial majority, she was minoritised for being English. When Louise referred to her childhood and teenage years, gender and sexuality played a dominant role while ‘race’ did not come up much. Her accounts of Manchester, as I discuss in the next part, are different.

Perceptions of Manchester's urban spaces

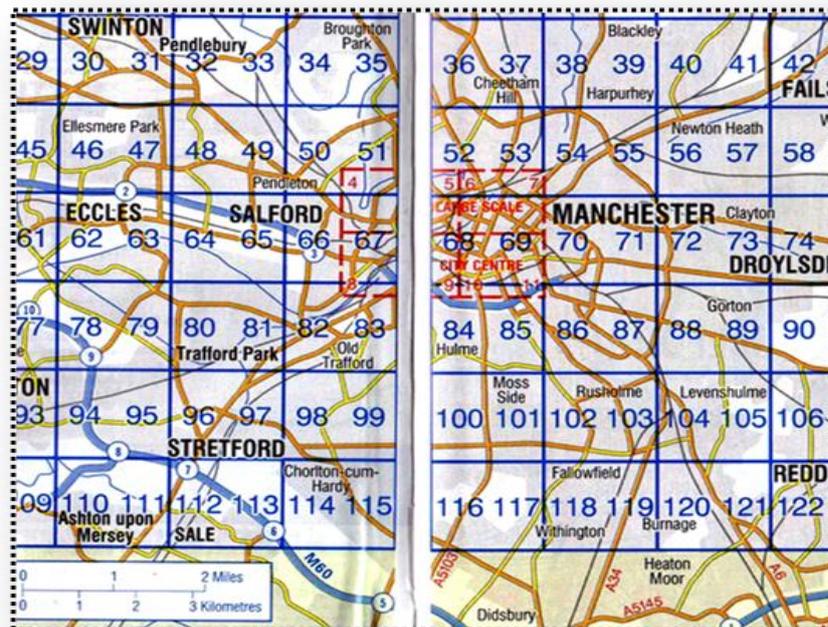


Figure 5: Map of Manchester⁶⁸

As I argued in chapter 2, the Gay Village is primarily perceived as a sexualised space, whereas other urban areas (such as China Town) are marked as racialised spaces. Those perceptions have an impact on how space is imagined and lived. In general in my research, it was noticeable that when I talked with Carol and Louise about their imaginations of and lived experiences in lesbian and gay spaces, issues of ‘race’ did not come up. They only arose when I directly addressed them. In contrast, when they talked about other urban areas, their narratives were often structured around ‘race’. Because ‘race’ and sexuality are relational, it is important to contrast the perceptions of and the experiences in spaces of the Gay Village of these women to their perceptions of and experiences in other urban areas. It is those movements through different spaces, in conjunction with their experience of the spaces of their child and teenage years, that, in part, constitute their subjectivities.

⁶⁸ *A-Z Mini Manchester*, 2-3.

Although we were present in a specific sexualised space, in Carol's description of the night (account 7), she linked the apparent separation by black women to other spaces in the city such as an Asian student club night, and other racialised areas like China Town and Rusholme. The racialisation of those spaces and her perceptions of them shape her seeing of 'race' and her sense of self. In contrast to other participants, Carol had a quite distinctive 'race consciousness'. In *Coyotes*, the four black women seemed to represent, on a micro-scale, what is of general concern for her: ethnic and racial segregation.

When I first met Carol, she had been living in Manchester for a year. That first night, when we were having a drink in *Vanilla*, she told me about her impressions of the city. Already that first time that we met, it became clear to me that the city's division into different 'zones' was of great concern to her. Seeming to draw on dominant discourses of which neighbourhoods are 'not safe', she referred to the areas of Longsight and Moss Side, which often figure in the media as areas which have problems with gun crime. According to estimated neighbourhood statistics, they also have the highest proportion of ethnic minorities in Manchester (see chapter 2). In the interview, however, it became clear that Carol also has a distinctive 'space consciousness' and that it is not only ethnically and racially segregated spaces that are of concern for her, but also spaces structured around class and other markers. She told me that she had regularly visited Manchester when she was still living in Wales, but when she moved to Manchester, she became aware of 'how everything is separated':

You know you've got Fallowfield, which is now the new student mecca. Didsbury, very middle-class, very white, very money-orientated. Then you've got Rusholme, which is obviously your Curry Mile where you've got all your Asians. Longsight, more immig, more, I think, that's where they dumped a lot of the immigrants. The Irish, a lot of the blacks are there as well, from what I had ... well, from my experience last year living there. And Moss Side, you

know, that's your own little ghetto. The Village, that's all your own little gay ghetto, so to speak. You've got Deansgate, Northern Quarter, everywhere, it's all separated into little, tiny spaces which you can identify with. That's the best to describe Manchester.

This is an interesting description of Manchester's classed, racialised and sexualised spaces, and some of the historicised processes that produced them – or at least it reflects popular perceptions of the city. Often inherent in such perceptions of space is an 'overseeing'. Although those areas might have larger populations of people with the ascribed characteristics, they might not in fact be in the majority. Even though they are represented here as segregated areas, the construction of those different spaces could be perceived positively, as illustrating 'diversity' in the city. While Carol's description does not contain any valuation, during our nights out she clearly addressed the spatial segregation in the city as something she does not like, that makes her angry, even. Her upbringing in Wales, as a minoritised person in a segregated area, might be a reason for her consciousness of and concern for segregated spaces. But who does she attribute the segregation to? Whereas in that particular moment in *Coyotes* (account 7) it seemed that she was angry about the 'racially others' segregating themselves, in her description of Longsight (above) she addressed the wider political field and acknowledged that some of the areas might not be entirely self-created.

As the previous chapters have illustrated, there is a certain lesbian identity produced in *Coyotes* and *Vanilla*. Because sexual identities and spaces are in a dynamic relationship, meanings of lesbian identities are not only negotiated in lesbian spaces but on an everyday level in different spaces of the city (see Rooke 2005). Although the lesbian spaces are important spaces for Louise and Carol, and they spent a considerable time in them, other spaces of the city are equally important in shaping

their sexual and racial subjectivities. While in the lesbian bars their sexual identities are in the foreground, in other spaces sexuality might only become important in certain moments. Thus, as I show below, it is not only Carol's and Louise's perceptions of spaces that are constitutive of their sexual and racial subjectivities, but even more so their *embodied experiences* in certain areas in Manchester. In that respect, three areas in the south of Manchester seemed to be of particular importance for their experiences: Rusholme, Fallowfield and Longsight. (Longsight, which is not marked on the map, is the area between Levenshulme and the City Centre, numbers 86 and 87.) During her first year at the university, Carol lived in Longsight, but at the time of the interview, she was living in Fallowfield. Rusholme, which lies between those two areas and is on the bus route to the university, is Louise's neighbourhood of residence. Louise's and Carol's movements through the city seem to be restricted, as they often did not know other parts of the city I mentioned in the interviews. Louise, especially, had not explored very much of the city, and her lived spatiality was restricted to Rusholme (her home), Oxford Road (where the university is), and the Gay Village.

In our interview, Carol marked Longsight and Rusholme racially, and her description of Fallowfield carried age and class inscriptions (see above). When we talked further about her experiences living in Fallowfield, she said that she likes living there, especially because of the shopping infrastructure. But she also said, 'It's studenty, it's very studenty, very straight, if you go out around here it's very straight'. As markers of this 'straightness', Carol used the image of high heels and 'proper dress', which seem to indicate that she perceives and experiences her neighbourhood of residence as a particular kind of gendered and sexualised space. Gendered and sexualised experiences were also part of her account of Longsight. When I asked her

about the difference between Fallowfield and Longsight, she mentioned the poor street lighting in Longsight, then said that ‘even on a two-minute walk around the corner you had to be very careful’. She told me that one night, when she was on her way to visit a friend who lived nearby, she was asked if she was ‘doing business’. So here was Carol’s body on the street being perceived by someone as a particular kind of sexualised body; that moment and that question sexualised the space for her. Apart from that incident, however, she ‘didn’t get any hassle’, but said there had been a lot of muggings in the first weeks ‘because obviously it’s students’. Fallowfield would not necessarily be safer, as there had been a series of rapes of young women over a specific time period. Again, gender and sexuality shape her feelings of the safety in the neighbourhood.

In her accounts, the racialisation of space tends to be invisible, and we do not know how Carol imagined the bodies threatening her safety. At the end of her narrative, however, she mentioned ‘three Asian guys parked in this parking spot, just outside the house, checking the house out, all three watching the house, so I don’t know what’s that all about, whether they are doing it over, good luck to them’. Here Carol seems to be drawing on a discourse of black and Asian bodies and areas linked to crime (see above). Furthermore, in Carol’s and Louise’s accounts Asian people generally figured quite dominantly, and it is Rusholme – the area in Manchester marked as Asian – which figures most strongly as a racialised space in their narratives. When we talked about the racialisation of lesbian spaces, I asked Carol to imagine her and me going to *Coyotes* after the interview and being the only white women coming in. This is how she said that would feel for her:

I’d feel awkward. I’d feel weird. I think I would, and that’s being honest, but I think, I wouldn’t want to, I wouldn’t want to feel that way because then that’d

feel like, you know, that's a bit wrong to feel that way, but I still would. It's like when I'm walking down Rusholme sometimes, and it's almost like 'spot the white kid', almost like that, and I just feel like, why does it have to be like that? Why does everything have to be so concentrated on one area? Why not just have a complete utter mix? But then that'd cause such a chaos.

Here we have a powerful example of the interdynamic relationship between perceptions and imaginations of space and embodiment. When Carol was talking about Manchester's segregated spaces, she described Rusholme as 'obviously your Curry Mile where you've got all your Asians'. She has a specific perception of the racialisation of the area and imagines the Asian population to be much bigger than it statistically is. According to figures of 2007, in Rusholme, where she almost feels like the 'only white kid', white people are actually in the majority (52.2%) and Asian people make up just over a quarter of the population (26.7 %).⁶⁹ Her imaginations of racialised space, then, make Carol's body into a white body. She perceives herself as white and is conscious of her whiteness, but this is an awareness she might not have in a different area. As Byrne (2006: 3) remarks:

white people's conscious appreciation of their 'whiteness' may well be limited. They may only feel, or be conscious of being white in the presence of racialised others (and perhaps even then only when they feel that they are in a minority).

Carol's example illustrates the importance of space in the relationality of whiteness Byrne describes. If whiteness, or rather the consciousness of being white, changes spatially, then this can be seen as a sign of how space acts upon 'race' and how it is constitutive of racialised subjectivities. Carol's account is interesting in

⁶⁹ The figures are 7.0 % Indian, 12 % Pakistani, 7.7 % Bangladeshi, 2.0% Black Caribbean, 5.2%, Black African, 5.1% Chinese, and 5.6 % were identified as belonging to other ethnic groups (Manchester City Council, Population Factsheet, www.manchester.gov.uk/.../a26zii_rusholme_ward_population_factsheet_2009, access date: 08 February 2010).

different respects. She was clearly struggling when giving her ‘honest’ explanation and seemed to be aware that her feelings might be ‘wrong’. She expressed a desire not to have those kinds of feelings, but then she turned her struggles of having the wrong feelings into anger and implicitly blamed imagined spatial segregation for her feelings. At the same time, she said that mixing would cause ‘chaos’. While this account again illustrates Carol’s concerns about the segregation of space, it might also indicate a certain sensitivity to being seen as different (similar to Danielle’s account, see chapter 6). When we further discussed her feelings in racialised space, Carol referred several times to her upbringing and said she is not used to mixing. She said, for instance, that there were no black or Asian pupils in her primary school. At the same time, growing up as a minoritised person seems to be vital to her concern about segregated spaces. Hence, her experiences of an ethnicised subject seem to shape her experiences of a racialised subject.

Although Carol is aware that she would feel awkward if she were the only white woman in a lesbian space, during the evening we were in *Coyotes* she could not empathise with the four black women who came in. She could not understand why it might be also ‘awkward’ for them when they came into a predominantly white lesbian space.

Louise gave a similar account of her lived experience in Rusholme and, more specifically, in her student accommodation. When I asked her if moving to Manchester felt ‘scary’ to her, she said that she was ‘really, really scared’ and quite lonely. She did not know anybody except the only other person in her flat, who was her male Asian flatmate. She said that he had his friends around and that they were all Asian and:

I've got no, no... ehm ehm, I don't, I am not racist at all *but* when I went in there, I felt a bit intimidated being the only white person. I've never been in a situation when there has been so many Asian people because where I am from, there's not many Asians but there's a big Asian population here and I just felt a bit wo...

Like some of my other participants, Louise used the rhetorical statement 'I am not racist, but' when facing the discursive problem of finding legitimate reasons for feeling intimidated while at the same time not appearing to be racist (see Gill 1996). Like Carol, Louise did not simply fear being seen as racist because she was talking about 'race' (see Byrne 2006; Frankenberg 1993), but also because she was expressing emotions triggered by a certain racialised space. Louise also explained her emotions by arguing that she was unused to being in such a racialised space. Interestingly, the racial landscape of the borough where she grew up is statistically not much different to Manchester, where around 9% of the population identify as South Asian and 86.5% identify as white.⁷⁰

So here it is not just about the seeing of 'race' and perceptions of 'race' and space. It is also about Louise's experiencing herself as an embodied person, as a white woman in interaction with space. This was further apparent in other descriptions of the spaces of her student accommodation. It is interesting that as she referred several times to a house party organised by Asad⁷¹, her Asian flatmate, she referred to this party in answer to two questions I had asked her. What is her racial identity? What is her sexual identity?

Nina: OK, just let me see [looking at interview guide], I mean, we had age, class, sexuality, ehm, oh have you ever thought about yourself in racial terms?

Louise: What do you mean? Like, Oh, I am white, I am different?

⁷⁰ See www.neighbourhood.statistics.gov.uk.

⁷¹ Like all names used in this thesis, this is a pseudonym.

Nina: Mhm.

Louise: I think the only ... the only thing I felt a bit funny about my race was when I walked, when I... ehm go to these house parties and I am the only white person because he's [Asad] Asian and all of his friends are just Asian, so when I walk in there, I am the only white person, 'cause Cana is black. So, yeah, then I realise, wow, I am in a minority group, you know, I am the only white person. But that's the only time where I actually think of my colour, when I am in there and I am the only person of my colour, but otherwise I don't really care, to be honest...

The way I asked that question demonstrates a common strategy I used in the interviews. I tried to mention 'race' as casually as possible. Thus, sometimes I pre-imagined that it might be difficult for my participants to talk about it, which often made it difficult for me to talk about it, too. Louise's immediate response to my question indicates that 'race' seems to equal 'different' to her. She starts, stops, and starts again, which might suggest that she is thinking about the best way to describe her feelings. This time she chooses to describe her feelings as 'funny' instead as feeling intimidated, as she did before.

Louise states that this is the only time when she actually thinks of her colour when she is in the minority as a white person. She follows a 'colour-blind' approach and says she does not 'otherwise really care'. She does not seem to be aware of her privilege, is unaware that most of the time she does not need to think of it in contrast to her flatmates (I discuss this point later). However, as this and her other accounts illustrate, while she might not care about *her* colour, the colour of 'others' is not insignificant for her.

When I asked her what importance her sexuality has in her life, she said:

Ehm, I think it's not who I am, it's not, it doesn't describe me as a whole person of who I am. It's just like a little bit of me, but people see it as a big thing like, ehm, at this house party. Asad had a house party and everyone was, like 'Oh, who are you?' and I went Louise. 'Ah, are you the *lesbian* one?' and

everyone I spoke to was, like ‘Ah, so you are the *lesbian* one...’ ” (N: oh no) “‘So you are the *lesbian*?’ And late at night I get people knocking on my door, saying, ‘Oh, is that the lesbian one? Let’s see her’, and, like, would knock on my door.

Like Phoebe’s account given in chapter 6, Louise’s description suggests that her sexuality only becomes important for her at certain moments, as here, when it is felt as embodied difference. When I asked her if she had experienced similar incidents before, she said that Cana’s friends made comments like that, and even her male ‘straight best friend’, who is white, always introduced her to new people with, ‘This is Louise, she is gay’. Her lesbian subjectivity is generated through being an issue, through her body being marked as lesbian.

Louise thus experiences the spaces of her home as not only gendered and racialised but also sexualised. At this party, she seemed to have felt intimidated for two reasons: both because of being the only white person and of being singled out and exoticised as ‘the lesbian one’. She pronounced ‘lesbian’ quite dramatically as she spoke, and I responded, ‘Oh, no’ to indicate the horrors of this very oppressive scene. This example powerfully illustrates how sexuality is marked on the body through ‘the gaze’. In contrast to looking practices explored in chapter 5, here there is no reciprocity in looking but Louise’s body becomes objectified through the male heterosexual gaze (‘let’s see her’) (Mulvey 1975). In this particular gendered, sexualised and racialised space, Louise’s looking back has no authority (see Kaplan 1997). At the same time these looking practices are very different to the ones described by Frantz Fanon (1967) (see chapter 5). It might be argued that in Louise’s student accommodation racialising looking practices that are inscribed with power relations and rooted in a coloniser/colonised relationship are turned around.

This account, then, illustrates how complex and fluid power and intersubjective inequalities are. In this space, Louise cannot fall back on the ‘privilege of whiteness’ (if we want to call it that). It might be exactly this privilege, and the comfort that *usually* goes with it, that make her experiences so powerful. In Louise’s case, the privilege of whiteness is shaped in complex ways through her experiencing herself as a minoritised person on grounds of sexuality. This example illustrates how whiteness is shaped by sexuality and therefore has different ‘shades’. We might expect that both Carol’s and Louise’s experiences in and perceptions of the spaces in the Gay Village are very different from the ones discussed above.

Perceptions and livedness of the Gay Village

For Louise and Carol, the spaces of the Gay Village are significant. Louise’s choice to study in Manchester was based on the fact that it has a ‘gay scene’. Carol said that during her first year at the university, she went out in the Gay Village almost every night. At the time of the interviews, both were visiting the Gay Village a few times a week. They seem to be confident users of the space and never seem to question their ‘right’ to be there.⁷² Their bodies being read as young, white and gay shape their embodied experiences in those spaces, although they hardly reflect on this. Both describe the spaces in the Gay Village as ‘mainly white’ and seem to perceive them as racialised. Nevertheless, they experience those spaces primarily as sexualised. As account 7 shows, there are moments when their perception can be disrupted, when ‘race’ explicitly acts upon their experiences of sexualised space.

⁷² Carol especially claims ownership of the space. She expressed some anger at having her ID checked by *Coyotes* bar staff because, as she said, she had been going to *Coyotes* longer than the bar staff had worked there. She described this as a ‘completely utter insult’. At the same time, she said that the staff should check IDs more thoroughly so that women who are younger than 18 do not come in.

'Colour-blind' spaces

When I asked Louise if her ethnic identity had ever been an issue in the Gay Village, she said:

What if, that I am white? (N: Yeah, oh yeah..) No, wasn't an issue, but I don't think it would be an issue anyway in a gay place, no matter what ethnic minority you are because they don't really judge you, you know, 'cause you're all the same, you know, 'cause you're gay, you're accepted, kind of thing. It's, like, I don't know, it's just like a bond kind of thing, because you're gay, you're allowed in, no one's gonna judge you for being who you are, you're just yourself. And I think you can be yourself in a gay place, but whereas in like a straight place they might think, 'Oh there is a hell of a lot of Asians', 'cause I was talking to Cana earlier about a club, but I said I don't go to many straight clubs, but she said, 'Oh, I go to this club and upstairs it's all Asian, it's just Asian', and then Asad said, 'Oh, I went to this club and it was full of white people and we went'. So I think it's, it's more of a different feeling, depending on a straight place than to a gay place. I think in a gay place it's, no one even bothers to look at you like that. They only look at you to see how fit you are and whether they like you, than to what colour you are and how old you are. They're more accepting.

This is a telling example of seeing and perceiving sexuality and sexualised spaces. In Louise's opinion – and this stands in contrast to the findings outlined in chapter 5 – in lesbian and gay spaces, looking practices are only based on the judgement of 'how fit you are'. She suggests that there is only a sexualising look at work in those spaces and that 'race' does not matter. She did not explain, however, why she thinks that gay spaces are 'more accepting' and she repeats her flatmates' accounts (as 'native informants') to explain the difference to straight spaces where colour matters. In contrast to her flatmates, for whom the racialisation of sexualised space is very noticeable, Louise perceives the space of the Gay Village as racially (but not sexually) neutral (see Sullivan 2006: 158). When she and her friends talked about the racialisation of particular clubs, she did not seem to understand why they might

notice the racialisation of these spaces. She put it down to the sexualisation of these clubs. At the same time her example shows how people perceive the racialisation of space in complex ways and how the issue of racialised space is not only about white/'non-white' space.

When I tried to challenge Louise and said that a Chinese lesbian or a black lesbian who comes into a lesbian bar which is predominantly white might feel in a minority, not because of her sexual identity but because of her ethnic identity, she said:

But then, again, there's not many. I think they're probably used to it in a way because it is mainly all white. This population in this country, there is not, unless you go to somewhere like London, where it is mainly black, or if you're going to Manchester, it's quite a lot, a high population of Asian people, so ... I think they're kind of used to being like the minority group. So I don't know whether they may feel a bit funny in a gay place.

Thus, for Louise, Chinese or black lesbians 'are used to being' in the ethnic/racial minority, and this is not different in gay spaces and therefore it does not make any difference. This suggests that Louise has quite clear perceptions of the racialisation of the UK's urban spaces, despite claiming that she does not 'look' (see below). Her imaginations of space shape her subjectivity and her experiences of these spaces as well as her perceptions of others who move through these spaces. (This is shown in what follows.)

White lesbian and gay spaces

When we talked about the racialisation of lesbian spaces, Louise said:

Louise: There is ... I think there is not. It's mainly white orientated, the gay scene. I haven't really seen, maybe because I think, ehm, with the Asian community, ehm, like, I was speaking to some Asian girls, and they said, 'Oh, my parents would disown me if I was gay', so there

might be some Asian lesbians or gay men that are hiding their sexuality because of how their family's gonna be treating them because it's ... there is different upbringing in different cultures, and it's against their culture and religion to be gay. So that's probably why you might not get different ethnic groups in there. I am not quite sure about the black, whether it's acceptable for them to be gay or not, but it's not many black people here, I don't think.

Nina: In Manchester in general?

Louise: I haven't really seen that many. But then again I don't really look, because I don't judge people of their colour. I don't really take much notice.

Again, Louise uses explanations from 'native informants' (who can speak for 'all' Asian men and women) to find reasons for the whiteness of the space. According to her, Asian lesbians and gay men mainly 'hide' their sexuality because of their families. She then seems to suggest that they are not gay because they have a 'different upbringing in different cultures and it's against their culture and religion to be gay'. This interpretation is also indicated in the last part of her account, when she speaks of not knowing whether it is acceptable for 'the black' to be gay. Louise seems to suggest that Asian and black women and men are not gay, as it is not accepted in 'their' group because of their families, cultures and religions. While she might think that some hide their sexuality from their families, it is not clear to me why she thinks that they do not go out in the Gay Village.

In the last part of her account Louise presented herself as being 'colourblind'. She said she does not take much notice, suggesting that 'seeing colour' equals judging 'people of their colour'. In fact, she seems to see colour very clearly.

Carol likewise said that the lesbian spaces are 'mainly ... obviously, mainly white'. I probed her about that:

Nina: And you said that is mainly white, of course. Why do you think that is?

- Carol: Why do I think that is? (N: mhm) Ehm, I honestly don't know why. I think 'cause, obviously, you're not gonna get a lot of Asians, I mean, I might sound racist here, and I apologise if I do, but a lot of Asians are possibly Muslim, Sikh, you know, anything, any kind of religion which is totally against having sex with the same person, doing whatever with the ... same-sex person even, but that might be a problem. That might be an issue or, just, I don't know.
- Nina: That they don't come out?
- Carol: Yeah. Drinking as well, so, yeah, that might be it but I don't know...
- Nina: And the others who are not Muslim or whatever?
- Carol: Ehm.... I don't know. I don't have real, any reason for that. Unfortunately, I like to know why, but I don't know [laughs]. Do you know why?

While Louise spoke about culture, religion and family by conflating 'race', especially in regard to Asians and religion, for Carol, it is *mainly* religion which is responsible for the fact that the Gay Village is predominantly white. She uses the rhetorical strategy of apologising for sounding racist before she constructs 'Asian religions' as homophobic. Facing the discursive problem of giving intelligible and legitimate reasons for *Coyotes* being predominantly white whilst not appearing to be racist, she seems to be struggling, as shown by her switching from certainty ('obviously') to uncertainty ('I honestly don't know why'). Finally, she presents herself as being interested in this issue and maybe out of a feeling of discomfort (as her laughing indicates), she turns the question back at me.

The 'right mix'

As I have mentioned before, in all of my interviews with white women, 'race' did not figure in their initial descriptions of their 'dream lesbian space'. For this reason, I had to probe them to learn about their racial imaginations. In her first description of her dream lesbian space, Carol said she would like to have a space

where 'everybody is equal'. But she referred to equality only in terms of (trans)gender and sexuality. When I probed her about the 'mix' of women, what kinds of women she would like to see in there, she said:

Blonde, blue eyes, you know big [inaudible] [laughs] no, none of them.... No, just a mixture of women 'cause diversity is always best. I mean, when you go out at night, you never see any coloured women. Only at the door, which I don't think is fair 'cause I think you should have more out. There you go....

Carol is referring to a stereotypical image of white heterosexual femininity. At least, I assume that her inaudible words referred to bust size. And then she turns this into a joke. Her description indicates how some of my participants' accounts might be co-constructed through their knowledge of the focus of my research. Hence, they might try to present themselves 'in a good light'. Carol's 'there you go' suggests that she thinks this is what I want to hear.

It also seemed that for some of my participants, my research raised their awareness of the racialisation of lesbian space. For instance, a few weeks before our interview, Carol and I had a discussion in *Coyotes* during which I asked her how many black women she could see in the bar. At that point, she seemed not to have (ever) thought about the issue of racialised lesbian space. I had to repeat my question a few times until she understood what I meant. (This was partly due to the loudness of the music.) When she finally understood my question, she looked a bit confused. Then she looked around without answering my question. Her reply, 'I don't think is fair', and 'there should be more coloured women out' is quite surprising, considering the fact that a few weeks later it made her angry when four black women came into *Coyotes*. While in our interview she had time to think about the issue (and might have thought about it before), it was a different context in *Coyotes* when she became angry at seeing

four black women coming in as a group. However, as I have pointed out, her anger seemed to be produced by what she perceived to be racial segregation. Somewhat paradoxically and as her account of Rusholme indicated, Carol seems to imagine that mixing would ‘cause chaos’. This seems to also be the case in lesbian spaces:

Nina: So, how mixed would it be, or how would you kind of imagine that? Who would be there?

Carol: Mixed to the point that it represents society

Nina: All right.

Carol: So, obviously you’re not gonna get loads of Muslims in because that’s their religion. That goes against their religion. But it would be good to have some Asian people, some black, some white, and mix them all together and just hopefully they all get on. If not, you’ve got the bar staff, you’ve got the door staff [laughs].

While describing her ‘dream’ space, Carol refers to ‘reality’, or what she perceives to be reality. Here, again, religion functions as a marker of ‘racial’ difference, and Carol conflates religion and ‘race’ in the sense that she seems to suggest that all Muslims are Asian (or all Asians are Muslim). Sexuality and ‘race’ are thus linked in her assumption that Muslims and Asians are less likely to be gay because of their religion. Her words, ‘some Asian people, some black, some white and mix them all together’, sound like she was reading a recipe. What is crucial here is that she seems to position herself as the one who has the authority to do the mixing. Although she said before that ‘diversity is always best’, she now suggests that mixing might cause problems (though ‘hopefully they all get on’). Carol’s views here seem to be shaped by popular discourses of ‘social cohesion’ (Fortier 2008).

Both Louise’s and Carol’s perceptual practices seem to work in ways that make Asian bodies into ‘non-gay’ and maybe even homophobic bodies. For Carol, it seems especially difficult to imagine that Asian men and women are gay because of

‘their’ religion. In that respect, for both of my participants, it is mainly the ‘other’ religions, cultures and families that make it difficult to be gay. Through constructing it in such a way, she makes whiteness the implicit normative device. ‘White’ religions and cultures are rendered as ‘gay-friendly’, open and accepting (and to Carol this might be white Englishness). This approach ignores the fact (as I wrote in chapter 6) that the development of the Gay Village as a bounded space resulted from a need for safety from homophobic ‘white cultures’. White lesbians and gay men are in fact often disowned by their families, and lesbian and gay spaces are often important for those precise reasons (see Valentine 1993). When talking about Asians, Carol argued that their religions (which she defined as Muslim and Sikh) are ‘totally against having sex with the same person, doing whatever with the same person, with the same sex person even’. Her argument holds also true for Catholics, however, this does not stop them from being gay and going out in the Gay Village.

These two participants seem to be unaware of any racist practices and why Asian and black lesbians and gay men might not feel comfortable – and safe - in the Gay Village. Louise even suggests that gay spaces are more accepting, that they are in fact ‘colour-blind’.

Conclusion

This chapter explored the constitution of white lesbian subjectivities. I looked at not only how Louise’s and Carol’s perceptual practices, but also at how ‘race’ and sexuality as embodied experiences shape their subjectivities. Both perceptions and experiences are in an interactive relationship: perceptual practices are part of how sexuality and ‘race’ are experienced on the body.

Louise's and Carol's perceptions racialise and sexualise space. This imagined racialisation and sexualisation of space then acts back upon their bodily experience. I also explored how Louise and Carol perceive and experience other spaces in the city as well as their perceptions of and experiences in the spaces of the Gay Village.

The Gay Village is primarily perceived and experienced as a sexualised space. It is constructed as 'colour-blind', where 'race' does not matter, whilst Louise's and Carol's perceptions of and experiences in Rusholme, Fallowfield and Longsight are more complex. It seemed that only when Louise and Carol perceive certain urban spaces as racialised other than white, that they are conscious of being white-skinned. Also being a lesbian only becomes an issue at certain moments, as when it is felt as embodied difference. These perceptions of and experiences in those different spaces constitute Louise's and Carol's white lesbian subjectivities. As Carol's accounts show, those subjectivities are also shaped by the women's growing-up spaces and their 'social geographies of "race"'. Carol grew up in a racially segregated area where she was English and not Welsh, and during her childhood and teenage years experienced herself as different, as a minoritised person. This seems to have shaped her perceptions of space and her awareness of segregated spaces.

Both Louise and Carol claim to be 'colour-blind' while they are in fact quite aware of the 'colour' of people. They also attach certain meanings to their perceived differences. As Byrne (2006: 76; 172) points out, although the person with 'colour-blind' approach expresses the claim of not seeing colour as well as of not being prejudiced, people might present themselves as being colour-blind in a response to the fear of being seen as racist. In that sense, as Byrne argues, the colour-blind approach should be seen as a negative move, rising out of self-protection, instead of a positive statement (see Byrne 2006: 83). Even though it might be seen as 'progressive' not to

think about 'race' and not to see differences, as the previous chapters reveal, such differences still exist in terms of how lesbian (and other) spaces are experienced. The colour-blind approach, then, prevents any serious discussion about those different experiences because it starts from the premise that differences do not matter.

Louise's and Carol's racial seeing and their racial feelings in spaces where they are (or feel as if they are) in the racial minority disturb this presentation of being colour-blind. In those moments when they are (or feel like) space invaders in spaces where their bodies do not represent the somatic norm, they become aware of being white-skinned. This suggests that because whiteness is spatially and socially located, the consciousness about 'race' can change in different locations and social settings (see Gallagher 2000: 74). Louise's and Carol's accounts also demonstrate that we cannot think whiteness separately from other categories, such as gender, sexuality and ethnicity (and although only marginally explored here, as Byrne's (2006) and Frankenberg's (1993) studies illustrate, whiteness is always classed). Whiteness is not a singular experience but there are different ways in which whiteness (or 'white' people) are produced (Byrne 2006: 2).

Both Carol's and Louise's accounts reveal that there is a fear that feelings triggered by the racialisation of space are racist feelings. Their accounts indicate a view of racism that sees it as individual fault, including having the 'wrong' feelings.

Throughout their interviews, Louise and Carol drew on discourses of 'Asian cultures' as not being 'gay friendly', whereas 'white/western cultures' are open and accepting. Interestingly, both women told me that their 'white' families have not easily accepted their sexuality. In their accounts of the Gay Village and other urban spaces, 'Asians' figured dominantly in their perceptions of and experiences with 'race'. In their descriptions of the Gay Village as a predominantly white space, they

speak from a position of comfort, attach certain meanings to Asian bodies, and do not have to think about the issue any further. Whiteness is not questioned or challenged. This is quite different in other spaces, where being white-skinned shapes their embodied experiences. Louise's example tells that such experiences can intersect with embodied experience of sexuality in complex ways. It vividly demonstrates that the body is not only central for how 'racialised and gendered individuals make sense of their being in the world', as Alexander and Knowles (2005: 13) suggest, but also for how sexualised individuals make sense of their world. Louise's lesbian subjectivity is generated through being an issue through her body being marked as lesbian in an exotifying way.

However, both Louise's and Clarke's accounts are particular gendered and sexualised articulations of white experience (see Byrne 2006: 3). 'Race', class, gender and sexuality intersect in complex ways to produce different subjectivities in particular places. It is the interplay of 'race', gender, class and sexuality that constructs their sense of self and everyday experiences.

The accounts examined in this chapter show that women come into *Coyotes* and *Vanilla* with a particular sense of self, which is then further shaped by their perceptions of and experiences in those spaces. Further highlighting the intersections of sexuality and 'race', this chapter has shown how sexual and racial subjectivities are in part constituted by past spatial experiences. They are also continually produced through everyday spatial experiences, along with looking practices, group relations, and feelings of safety and comfort.

In the final chapter of this thesis, I explore this further by bringing together the different themes and analytical strands discussed in the previous chapters.

Chapter 8: Conclusion

‘What makes lesbian spaces *white*?’ This is the question that was the starting point for my research. As I explained in the Introduction, an article published in the UK lesbian magazine, *DIVA*, raised my curiosity about the racialisation of lesbian spaces. When I started thinking about the topic, I first only considered looking at how ‘race’ works in lesbian spaces. As I explored the topic further, it became evident that another question needed to be asked at the same time: ‘What makes lesbian spaces *lesbian*?’ My ethnographic research looked at the processes of sexualisation and racialisation in the two Mancunian lesbian bars, *Coyotes* and *Vanilla*. As I have argued throughout this thesis, it is important to look at the mutual constitution of ‘race’ and sexuality and at how sexualised space is racialised at the same time, because when researchers separate these processes, they often construct lesbian and gay subjects and spaces as implicitly white. I make a claim for analysing how the category sexuality is racialised. As I outlined in chapter 2, the historical construction of sexuality was racialised from the beginning, and discourses of sexuality cannot be thought of separately from discourses of ‘race’ and vice versa (Mercer and Julien 1988; Somerville 2000; Stoler 1995).

The aims of my study were manifold: (1) to develop an understanding of how practices of inclusion and exclusion work in leisure spaces designed to meet the needs of a marginalised group; (2) to find new ways of understanding ‘race’ and sexuality by looking at their spatial relationship; (3) to contribute to debates on sexuality and space by investigating how space is simultaneously sexualised *and* racialised; and (4) to contribute to existing research on whiteness through an exploration of how different forms of whiteness spatially intersects with sexuality.

My thesis argues that it is important to look at everyday practices (Lewis 2004, 2007) and that it is especially important to look at everyday spaces where meanings of 'race' and sexuality are negotiated in a mutually constitutive relation. As I write in chapter 2, it seems that there exists no study or theoretical framework that brings 'race', sexuality and space together into a single framework of analysis.

My ethnographic research in the two lesbian bars in Manchester's Gay Village was designed to help me explore the issues I raised. My fieldwork set out to find answers to the following questions: What are the processes that racialise and sexualise lesbian spaces such as *Coyotes* and *Vanilla*? What are the processes through which sexuality and 'race' are made and re-made in lesbians' interactions in and with space? What role do place and space play in constituting sexual and racial subjectivities? What is the specific role of whiteness in the interplay of sexuality, 'race' and space?

In this final chapter, I look back on the journey of this thesis and reflect on what answers I found to the questions posed at the beginning of this research and where my questions shifted during the process of my research. I also highlight the contributions my research makes to the different fields I have drawn on. In the final part of this chapter I offer some final methodological reflections about what I have done and could have done and how my research might be taken further.

White lesbian spaces?

My research looked at practices of inclusion and exclusion in night-time leisure spaces created for people who belong to a marginalised sexual group. Because of this marginalisation, it is often assumed that in lesbian and gay spaces differences are more accepted than in other spaces (see Joanne's and Louise's accounts, chapter 1

and chapter 7). As my research illustrated, processes of racialisation are also at work in lesbian spaces and are intrinsic in the making of sexuality and constructing a certain lesbian identity.

My material suggests that most of the practices are not practices of 'exclusion' but, rather, practices of 'subordinated inclusion' (see Lewis 1998). It is not only about 'body count' and whether our eyes tell us that the space appears to be white. For instance, when Firth described her 'dream lesbian space', she described a bar where she went to regularly after coming out. She described it as a small, intimate bar where she and another woman were the only two black lesbians in there. Joanne's opening account indicated that the issue might not be the whiteness of space in terms of bodies present but certain 'practices of whiteness'. Those racialising practices contribute to the racialisation of the space in terms of 'body count', as women who experience 'the look' or their hair being touched might be reluctant to go to these places again.

Who can and who cannot go to the Gay Village? Who feels comfortable and who does not? These questions lead to consideration of the sexual and racial identity of the women who do or do not go. The particular construction of space acts upon the experiences of the lividness of sexuality and 'race' and how the meanings of 'race' and sexuality are negotiated in everyday interactions in those spaces.

The focus of my ethnographic research was not primarily on the experiences of black women in the lesbian bars and how they experience racism, for instance, but also on the perceptions, thoughts, experiences and practices of white women. I included myself in this research and tried to constantly reflect on my own 'race making' and experiences of 'race' in the contexts of the highly sexualised spaces of the two lesbian bars.

My exploration of the processes that racialise and sexualise *Coyotes* and *Vanilla* and the bodies in them and the active role of space in constituting sexual and racial subjectivities led to four main themes: going-out groups, looking practices, issues of comfort and safety and white lesbian subjectivities and spatialities. Although chapters 4 through 7 each focus on one of these themes, the examples given and discussed in the chapters illustrate that the themes are not separate and distinctive, but are closely linked to each other. As a whole, they produce a particular account of the complexities of the relationship between sexuality, 'race' and space.

The theme of 'groups' runs through all of the chapters. Looking at issues of 'group-ness' is telling because the boundaries of sexuality and 'race' are drawn around groups and in interactions within groups. Chapter 4 explores ways in which people make 'race' and sexuality in interactions with each other, for instance through talking about/expressing racialised sexual desires or through practices like touching hair. I show how practices of race-making and sexuality-making are linked to wider forms of group-ness and how minoritised people often get particular characteristics ascribed to them that define them as belonging to a distinct group. Interactions between group members sexualise and racialise the space in the group, but groups also sexualise and racialise the spaces of the bars.

'Race' and sexuality are in process through the ways in which people get certain group belongingness assigned and through people negotiating their belonging to those groups. This often illustrates the constructed and arbitrary nature of 'race', for instance, when the taxi driver's perceptual practices made me (and other group members' bodies) into a 'Chinese woman'. These examples show that the dimension of 'group-ness' needs to be added onto Bridget Byrne's (2006) concept of 'perceptual

practices'. As I argue, some people are seen as members of social groups more than as individuals. This is how perceptual practices racialise individual bodies *and* groups.

'The look', which I discuss in chapter 5, ascribes certain characteristics to women, such as causing fear or being disgusting. In account 5 (chapter 4), when Maya was looking with a disgusted expression on her face at an interracial couple kissing, it was the *black* woman to whom she ascribed the belonging to a racial group. This example illustrates that we can find a sexual hierarchy in lesbian spaces (see Rubin 1993, see chapter 2). As examples discussed throughout the chapters show, it is often people who come together in groups who disturb the comfort of others. Examples include our racially mixed group sitting on the balcony of *Mantos* and (account 7, chapter 7), a group of black women coming into *Coyotes* that caused some disruption (for Carol). In Sarah's account (chapter 6) it was a group of Asian men who caused her discomfort.

Lesbian spaces are constructed in complex ways. As I argue in chapter 3, *Vanilla* and *Coyotes* have particular representations of space which construct a particular lesbian identity of the place. Chapter 5 tells how door policies also play a part in those representations of space and the dominant codings of space. A theme that runs through all chapters is issues of belonging, of feeling 'in' or 'out of place'. This starts at the door. The gaze of the bouncer, which is shaped by and in turn produces a lesbian somatic norm, constructs the belonging to the place. The bouncers' spatial practices impact on the women's experiences of the space in differentiated ways and often determine whether or not women return to the particular place. It is not only the issue of being let in or not, however; merely being stopped and/or questioned at the door has an effect. The gaze of the bouncers in combination with a dominant lesbian

image embodied in the bars and represented on flyers constructs the somatic norm inside the spaces.

Researchers working on sexuality and space have powerfully shown how looking practices shape bodies and spaces (Munt 1995; Valentine 1995, 1996). While most of this research has focused on the heteronormative gaze or the pleasurable look constructing lesbian identities, 'the look' discussed in chapter 5 adds another dimension to and challenge of earlier debates. In *Coyotes* and *Vanilla*, looking practices not only sexualise bodies and spaces, but they also racialise them. However, 'the look' has to be considered in relation to the 'somatic norm' in those spaces; it has different effects when there is a differently racialised somatic norm in these spaces.

What my research demonstrates is that it is not only white peoples' perceptual practices that make 'race' but that *everybody* is involved in race-making. Living in a racially structured world it is very difficult not to participating in the making of 'race'. The Pakistani taxi driver's perceptual practices are an example of that. Account 1, account 2, and other examples given in chapter 3 illustrate my own involvement (as a researcher) and how my body got markers attached to it by other women (e.g., when a black woman thought that I, a white woman, needed some teaching in dancing). Chapter 3 also shows that while white women make 'race' by thinking that 'race' as a topic has nothing to do them, black women make 'race' by positioning themselves as the ones who know 'everything' about it. And although 'the look' is a racialising practice experienced by black women, we might also ask how narrating those experiences (and writing about them) might contribute to fixing racial categories.

What the accounts of 'the look' and touching black women's hair also show is that 'race' is not only produced through perceptual practices and embodied experience, but also through the accumulation of experience. It is the accumulation of

experience that makes each situation so ‘knowable’. The accumulation of experience in some spaces might lead women to expect certain practices, as Joanne’s, Firth’s and Natasha’s accounts indicate. These examples of ‘the look’ powerfully illustrate that ‘race’ and sexuality are not only made through *perceptual practices* but also through *feelings*.

Chapter 6 focuses on comfort and safety as emotional states, a focus that offers a contribution to the field of emotional geographies and research on night-time leisure spaces (see Hubbard 2005). The research of Skeggs et al. (2004) tells us that the experiences of comfort and safety in the Gay Village are complex. My ethnographic material further documents the complexity of issues of comfort and safety. For instance, while Danielle praised the Gay Village for being such a safe space, in the everyday experience of going out this did not seem to be the case. Danielle’s example, and others discussed in chapter 6, suggest that while the Gay Village is somehow constructed as a comfortable and safe space *by white women*, the Gay Village’s spaces of ‘fun’ are frequently not experienced as comfortable and safe *by both white and black women*.

This construction of a safe and comfortable space is often put in opposition to ‘straight’ spaces, which are experienced and constructed as *not* comfortable and safe. In this opposition, however, homogenous and fixed sexual identities are constructed and the intersections of different identities neglected. In that sense, comfort and safety are performative, and they *produce* gendered (‘bitches’), sexualised (‘straight’) and racialised (‘Asian’) bodies and spaces.

Black and Asian bodies are shown in this thesis to figure as comfort and safety-threatening bodies: Kathryn, who described not feeling safe at the ‘black night’ in *Mantos* (chapter 4 and chapter 5), said it would make her feel uncomfortable if she

came into a room full of Pakistani people. Carol described feeling ‘awkward’ when walking down Rusholme and feeling like ‘the only white kid’. For Louise, it was intimidating when she was the only white person at her house party. For Maya, black bodies caused disgust. Joanne remarked that white people sometimes look at her with hate and disgust; her metaphor comparing herself to an insect that wants to be squashed is a powerful illustration of her perception. Firth said that she thinks white people are sometimes afraid when they see her, and that is why she receives ‘the look’. All these examples powerfully illustrate how ‘perceptual practices’ work and how ‘race’ is made through the seeing of difference and attaching meanings to certain bodies. However, these examples also demonstrate how ‘race’ is made through the feelings the differences produce. As Sara Ahmed (2004) has argued, emotions such as pain, hate, fear, disgust, shame and love performatively produce racialised bodies. In chapter 6, I argue that it is not only emotions that are directed at others that racialise bodies, but also that the feeling of being ‘in place’ racialises bodies. In that respect, comfort and safety are constitutive of white lesbian subjectivities.

Chapters 4, 5 and 6 focus on particular processes of sexualisation and racialisation caused by the specificities of the places. Thanks to the clustering of bars, the Gay Village is often used by ‘going-out’ groups, which are formed on the basis of sexual identity and going out together in those sexualised spaces. The spaces are structured around looking practices, where seeing and being seen is central. Comfort and safety were constitutive of the Gay Village from the beginning, but the particular construction of the spaces impacts on the interactions within the spaces. Sexualised and racialised bodies and spaces are produced in an interdynamic relationship.

My research demonstrates the spatiality of race-making and sexuality-making and how space is constitutive of sexualised and racialised subjectivities. Chapter 7

especially explores this conclusion. Certain areas are already racially and sexually marked, which raises certain expectations. In the Gay Village, sexuality is expected to be in the centre of experience, whereas in China Town or Rusholme, there is the expectation of experiencing those spaces as ethnicised and/or racialised. Rusholme is marked as ‘Asian’ (and called ‘Curry Mile’), and when Carol walks down this street, she is aware of this marking. Seeing, perceiving, feeling and experiencing different spaces, such as growing up spaces (like Carol’s Welsh village), the Gay Village, and other Manchester neighbourhoods constitute sexual and racial subjectivities.

To conclude, my research asserts that the relationship between ‘race’, sexuality and space is shaped in complex ways through perceptual practices – the seeing of bodies and looking at them -, grouping, expectations, imaginations, feelings, embodied experience and accumulated experience, the marking of bodies and spaces, and the dominant codings of space. My findings were produced through a particular methodological approach on which I next reflect.

Final methodological reflections

My research contributes to endeavours that seek to understand how the meanings of ‘race’ and sexuality are produced in everyday life. I took a particular methodological approach that produced rich ethnographic material. During my fieldwork, when I talked with people about my research, they often assumed that I had chosen the topic and the methodological approach ‘just to have fun’. But I experienced doing ethnographic research as a real challenge, especially because of my emotional involvement with my participants and the unclear boundaries between them as participants and friends (see chapter 3). Even though, at times I told myself that I

would ‘never do ethnography again’, my research demonstrates that it is the most suitable methodological approach for capturing the processes that produce meaning in everyday lives, especially in research on ‘race’.

I used participant observations and semi-structured interviews as the primary research methods. If I were to do this research again, I might include other methods which lead the researcher to look at the movements in and between spaces, such as walking through people’s lives (see Knowles 2005). My methodological approach was different to Byrne’s (2006) and Frankenberg’s (1993), both of whom used oral histories to explore how individual white women’s lives are structured by ‘race’. In contrast, my research explored the livedness of ‘race’ and sexuality, and I looked at interactions between people in night-time leisure spaces. However, as chapter 7 shows, using narrative interviews in addition to participant observations and semi-structured interviews might be useful for analysing how subjectivities are spatially produced. Because of the richness of the material, additional methods would require a smaller research sample. The chapters of this thesis include only a small proportion of the material produced during the research process.

The participants of this study were somehow mysteriously drawn from a self-selecting cohort. As I write in chapter 3, my participants were all women I ‘connected to’, and so my material is drawn from a very particular sample. As I chose mainly to interview women I met in the Gay Village, women who do not go out in the Gay Village and their reasons for not visiting the space are not included in my research. *Coyotes* and *Vanilla* are commercial spaces, and my research excludes women who might not be able to afford to go to those spaces. This speaks to issues of class (see Rooke 2005 and Taylor 2007). My project focused on the intersections of sexuality and ‘race’, but both categories are also inherently classed, and any future research

project that looks at how class shapes the relationship of ‘race’ and sexuality and space would certainly enrich and extend my study. However, as my research also indicates, ‘intersectionality’ is an analytical tool that it is not always easy to ‘capture’ empirically. Hence, the question is how many categories can be looked at in empirical research in order to still do justice to the concept of intersectionality.

I suggest that it also needs to be further explored how ‘race’ and sexuality are made, not only through seeing and feeling but also through other senses. I give a few examples where ‘race’ is made through the aural sense, for instance, when some bodies seem to be perceived as loud, as happened to our group on the balcony of *Mantos* (discussed in chapter 4), to our Asian neighbours and to my friend’s African’s drums (both discussed in chapter 2). How ‘race’ and sexuality are made through the aural might have been further explored. For instance, in chapter 6, I discuss the complex ways in which comfort and safety performatively produce gendered, racialised and sexualised bodies and spaces. I explore issues of comfort and safety by looking at how comfort and safety are produced through forms of seeing. *Coyotes* and *Vanilla* are spaces where ‘soundscapes’ are quite central and where music plays a major role in the creation of space. Although I do not further explore this, some of my observations suggest that certain kinds of music can produce comfort or discomfort – comfort when the music is familiar, discomfort when the music is deemed to be ‘too different’.

While my research has produced some ‘thick descriptions’ of the processes of sexualisation, racialisation and spatialisation, I can make only (rich) claims for my research sites; my claims might not be transferable to other sites. The material discussed in this thesis was generated through research in one specific city in the northwest of England and in two specific night-time leisure spaces. If we think of

space as active, then it is likely we might find very different constellations of the intersections of ‘race’ and sexuality in other spatial contexts. Looking at places that are sexualised and racialised spaces in other ways (e.g., ‘straight bars’ or *Black Angel*) might offer some interesting avenues for future research.

Final thoughts

My decision to conduct research in *Vanilla* and *Coyotes* was based on my own feelings of comfort in those spaces. If I had not felt comfortable there, I would have not chosen to do research in spaces which I ‘had to’ visit every weekend for the purpose of doing research. On most of my research nights, I actually enjoyed myself (and usually came home around 4am). Although I had a strong interest in the racialisation of those spaces, the whiteness of the spaces seldom impacted on my own enjoyment.

After I finished my fieldwork, my personal interests shifted and I became more interested in other lesbian spaces. My volunteer work with a Lesbian Immigration Support Group (LISG) led me to distance myself from the commercial venues of my research. However, near the end of the writing of this thesis, I was reminded that the issues addressed here are still important. In August 2010, members of LISG suggested going to Gay Pride. One of the group’s members, Amina, a lesbian asylum seeker from Pakistan, was reluctant to go. She told me that she would really like to join the others, but that she felt as if she was not wearing the ‘appropriate’ dress. She said she was worried that people would look at her or say something to her and concluded that she first ‘needed’ to get some ‘western clothes’ before she went out in the Gay Village. I remembered my conversation with Simone about the Gay Pride we attended

together a couple of years before (accounts 4 to 6), when she had asked me if I had seen the ‘Indian women’ in their traditional clothes one afternoon when we were together in *Coyotes*. Simone said that ‘that’s really nice’ and that she thought ‘that’s a fairly new thing’, i.e., to see Indian or Pakistani women on the scene. (Here we have another grouping of bodies as women with South Asian backgrounds are often grouped as ‘Indian’.)

At the beginning of my research an account of an incident which happened at Gay Pride in London in 2006 was circulating on different e-mail lists. Two Muslim women wearing headscarves had been racially attacked by two white gay men, who still shouted at the women when they were in the taxi trying to flee the scene. In another e-mail circulating at the same time, an Asian woman told of her experience of being verbally (called ‘Paki’) and physically attacked by two white lesbians in Manchester’s Gay Village. Although I was tempted to encourage Amina to go to Gay Pride to ‘have some fun’ and try to forget about her pressures with her asylum claim, those reported incidents, together with the other examples of my research that document racialising practices, discouraged me from telling her, ‘It will be all right’. I was not sure she would be ‘safe’. Amina’s imagined discomfort, again, highlighted the importance of looking at the intersections of ‘race’, sexuality and space and how our experiences are shaped by their mutual constitution.

In some ways, Amina’s perceptions and experiences reflect the themes of this thesis. She was afraid of being ‘read’ and perceived as a ‘Pakistani woman’. As my research shows, this is not ‘just’ about racism. It is also about being marked as different through certain spatial practices of embodiment (or practices of the skin; see Lewis 2004, 2007). Amina had been in the Gay Village once before, when we walked together down Canal Street on a busy Friday night. While she had not been worried

about her dress before this short visit, it seemed to have left her with the impression of a particular representation of space, a dominant coding of space where she does not seem to fit in and does not embody the somatic norm. Related to that was her perception that her dress makes her invisible as a lesbian. Her conversation with me illustrates the relationship between 'race', sexuality and space, and as I have argued throughout the thesis, that those three categories cannot be looked at separately from each other.

Appendix 1: Cast of Characters

Name (pseudonym)	Self-Identifiers
(Alice)	36, white, English, Jewish, middle-class, bisexual, lives in a small city in NW of England (pilot study)
Anja	31, white, Central European, middle-class, Kathryn's partner, Joanne's housemate, we met in <i>Coyotes</i>
Carol	19, white, English, working – lower middle class, Danielle's partner, we met in <i>Coyotes</i> (through Louise)
Claud	Organiser of <i>Black Angel</i> , Black British
Danielle	29, reluctant to identify as white, South European, middle-class, Carol's partner, I met her in <i>Coyotes</i>
Firth	42, black, English, working-class, we met in <i>Coyotes</i>
(Flis)	44, white, English, working-class, lives in a small city in NW of England (pilot study)
Joanne	30, mixed-race, English, bisexual, working-class, Anja's housemate, we met through Anja
Kathryn	26, white, Antipodeans, middle-class, Anja's partner, Lesley's housemate, we met in <i>Vanilla</i>
Lesley	30, mixed-race, English, middle-class, Kathryn's housemate, we got to know each other through Kathryn
Louise	20, white, English, working-class background (but was not sure about it), we met in <i>Coyotes</i>
Mary and Maream	46, white, English, disabled, working-class 61, mixed-race (white – African-American), North American, working-class, self-employed, I met both through Joanne
Maya	22, white, East European, we met on the streets in the Gay Village
Natasha	33, black, North American, middle-class
Nina – researcher	32, white, lower middle-class, Central European
Phoebe	36, white, English, working-class, we met through Joanne
Qooz	26, East Asian, we met in <i>Vanilla</i>
Sarah	33, white, Scandinavian, born in England but lived most of her life in Scandinavia, middle-class
Simone	38, white, English, working-class background, we met through Qooz
Tania	29, mixed-race/black, Southern European, I met her in <i>Coyotes</i>

Appendix 2: Consent Form

Experiences in lesbian spaces

The research I am doing involves participant observation and interviews and is part of my PhD at the Institute for Women's Studies in Lancaster. I am interested in your experiences in lesbian bars and clubs, in particular with regard to issues of diversity (age, class, ability, race, gender).

Participation in this project is voluntary so there is always the choice to opt out of the research at any time. I will need your written consent (permission) to allow me to talk to you, tape record your views and to use your information for my study. This only involves you signing this form. Thank you for your contribution!

Please tick the appropriate box(es):

I have read the above statement and understand its contents. I agree to participate in the study as it has been explained

I give permission for you to quote me:

- in your unpublished thesis
- in related academic publications

I would like you to use the following pseudonym:

- Please let me see a copy of the transcript before you use the interview
- Please feel free to contact me again if you have further questions

Name (BLOCK CAPITALS) _____

Signature

Date _____

Contact details:

If you have any further questions about the research please contact me:

Nina Held

Institute for Women's Studies, Lancaster University

01524 594732

n.held@lancaster.ac.uk

Appendix 3: Interview guide

Introduction: Thank you very much for taking the time for doing this interview (consent form). As I have told you, I am doing research on “experiences in lesbian spaces”, so I am interested in particular in how you experience places defined as lesbian such as lesbian bars and clubs. I will also ask you general questions about yourself. All information given will be treated confidentially and anonymously.

1. Lesbian Spaces

- Let us do a little fantasy journey: try to imagine some kind of lesbian space (bar, club, any kind of event identified as lesbian) of your dreams. How would your ideal lesbian space/ club look like? Could you paint me a picture?
 - Probing: Music, food/ drinks, who is there, what do the people wear, how are they, any Asian woman or black women, do they all come from the North?
- Can you talk about a “real” place identified as lesbian? How does it look like? (probing: Music, people, dress, food, what do you like about it, what not?)
- Locating the space: how would you describe “the scene” in general where that particular place is (+ the city where you live in, differences to other cities you know?)
- In what ways were the spaces you described mixed (the imagined and the real one?)
 - Probing: Do you like this mix? Can you describe any occasion (or times) when it was different, why was it different? Would it be different when other people came in?

2. Identity questions

- How does the picture you have just drawn of these spaces relate to your identity? (How would you describe/ identify yourself?)
(probing: class, educational background, religion, profession, where born + brought up, lived)
- Have you ever thought about yourself in racial terms (ethnic terms)?
 - Probing (if not): why do you think that is? Maybe tell about myself...., has your “race”/ethnicity ever mattered when being in lesbian spaces? Do you remember any occasions where issues of “race” and “racism” were raised in lesbian places? Have you ever witnessed a racist event?
- What would you say, what importance has your sexuality in your life?
- Do you think of yourself as “out”? (Would you say you are fully out, not out at all, partially out?)
- Have you ever experienced discrimination on grounds of sexuality (or other identifiers)?
- Is being in a lesbian environment important to you?

3. Lesbian community and culture

- Do you feel you belong to a “lesbian community” (in Lancaster/ Manchester and in general)? How would you define it?
 - Probing: How important is the “lesbian community” to you? Lesbian networks? Lesbian friendships? Do you feel you get support from the “lesbian community”?
- Do you think something like lesbian knowledge or lesbian culture exists? What constitutes it?
 - Probing: could you name some famous lesbians; films, music? How much do you participate in it? Do you buy the Diva? Use internet sites? Film etc.
- Do you feel you belong to any other “community”?
- Do you think something like lesbian knowledge or lesbian culture exists? What constitutes it?

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