

Gaytrification and The Re-orienting of Sexual Peripheries

Milton Hae Robert*

Abstract Sexualizing space and place requires negotiating the substance, production, and constitution of the framework within which the sexual self is created, refracted, and re-interpreted. Though some have limited the boundaries of this framework to gender as internalized from within, this paper argues that only through social interactionism and performativity can sexual behavior be understood and negotiated. Using multiple semi-controlled interviews with both a male and female entrepreneur of sex-related businesses, as well as from observational data, this research further investigates the social through the performative geographies created by space and place. At the macro-level, this research analyzes the influences of capitalist and cultural forces in destabilizing geographies of gender and sexuality on place, while from a micro-sociological level it investigates how the consequent newly created space(s) mitigate, manipulate, and even dictate the consolidation of the sexual self, and either rupture or catalyze a return to traditional notions of gender-based heteronormativity even within queer society.

Keywords Gaytrification, South Korea, Sexuality, Spatial Competition, Territoriality, Queer, Gay

1. Introduction

How we conceive of space and place can have a huge impact on how we imagine membership and participation. Sexuality has traditionally been seen as a metaphysical, biological, circumstantial, temporal construction—often the result of some

* Ph.D. Candidate, Department of Sociology, Seoul National University, rchristo10@hotmail.com

analysis in which space and place are interpreted as perpetually static or completely independent variables in a complex web of power relations. Though such studies have provided noteworthy strides in understanding both gender and sexuality, investigating the interaction of space and place beyond their seemingly unchanging natures is essential to further understanding the effects of post-modernism on sexuality, especially in a world in which “...time is being replaced by space, or rather temporarily by spatiality” (McDowell, 1995). In an environment in which material displacement comes with relative ease—whole cities can be remade and rebuilt in a matter of months—it would be a fallacy to believe that space and place are not every bit as pliable and dynamic as the sexualities within them. Just as haphazard is the assumption that sexuality is not therefore affected by changes in space and place or vice-versa. The combination of these two factors becomes the very essence of performativity. Yet, for a more nuanced discussion, it is important to ask, what then is the distinction between space and place and how do the two mitigate sexuality?

Distinguishing between space and place is no easy matter and most scholars have often opted out of the gambit of delineating between them. For one, the two are not mutually exclusive; they are in fact intricately connected. While space is usually interpreted as inauthentic, generic, and abstract, place is seen as a concrete geographical locale that can be talked about, seen, or experienced—a humanized notion of space. Second, a distinction between the two is not always warranted and at times the two are interchangeable. In this research, and for all intents and purposes, a queer sexual place will be defined as a geographical location in which queer sex-related commercial boundaries are semi-defined by distance from the individual, i.e. a geographic locale within a commodified and perceived sex market, such as a particular store, bar, or street. A queer sexual space, however, will be defined as a subjectively internalized area or reality from within—that includes commercially and non-commercially constituted sex-related boundaries, influences, and opportunities internalized by the individual, i.e. a subjective interpretation of the self’s relationship to its perceived sexual or sexualized environment.

2. Queer Sexual Place

Place is essential to understanding the formation of new queer sexual spaces in Seoul, South Korea. Prior to recent years, sexual places were concentrated in two general areas: *Jong-ro* and *Itaewon* in the northeastern and central areas of Seoul respectively. It is within this "...interweaving of urban governance and sexual citizenship agendas produces particular kinds of sexual [places], at the exclusion of other kinds," (Bell & Binnie, 2004). D'Emilio argues this as a product of history, the effects of a free-wage labor system that led to the release of the Victorian imperative to procreate (D'Emilio, 1993). However, this unidirectional narrative falls short of explaining the socio-historical development of sexuality in Seoul, which under colonial rule, neither experienced its own Victorian age nor an exclusive development of sexual identity unaffected by globalization. For example, sexual identities like "gay" or "gei" are only beginning to develop the attributes and cultural meanings significant in creation of a sexual minority group in the country (See McLelland, 2005). These new identities have invariably led to spatial competition and conflict in South Korea, these similar forces have led to the establishment of (though limited) sexual places, gay places that extend even to neighborhoods and distinct lifestyle qualities in other countries where a progressive narrative applies.

The generalized view is that capitalism and economics play the essential roles in where sexual minorities live. However, it is also driven by reputation for tolerating non-conformity. The general formation of gayborhoods goes as such: lesbians, feeling the brunt of social marginalization and violence because of gender, move into areas predicated on affordability, places where the typical heterosexual wants to do anything to leave and the lesbian resident wants to establish as a safe, tolerating space. Once established, gay men also begin to move into these areas, motivated primarily by forces of toleration and the sense of sexual freedom these spaces provide. Though this generalization often (unfairly) focuses on the middle and upper-class gay male, which driven by media, has led to the social insight adopted both by realtors and gays themselves that gay men satisfy a social need: the revitalization of

where they settle and reside. Gaytrification, or this gay-driven gentrification, is thus argued as the more common explanation of why gay neighborhoods form.

Driven primarily by deep-seeded family values and notions of private that overlap with public, the generalization above is not one that can be directly applied to Korea. Living with one's parents is seen as a filial duty in some cases, while the sanctity of sexual privacy is seen as a privilege afforded almost exclusively to the married. Instead, globalization and cosmopolitan forces, or production-side mechanics, motivate the behavior of sexual minorities in the country more than concerns over residency or settlement; Korean gay men often lead two lives, one tied to traditional notions of family and the other founded on seeking out places for freedom of sexual expression and behavior (this may not be the case for Korean lesbian women who suffer from the added gender oppression in the country).

The current trend is to place personal identity above the social forces of space and place, however there have been recent efforts to break free of these limitations. In Amin Ghaziani's *There Goes the Gayborhood?*, for example, a book that focuses primarily on the iconic Castro district in San Francisco, questions of gay identity and the negotiation of space and place have been replaced with inquiries into the effects of gentrification pushing out gays in preference of heterosexuals and the creation of new sexual identities, such as the "post-gay" (Ghaziani, 2014). The idea is that the "post-gays" see themselves less as a social identity based on the centrality of coded or trended "gay behaviors" (e.g. camp or butch), and rather choose to see themselves in a multicultural society founded on latitude, tolerance, and in some ways heterosexual assimilation "...adopting the perspectives and attitudes of heterosexuals, the dominant group, who, in turn, are incorporating gay people into their existing social structures, like marriage laws" (Ghaziani, 2014: 28). While a "post-gay" identity may be a new, primarily media-driven, identity in spatially well-established and sexually de-limited places such as Castro in the US, the necessity of posing such questions in the case of *Jong-ro* or *Itaewon* would again bury spatial development beneath that of identity-building.

Altman and Symons's most recent work, *Queer Wars*, is a more apt work to un-

derstanding the conflict this paper attempts to address, namely the polarization of queer issues created by global forces and the "...inevitable cultural clash between western democracies and 'the rest', often countries struggling with colonial legacies or other forms of social disorder" (2015; 3). While identity, spatial disintegration, and newly emerging imagined geographies (cf. third space theory) are issues pertaining primarily to the western front, in the case of Seoul, inquiry is arguably better placed in that of gentrification, spatial significance, and identity integrity, and this is exactly what this paper attempts to do. Namely, it looks specifically at the productive forces that help define social behavior in the creation of demand rather than emphasizing the demand-side, which reflexively define social identity. In essence, this is a unique opportunity to investigate the incipient creation of the pink dollar market, rather than focusing exclusively on its post-developed effects.

Seoul's two gay neighborhoods have very different histories and consequently different social significances. In the case of *Itaewon*, gaytrification is leading to the defragmentation of the original presence of queer sexuality, queer sexual space, and specifically queer sexual behavior, a process that Ghaziani refers to as de-gaying. While queer places in *Jong-ro* have conventionally served the needs of ethnically Asian customers, *Itaewon*, with its proximity to a U.S. Army base installed after the 1950-53 Korean War caters to foreigners or is at least frequented by more foreigners of non-Asian ethnicity in comparison to *Itaewon*. As such, the latter is typically interpreted as more liberal and global space, free from the ethnic Asian homonormativity currently associated with *Jong-ro*. This perception of *Itaewon* as a global village of sexual authenticity has provided a non-threatening atmosphere in which queerness could thrive both physically and ontologically. This includes the proliferation of brothels and a street, affectionately coined Hooker Hill—a sexualized place that even officials recognize as a place where illegal prostitution thrives. A legal gay sauna that advertises itself both on the street and on other pamphlets and boards as international or welcoming of non-Koreans is well known in the area. Standing bars that help to facilitate one-night stands as opposed to the conventional Korean-style sit-down HOFs or group-oriented dinner table drinking (which makes it

difficult to mingle or meet people outside one's table) are accessible to queers and non-queers alike. This infrastructure has led to both an imagined and real sexual freedom that has enticed new producers within the sexual market, and has also led to a burgeoning *Itaewon* queer culture split between the conservatives interested in queering "good sex" and the radical queers who embrace the bad as equally as the good (Rubin, 1984).

The gaytrification of *Itaewon* is one both of happenstance and one socially perceived of as of social need. The outing of Korea's first male celebrity, the media-driven acceptance of the country's first MTF transgender, and the consequent growth and interest in the pink dollar has led to a new publicity of a more conservative queer consumer culture and has driven the less-assimilated queers and their sexual spaces further underground and in some cases, outside of the area. In place of these "counterpublic sexual spaces", a slew of street cafés, trendy bars, and even a theme hotel have emerged (Berlant & Warner, 1988; Hubbard, 2001). The area is considered both cosmopolitan and affluent. However, similar to the disappearance of the leather spaces of San Francisco recounted by Gayle Rubin, I argue that queer sexual cultures are not only pushed to peripheries in terms of place but also toward new peripheries of conflict in regard to queer sexual space. In fact, the leading political figure of this move has readily admitted that he purposely sought *Itaewon* as a place for gaytrification, a key effort to clean up the area and remove its negative historical legacy of crime and unhealthy sexual behaviors. Yet, it is just this transference that has led to a resurgence of heteropatriarchal hegemony and subsequently to the forceful and often violent pushing out of or total social castration of queer individuals in the midst of capitalist growth and beneath the oppressive forces of its own making, namely that of gaytrification.

I will argue that not only the conflict between heterosexual and gays, but also the emergence of a strong intra-queer conflict, in the process of creating new sexualized places (while often claiming to promote sexual egalitarianism and equality), pushes sexual minorities to share space and thus vie for power leading to sexual territorial winners and losers.

3. Queer Sexual Spaces and Places: A Structural-Behavioral Analysis

Binnie and Valentine(1999) vocalized the need to understand how space and place are sexualized, delineated, and gendered “Geographies of Sexuality—A Review of Progress.” In this short article, the authors spelled out not only the progression of sexual studies of space and place, but also its limitations in the field, especially in terms of its lack of addressing issues such as race, migration, and physical disabilities. Often bounded within the contexts of hegemonic sexual ideal types along with their pre-conceived stereotypes, most research eventually miss the intricate interplay of peripheral influences that transcend identity. This research does exactly that, it breaks momentarily free of the focus on agency often invested by scholars interested in sexual identity and sexuality-based ideal types. Instead, similar to Moran, et. al. (2003) in “The formation of fear in gay space: the ‘straights’ story”, it will attempt to better understand how “...buildings [and particularly physical structures] embody concerns about proper social order” (173). In doing so, it will attempt to move beyond both heteronormative and homonormative criteria and pay close attention to the interdependence complicit of both within the frame of structures’ impacts on sexual behavior.

McCormack(2012) in *The Declining Significance of Homophobia*, for example, focused his research on high school and conducted much of this research within the spatial confines of schools. His findings effectively demonstrated the influence of settings and particularly the effects of space on both sexual identity as well as on heterosexual reaction to minority sexual identities. Very little, however, is dedicated to analyzing the intra-conflict between minority sexual identities caused by the high school settings. It is as if the high school is seen as an institute and no longer a building possessing real limits (through walls and demarked places) leading to different performative behaviors and by default power struggles over those spaces. As such, sexual minorities or the gays he focuses on are minimized to a consistent, non-conflictual, homogeneous social predicated primarily on their perceived iden-

tity opposites, namely heterosexuals. I prefer, however, to understand this conflict through the creation of eroticized topographies and subsequently analyze the behaviors formed and influenced within these new topographies. Though highly indebted to David Bell, John Binnie, Gill Valentine, and Julia Cream(1994) in drawing on the performance of sexual identity in space, this research attempts to understand the performative nature of space and how queers vie within these newly created spaces. In essence, how have heterosexuals and heteronormalization led to intra-queer conflict over space even before the places constituting such spaces are in the process of being created? Using interviews from and a production-side approach, this research found that the difficulty of claiming such places often lead to a need to re-invent sexual spaces.

Methods

This research is not an attempt to find patterned behavior or a means of typifying the sexual market and its creation in South Korea. Rather it is a modest attempt to better understand the intra-queer and conflicts over sexualized topographies caused by heteronormative forces combined with the effects of the supply-side forces of gaytrification.

The research uses multiple interviews with two people who consider themselves as exclusively part of the supply-side dynamic when it comes to creating sexualized places. Both have been working in the creation of these places for more than four years, dedicated to the extension of sexual space in South Korean, and South Korean natives.

The interviews were conducted, recorded, and transcribed fully by me in Korean with the full permission of both participants. I conducted five formal one-hour interviews with each interviewee, but also communicated informally with them both over the course of 17 months in direct regard to this research. In addition to interviews, observations were also conducted.

4. New Queer Sexual Spaces: A Production-side Approach

Gaytrification and the Demise of Gay Clubs

The first series of interviews were conducted with a male, 49 years old, who is the owner of a small-sized gay *Jjimjilbang* or Korean dry sauna located in *Itaewon* where patrons sleep, shower, and cruise for casual sex. Mr. Lee (a pseudonym) had owned this establishment for more than four years. He never advertised the establishment on either a store-front sign or using pamphlets or other such paraphernalia. He relied exclusively on word-of-mouth. He explained that he would often walk up and down Homo and Hooker Hill enticing semi-drunk gay men as a means of making sure there would be at least “some meat” in the store for the less-drunk customers who may be intent on casual sexual escapades in his establishment. When asked whether this could cause problems for his establishment, i.e. whether any semi-drunk or drunk gay or straight men complained of having been molested or raped while intoxicated, he said he had never had reason to care.

There’s no such thing as a guy raping a guy and besides if they complained nothing would happen because that person was likely in a gay bar on CCTV and now in a gay sauna. I think the police would just laugh at him.

He went further to explain that what made his place most welcomed by his clients is the darkness of all the rooms. The lighting, he explained, is dimmed just enough to see someone’s silhouette, but not enough to expose a person to intense scrutiny. He explained that his establishment was a safe-haven from Korea’s intense lookism and obsession with good-looks. “The sauna is a place where the only thing that perhaps matters is body shape and the length of one’s shaft,” he explained. My reason for selecting Mr. Lee for this research had more to do with his decision to open up a dance club that caters to sexually liberated gay bears or muscular men. Yet his views of how to sexualize place is witnessed in his efforts to expand. He saw



Pic 1: An advertisement of a man with shirtless man attempting to move beyond culture (left). An advertisement promoting discreet fun (right). [Poster credit: Owner; author authorized to use for this research]

making a gay dance club in *Itaewon* not only as one of his dreams, but also a great way of bringing business to his gay sauna. The two were not mutually exclusive.

Mr. Lee opened Club B in January this year, 2014. Upon hearing that he would open this club, I became interested and asked him to participate in a number of interviews, while allowing me to closely observe the process. He agreed.

Located at the entrance of Homo Hill, the club was on the second-level basement floor. Only a few feet from the street, the club's front sign advertising its name could easily be seen from even a block away. Upon entering the club, one is immediately met with a steep column of stairs leading to a reception table where customers pay the entry fee of 10,000 won that comes with a complimentary cocktail (not beer).

The next small hall opened up to a medium-sized dance floor, able to accommodate 340 people by law. Similar to the sauna, the walls were painted black with fluorescent red tint. The entrance led directly to a large semi-circular bar with no



Pic 2: Reception desk leading to the entrance to the bar (left). The view of the club upon entry (right). [Photo credit: author]

stools. Along each wall—excluding a small stage with a dancing pole—were backless couches that faced the bar. Customers had the view of either the bar, stage, or dance floor, which was on the left side of bar. The lighting was similar to his gay sauna; one could make out a silhouette but seeing the details of another person's visage was nearly impossible. The bathroom was unisex and the mirrors above the urinals made it easy for anyone sitting on the toilet to look at the penises of men urinating.

For opening night, Mr. Lee wanted to invite four non-Korean (Caucasian and straight) dancers to perform erotic dances shirtless. I provided interpretation in English for him and the potential dancers. Following the arrangements, I asked Mr. Lee more about his selection and why he thought foreign dancers (even straight ones) would be a good idea.



Pic 3: The bar neon sign advertising its name in red and black (left); The inside view of the booths and interior coloration of black and red. [Photo credit: Author]

To be honest, I want more Korean gay guys to show up. I think that having more Korean gay guys will actually lead to a better regular turnout. So I'm choosing foreign guys. Besides, foreign guys also frequent this gay area. If they see that foreigners are dancing then they will know that we are very open to foreigners too. Also, Korean gays don't really like gay-looking or effeminate men.

Though Mr. Lee confided in me that he initially wanted the performers to dance completely naked, he explained that such a display would be illegal and would only land him in jail. It was from this exchange that Mr. Lee expressed his sentiments that *Itaewon* was a place open to experimentation, but not open enough for full-out sexual expression or rebellion against laws and regulations. This conservativeness, however, did not end simply at his personal views or apprehensions. The night prior to opening, he ran into a problem that was both damaging to his business and also to his ego in terms of how successful he could be in *Itaewon*. On the phone he confided:

I recently got calls from the police and from immigration. Apparently, they saw my advertisement on my Facebook to use the dancers. They told me if I use them then I would have to pay a 10 million won fine for each person and risk additional fines. I'm sure it's because of these damn conservative gays. They just don't want my business to work.

Though US media focuses highly on the conservative vs. liberal gay divide, e.g. the supporters of the lascivious cruising-culture of *Queer as Folk* versus the conservatism and monogamy of *The L Word*, *The New Normal*, and *Modern Family*—little had I expected a similar manifestation in *Itaewon*, the country's gay mecca. But it exists, culminated in failed gimmicks, the gaytrification spurned growth of heterosexual consumerism, and eventually the shutting of Club B's doors at the end of May this year. The general effect of gaytrification had only begun to infect the area. Club B served as a sign that while sexual identity could serve the government's

purposes, the behaviors generally associated with gay sexuality would not be tolerated.

I sat with Mr. Lee for several hours and over several sessions to discuss the failure. Why would a gay bar at the head of a line of gay bars on Homo Hill fail to attract customers and win patrons? He explained that it was clearly due to both a region-based governmental drive to put in only kosher sexual identity-based establishments and also a slow move to drive out ultra-queer places and spaces, and queer behavior altogether, allowing in their place conservative posh attractions devoid of sex and sexuality. The pink dollar had effectively castrated its market in the process of establishing the infrastructure necessary for de-sexualized, politically-driven sexual outlets, and eventually giving way to heteronormative domination. I additionally asked Mr. Lee about alternative queer sexual places. He told me that the newer queer places were moving to avoid de-sexualization.

Basically it's like starting over for the gay community. We set up things in *Itaewon*, but now they want us out and that's understandable. Gays and straights *cannot* live together. So what you see is many of the more affluent gays and *real* queers are setting up places in underground places in areas like *Cheong-dam* and Olympic Park...places where you wouldn't expect any queers and places so rich that the police are too afraid to do anything to places that don't advertise. The police are conservative too and that makes them scared of arresting anyone, especially the rich.

The combination of affluence, sexual expression, and law is of importance here. It not only highlights the view of sexuality, especially homosexuality, as firmly linked to the idea of social privilege, but also supports the idea that sexuality and economic dependence (from family) are intricately connected.

Prior to closing the doors of his club, Mr. Lee admitted to embarking on a sexual sterilization of Club B himself, eventually succumbing to heteronormalizing pressures.

I had to do whatever I could to make ends meet. No one was coming to the bar. Most of the gays rejected the place because they associated the place with me, a gay sauna owner. I was looked at like a less-than-equal queer. Too sexual. Too perverse. The gays wanted to drink and have fun but also collectively acted as if they don't have sex. There's too much gay politics here [in *Itaewon*]. (Brackets mine)

And Mr. Lee tried ever heterosexual gimmick he could, including his advertising. He hired staff with experiences in straight bars. Still seeing sex as a powerful sale, he decided to advertise using sexually provocative women in ads. As illustrated in the advertisements below, lingerie and half-naked women were used to sell sex, but just not the kind of sex Mr. Lee originally had in mind when he opened the club.

He even staged his own reopening, this time hiring women to do on-stage pole dancing and singing. He enlisted a female disk jockey and changed the music to that suitable to 20-year-old heterosexual youth. He offered free drinks to couples who would do provocative dancing and pose as random clubbers, not hired hands. He became so desperate to entice people to come into his newly created club that



Pic 4: Advertisement with provocative woman in high-heels (left); Advertisement of provocative foreign woman in lingerie. [Photo credit: Owner; author authorized to use for this research]



Pic 5: Couple paid to dance provocatively and act like unpaid customers (top left); Female DJ (top middle); Opening dance girl show (top right); Young male with female companion provided with free guzzle of hard liquor (bottom left); Young man offered free guzzle from female staff member as his male friends look on (bottom right).

he embarked on an effort to simply get people drunk—for free!

I got so desperate to get people to come to the club. So desperate that I had to erase any trace of my being gay. I couldn't tell people 'I am gay' because the gays just don't want anything new and even the tolerant heterosexuals just want to maintain the gay section as it is and don't want anything else. So I had to target a new crowd—the intolerant gays. Because my place was at the foot of Homo Hill I figured that at least I could maybe get those people who didn't know about Homo Hill. Or just...I wanted to say to hell with gay people. They had ruined me...in a gay area! Damn it!

Mr. Lee is a great example of Bell & Binnie's argument, a corollary to Martin P. Levine's findings, which see gay ghettos as dynamic yet geographically static.

Levine defines a gay ghetto as a sexual place with four features: institutional concentration, cultural area, social isolation, and residential concentration. However, in the case of Seoul as mentioned above, social isolation often turns into social exclusion after all the resources are sapped up á la Bell & Binnie. In other words, what may be a sexual queer place or ghetto today may not be one tomorrow—especially after gaytrification.

Though the influences of gaytrification have led to a general ousting of sexualized topographies and sexual behaviors, it would be a far stretch to argue in favor of Ghaziani's claim of a "pro-gay" influence or seeing this force as one created on the idea that gay men and heterosexual people live similar lifestyles and should thus share space with one another. Rather, the "gay" identity in South Korea is still in the process of gaining its political, and particularly, its personal and cultural significance. The notion that gays are acceptable in the country, or even that their lifestyles are similar, acceptable, or even tolerable to heterosexuals here would ignore the social reality here.

5. Structure Fits Function?: Failed Sexualization of Queer Space

For the purposes of this research, I observed the club for three nights. Each night took place on a Friday from opening (11pm) to closing, which varied but usually ended at around 4am. For most of the evening I would sit in a booth in the corner of the bar, but at around 2am I would usually move around to get a better sight of the goings-on.

Most of the customers would come in groups of three or more people. Usually all male or a group of two males and one female. Some customers, however, would come alone. The groups would immediately take a seat on the couches after having bought drinks. Singles would usually stand by the bar or at the foot of the couches near the entrance/ exit (there was only one for use). Most of the customers

were young and likely in their 20s. Most would look sober aside for the occasional group, in which one person in the group might be so drunk that he or she would spend most of the night passed out on the couch. Though Mr. Lee's desire was to establish a gay club, few of the customers would fit the stereotypical camp-gay image often found in queer places.

What became clear from the beginning is that use of the booths was quite different in comparison to when the bar was set on attracting a queer crowd. The booths were places primarily where customers would sit with their party or friends. However, when the club took on a heterosexual identity, the booths became kissing grounds. This change in how customers interacted with their physical environment was based on their internalized notion of sexuality and sexual behavior. This can also be seen in how the standing bar area was used. Mr. Lee explained to me that during the club's brief queer period, the standing bar area was often used by customers as a pick-up area. This led to people standing closer to the dance floor with drink in hand. In addition, the use of the pole on the stage played a pivotal role during the club's queer period. This is most likely due to the personae of pole dancing as an overt display of sexuality as well as an attention grabber—both traits that are likely not as appealing to heterosexuals who wish to brandish a strong masculinity or avoid looking like a too-easy-to-get woman. As such, it could be claimed that the original infrastructure, which was remodeled based primarily on a decor that would facilitate a queer crowd simply did not allow for comfortable heterosexual interaction.

6. The De-Sexualization of Queer Space

The second interview was with a 43-year old female who owns her own bar that she refers to as a “swapping bar” (what is typically called a swinger's club). She has been in business for two years and four months, but says that she owned a similar establishment in Australia, which also happened to serve as the impetus for why

she decided to establish such a bar in South Korea. Ms. Park (a pseudonym) says that she was prosecuted for having owned a sex-related bar in Australia four years ago. Her lawyer at the time prompted her to take the case to the Supreme Court to adjudicate on the constitutionality of being prosecuted for illegal activities for acts conducted in foreign countries despite said acts falling within the legal boundaries, jurisdiction, and purview of where such activities took place.

I was acquitted of all charges. But to be honest, I want revenge. They put my life through hell. And do you know who I can only take revenge on? Yes...that's right, on society. So that's the reason I own this bar and why I think it's important. Our society needs to change.

According to Ms. Park, her usual customers are between the ages of 22 and 25. Often they come in couples and are generally interested in sexual experimentation. As such, she has designed the bar to fit such a sexualized structure. A table next to the entrance, has a layout of whips, cock rings, vibrators, leather straps, studded knuckles and bras, feathers of different shapes, colors, and sizes, and an assortment of expensive wines and liquors.

Oh that, we don't really sell the alcohol. That's one of our main points. We may allow people to do what they want, but we also want to control how they do it. We don't want drunk people in here. People have to feel safe. The alcohol is mostly decoration...I mean we do sell drinks, but we don't want people wasted here.

The bar is located in *Cheong-dam*, in the southern affluent area of Seoul. When asked why she had chosen this location she turned up her face, taking a long drag on her fag—puffs of smoke obscuring her visage.

Why? You think I should have gone to *Itaewon* or *Jong-ro*, right? Oh no...those

places are full of the conservative and self-centered...all they care about is money. And the other gays and lesbians and people who act like they're open to sex but don't even have it. Had I put this place there, I would be a beggar.

It is clear that Ms. Park also perceived of the need to relocate sexual place in order to accommodate pre-existing queer sexual spaces. Gaytrification had pushed her out of traditional queer sexual space and had led to relocation in non-sexual spaces. However, freedom from competition did not accompany this move. The competition for sexual space created had led to redefine sexual place to accommodate her new customers, some of whom were heterosexual and virgins when it came to semi-public sex.

The entrance is nestled between the table of sexual paraphernalia and a cabin of 18 medium-sized lockers. The lockers serve as storage areas for what Ms. Park sees as the most dangerous items in her bar, namely cell phones and any other device that could have cameras. Though voyeurism is a major activity in the bar, she explained that social privacy was also important both for people's personal lives as



Pic 6: Lockers for cell phones and personal belongings with provocative illustrations (left); Whips and Sexual paraphernalia (middle); Masks (right). [Photo credit: author]

well as for her business. “People want to explore but they also need to feel secure,” she explained.

Despite her prior claim that drinking is not a major part of the scene, the entrance opened immediately to a long drinking bar with stools. She explained that this is what she considers her “comfort zone,” a place where people can mingle close enough to one another yet separated both by staff and by the stools they sit in. The lighting in this area is also slightly brighter than those of the other areas. This lighting is tinted in red. Upon inquiry, she explained that she actually had a conflict of interest in this regard. She initially wanted to use pink—a personal favorite—but decided against it due to the color’s strong connotation with street butchers and street prostitutes—both of which she seemed to have a strong disdain for. It may seem ironic that Ms. Park is averse to prostitution being that she herself is in the commodification of sex industry, but she explained that people who sell their bodies also put themselves in harm’s way. “I pride myself on safety here and respect. Neither of which prostitutes get or have,” she said.

The bar was connected to a large single room of approximately (2,500m³), separated by curtains that are usually let down to provide a bit of privacy for those having sex and those enjoying a drink and conversation at the bar (Pic. 7). The large room houses 13 tables flanked with couches. At the head of this room, there is one couch that doubles as a large bed. And this couch/bed is enclosed on its three sides by translucent curtains. On each table, there are separate ceramic bowls into which are dozens of multiple assorted condoms—flavored, ribbed, specially lubricated for several different pleasures. A cabinet just before the large room displays several differently shaped dildos, some of mammoth size, and others that twist and turn electronically to provide many different stimulations for customers. Next to this cabinet is a red lacquered wooden X with hanging handcuffs and chains.

Yes...as you can imagine this is for S&M. (Do you usually make your clients make a safeword?) Well...actually we don't. I mean...we keep an eye on them we make sure that things don't get out of hand. We're always here...but not here at



Pic 7: Couch areas from four angles with photographer standing in the middle of the room.
[Photo credit: author]

the same time. Even asking such a thing would just make things feel more dangerous than they really are. It's not good for business.

Ms. Park's bar is saturated with the intricate interplay of public and private. Though curtains serve as a means of psychologically privatizing the area, their translucence makes all behaviors within a public affair. The separation of tables, the visible of non-participants in the presence of staff members, all resonate the idea that this is a public affair, a sharing of the public and private, the epitome of social incongruence in the country.

Ms. Park went on to explain that sex is not something that all her clients do. S&M, she explained, is a large part of what goes on in the bar. Her reasoning is that the noise from S&M actually stimulates sexual experimentation of some of the shyer customers. The more noise the clients make, the more other customers would experiment, and eventually the longer all the customers would stay at the club.

According to Ms. Park, who explained several times that her goals with this establishment is not aimed at profit, the bar opens at 10pm. Customers pay from

150,000 to 200,000 won just for entry (depending on the frequency of visits per week). Those who come as couples pay a standard price of 170, 000 won. Groups of three or more are negotiable. Alcohol is sold, but at hiked prices to discourage drinking (Pic. 8). Clients are enticed to stay as long as possible for the sole purpose of ensuring that everyone has an enjoyable time and “multiple orgasms.” She aims to make everyone leave at around the same time, though there is no official closing time.

Ms. Park advertises her venue with name cards that have both her club-specific cellular phone number and her club website address on them. The website first prompts the person to verify his or her age via a national registration number. After entering the site, the person can view both pictures of the interior as well as read up on the rules and regulations of membership. The main rules are no cameras, no intoxication, and no disrespect. Entry is by appointment only and the person would need to call prior to coming into the building. Several surveillance cameras are at the front entrance, where the customer has to buzz in to identify him or herself. Then the person is asked to enter and take the elevator to the proper floor. At the entrance of the elevator he or she is prompted to press yet another buzzer for



Pic 8: Internet Menu. [Photo credit: owner; author authorized to use for this research.]

additional verification. Passing these two identification protocols, the person is met by Ms. Park who inspects him or her for intoxication—a policy she says is essential but sometimes disregards if she knows the temperament of the client.

7. Sexualized Space as Gaytrification Rebellion

I did observations with Ms. Park's approval and for research purposes at the bar for four days working undercover as a waiter from 7 pm to 5 am on consecutive Fridays. On each occasion, the patrons (most were regulars) would show up at 10 to 11 pm and stay until 2 am. Usually, the first few customers (approximately 5) would come in at exactly 10 pm and were regulars who frequent the establishment multiple times per week. Customers were encouraged to use either their Internet site IDs or make up nick names that Ms. Park or they had created. These early-arrivals were often prompted by the owner to sit at the bar and chat with the bar staff and herself. The entrance fee came with a complementary bottle of (cheaper) alcohol and a fruit plate. Often the owner prompted patrons to pour her a drink or buy her one. In many cases, she would drink the remains of half empty bottles on stock (likely leftovers from past clients) without charging the customer she drank with. Conversations would begin with the usual idle chatter about one's workday, sexual desires and expectations for the day, or relationship concerns. Patrons would purposefully pace themselves with drinking their initial bottle. which at first seemed aimed at avoiding additional charges, however, as one patron put it after being prompted to drink for nearly an hour by a waitress:

I have problems getting it up if I drink, but to be honest I like drinking. I guess it will just have to wait until I get some action.

After 11 pm, patrons would primarily consist of groups and couples. Many would appear to have been drinking before arrival, but none seemed unruly or

intent on anything other than casual sexual encounters or voyeuristic escapades. These patrons would usually sit in an open area next to the bar or in the couch area where patrons could see one another from table to table. Often the owner would move run a circuit, table-to-table, chatting with the customers, prompting them to have sex or engage in cunilingus or fellatio.

Met with new somewhat unexpected arrivals, Ms. Park would first probe how they learned of her establishment (via phone). She would then ask about the relationships between any new-coming couples or groups usually only to the extent of whether certain couples were “fuck buddies” or simply friends. She confided in me later that she avoided using terms that specifically indicated relationships such as “boyfriend” or “girlfriend” and would instead limit her inquiry to sexual relations. This is because such labels are titles of endearment, not something that her establishment aims on catering to. “This is a place for fucking,” she said.

Once members were found to be in a sexual relationship, she would ask about sexual orientation or positioning. It became obvious that many of the customers were not well-versed in the sexual lingo usually employed for sexual activities, and on more than one occasion she would relish in explaining the ins-and-outs of sexual terminology, methods, and tricks. The customers also seemed to enjoy learning from her, some putting what she taught immediately to use to the looks of voyeurs.

Most of the customers were Korean, however, on one occasion a Caucasian male and Caucasian female came to the club. They described themselves as free-living sex friends. While the two enjoyed fondling one another, the venue, which had 32 people at the time, was beset with tension. Most seemed anxious to see the two engage in full-on sex. Once the two started having sex, the onlookers began to fondle one another and partake in loud, somewhat competitive foreplay. Noteworthy on this day was the exact area where full-on sex took place for the Koreans. On prior days, they often stayed in the open hall of couches, however, today most of the sex had moved into the semi-medium size room that had nearly no lighting—away from the purview of the non-Korean participants. It is unclear whether the clients, including the experienced patrons, saw this Caucasian couple as a threat or simply



Pic 9: Dimly lit private room. [Photo credit: author]

interpreted their presence as too exotic. Regardless, the venue for sex moved from the open area to the more private room accommodation (Pic 9).

Shortly after 1am during each observation, Ms. Park would become much more vigilant in terms of who she allowed into the bar and who she would reject or send away. Often, she would only invite couples or groups that included at least one woman. If she found that the men or women were even slightly drunken, she would send them away.

There were several areas that made the structural environment interestingly less open to queer than what Ms. Park had claimed during the interview. First, she seemed obsessed with asking or indirectly probing each client's sexual identity. At first this seemed to be aimed at finding the correct pleasure centers for the patrons and customers, but later it seemed aimed at a different goal. She would, for example, incessantly introduce her waiters or waitresses as either lesbian or gay. A ploy to avoid customers from making sexual advances at her staff, I thought. However, her answer to why she does this was both unexpected and ironic.

I tell them she's a lesbian because I think they should know. I mean...she is a

lesbian. (So most of your customers are heterosexual?) Well actually, we have gays and lesbians...and heterosexuals. To me everyone is bisexual. (Well, if that's the case...why do you say she's a lesbian?) Haha...honestly I don't know. I guess it's just interesting to me.

What became clear from this exchange was that though Ms. Park says she wants to break free from social expectations of the sexual self, she subconsciously reinforces heteronormative notions and compulsory heterosexuality. This was further evident in the unisex restroom, which is lockable from the inside though it can accommodate three people. She policed the restroom vigilantly. Whenever a man or woman went to the restroom she would yell to another walking toward it that it was occupied and that he or she should wait. The fecal phobia and the interpretation of the restroom as a place of complete privacy, an age-old idea residual of heteronormative expectations come to mind.

Understanding the interplay between queer sexual places and spaces is a matter of synthesizing phenomenological ontology with the psychoanalytic and current-day politics of the body. This must be done in the context of a dynamic system characterized by capitalist and cosmopolitan forces, both of which are known to compress the private sphere, fracture conventional identities along reified versus pseudo-realized lines, and catalyze the commodification of emotions along with notions of intimacy. Such is the intricate interplay detailed in the two cases above.

This new queer sexual place in *Cheong-dam* had created a competitive environment in which to compete for queer sexual space. This was observed on more than one occasion in which the owner would immediately give gays and lesbian couples the VIP room in which to play instead of allowing them the satisfaction of group voyeurism or the sexual "swapping" that the bar claims to provide.

Additionally, single men who would come to the bar would also set about sizing one another up, speaking with heterosexual machismo and in one case even asking me to arm wrestle. Throughout the venue, the competition for sexual territory had a strong presence and was often enhanced at the standing bar rather than at the

couch area. Whereas the bar provided a sense of security for females and gay males (especially singles), who could talk to the staff or to Ms. Park, the bar for single heterosexual males served as the first area in which they could show their power and manliness in a more public way (due to the greater lighting and ease of hearing one another). For the heterosexual male, the bar in many ways set the stage for creating an arena conducive to phallogocentric normativity. However, the couch area, which was dimmer and an area where speaking was replaced by intense gesturing and low talk (if any), was seen as a place of engagement rather than of mere display.

Here, queers and the fetishily playful heterosexual alike were expected to move from talk to action. As such, it became distinctly dominated by heterosexually-driven competition based primarily on standard notions of gender roles, whereas queer activities were pushed to the barely lit private room or the complete exclusion of the VIP room. The place served less as a replacement of the sexual diversity pushed away by gaytrification than as a place of expansion and sexual “Revival” that Ghaziani refers to when explaining queer geographies (Ghaziani, 2014; 161). Gaytrification has led to homosocial activity in place of a growing homosexual one.

8. Conclusion

This research set out to use the two cases above to show both the interplay of sexual space and place as well as to provide a more nuanced discussion of how macro-level, infrastructural changes such as gaytrification in a particular geographical location can lead to changes in traditional sexual places. It also showed how these macro-level changes in sexual place can lead to competition for sexual space within newly installed sexual places. It did this by taking a turn from the typical demand-based analysis of sexual markets to the supply-side, using interviews and observations as a means of providing both context and content to the meaning of queer sexual space and place. In doing so, however, I admit to having at times succumbed to the need of using categorical and fictive universals of the structure of domina-

tion and representation—a gay, for example, is not simply a gay, he is also an orientation, a race, an ethnicity, a language, an age, that is, if he is a he at all. However, I felt it necessary to dispense with agency for once to reconsider the why of agency (not simply the how), which I argue is strongly connected to a person's place and perceived space.

In addition, within this research I hoped to express the need to revert back to seeing social structure and specifically the roles of space and place, not simply relationships based on individual agency, as important components in both sexual competition and in the reproduction of sexual organization and topographies. All too often, space and place are seen as static and un-responsive to social change. In this day and age, a time in which restructuring venues, transfer of capital, and advances in architecture are moving at rapid paces, it is important to consider how the mobility of space and place can lead to changes in self-identity, behavior, and how we interpret our membership within these quickly changing structures. As such, rather than considering ourselves fundamentally defined within set boundaries of identity, we are more accurately agents within spaces and places and their peripheries, which are shaped primarily by their inter-sectioning, overlapping, and intra-relational play.

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게이화와 성별 주변부의 재지향: 한국 동성애 언더그라운드의 공간 및 장소적 치환

밀턴 해 로버트*

요약 _공간에 대한 성적 구분은 성별 자아가 생산, 굴절, 재해석되는 틀의 구조, 본질, 생산의 협상을 요구한다. 이 틀의 경계는 그 안에 내재화된 젠더에 국한되기도 하지만, 이 글은 사회적 상호영향과 수행성에 의해서만 성적 행위는 이해되고 협상될 수 있다고 주장한다. 이 연구는 성 관련 산업에 종사하는 남녀를 대상으로 반구조화된 인터뷰와 관찰 기록을 사용하여, 공간과 장소에 의해 만들어진 수행적 지리학을 통해 사교집단을 분석한다.

주요어 _게이화, 대한민국, 성, 공간경쟁, 영토권, 퀴어, 게이

* 서울대, 사회학 박사과정, rchristo10@hotmail.com