

Subcultural Spaces: LGBTQ Aging in a Swedish Context

The International Journal of Aging
and Human Development
2019, Vol. 88(4) 325–340
© The Author(s) 2019
Article reuse guidelines:
sagepub.com/journals-permissions
DOI: 10.1177/0091415019836923
journals.sagepub.com/home/ahd



Anna Siverskog¹ and
Janne Bromseth¹ 

Abstract

This study takes its starting point in the Swedish context to explore experiences of community among older lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or queer (LGBTQ) adults. Using life story interviews with 33 self-identified LGBTQ older adults between the ages of 59 to 94 years, our aim is to explore meanings of community, belonging, and subcultural spaces at different times and in different ages. How are narratives of finding, entering, and creating subcultural spaces described, and how does time and geographical context play into these experiences in particular? What is it like to age within these communities and to enter these queer spaces later in life? This analysis illustrates how old age can be a disadvantage for entering or participating in queer subcultures, especially when it comes to dating, but the results also point to how old age can be something adding to one's social capital within these subcultures. Further, results suggest that it is important to take social, cultural, and economic resources into account when analyzing community and relationships among older LGBTQ people.

Keywords

ageism, aging, family, interpersonal relationships, life span, sexuality, social network, social norms, LGBTQI

¹Jönköping university, Sweden

Corresponding Author:

Anna Siverskog, Department of Social work, School of Health and Welfare, Jönköping university, Box 1026, 551 11 Jönköping, Sweden.

Email: anna.siverskog@ju.se

Many older lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or queer (LGBTQ) people in Sweden now have lived and come out in times where, compared with today, there were few public queer meeting spaces, few visible role models, and few LGBTQ organizations. Entering a subcultural community was a life-changing experience for many older LGBTQ adults trying to create livable lives in the margins of heteronormativity. In this text, we use subculture or community to describe the spaces or contexts where gender identity or sexuality is a common denominator; it could be a bar, political organization, a trans camp, or a lesbian-feminist group (see Valentine & Skelton, 2003).

Previous research has pointed to how for many older LGBTQ people, community has been a place to find close relationships and family (de Vries & Megathlin, 2009; Weston, 1991), and how friends and social and political networks are often included in the concept of family among older LGBTQ adults (Bromseth & Siverskog, 2013, p. 53). Subcultural spaces where one can be authentic, safe, and comfortable are often very important. Still, economic, social, and cultural resources affect people's abilities to shape relationships (Heaphy, 2009), and dimensions such as gender, age, class, race, functionality, and geographical situatedness are all factors that determine which LGBTQ people can access and take part in which communities (Formby, 2012).

Drawing primarily on our own empirical material from Sweden, our aim is to explore experiences of community among older LGBTQ people. How are the processes of finding, entering, and creating subcultural spaces described by our participants? How does time and geographical context play into these experiences? What is it like to age within these communities?

Background: The Swedish Context

Life conditions and resistance strategies are always historically and culturally situated. As Rosenfeld (1999) points out, being informed about the historical context is crucial to understanding the diverse and complex experiences of older LGBTQ adults. As in many parts of the western world, LGBTQ peoples' rights have changed radically in the Nordic context during the last 40 years, in terms of increased civil rights and legal protection from discrimination (Bromseth & Siverskog, 2013; Fredriksen-Goldsen et al., 2011). Sweden shared with many other countries in the western world the strong anti-homosexual attitudes prevalent in society in the 1950s, changing gradually in the 1960–1970s, along with shifting discourses on sexuality in society and a growing feminist movement. By the 1980s, homosexuality had been removed as a psychiatric diagnosis in most Nordic countries. However, the emergence of HIV/AIDS at the same time affected the society as a whole and the gay community and social life in particular, with dramatic consequences (Svensson, 2007). The 1990s marks the beginning of a period with increased civil rights and legal protection from discrimination that has continued to improve up to the present.

Sweden was the first country in the world to introduce laws creating access to public trans (trans is used in the text as synonymous with transgender) health-care in the 1970s. However, getting access to care has been conditional on participation in a gender identity assessment, including requirements to adjust to tight frames of gender normativity to live up to the criteria of the diagnosis for transsexualism (Bremer, 2011). It is also required to adjust to the terms for the assessment, like forced sterilization that was required in Sweden up until 2013. Trans identities have been pathologized through medical diagnosis with transvestism being classified as a psychiatric disorder until 2009, while transsexualism (now known as gender dysphoria) continues to be on the books. The World Health Organization's removal of trans identities from the medical diagnosis system, The International Classification of Disease, 11th Revision in 2018, and the chapter on mental disorders to the chapter for sexual health, recognizing gender identity as fluid and nonbinary, is expected to impact the how trans people can access health care, but as to how and when remains to be seen.

The early trans movement started in the 1960s in the Nordic countries, and trans people's living conditions and rights have increasingly become part of the gay movement in Sweden (Norrhem, Rydström, & Winkvist, 2008; Siverskog, 2016). In spite of these changes that have implied improved possibilities and terms for creating livable lives for LGBTQ people, heteronormative structures are still dominating society. LGBTQ people still face increased risks of harassment and violence, as well as a higher likelihood to suffer decreased mental and physical health (Public Health Agency of Sweden, 2014, 2015).

Methodology and Theoretical Perspectives

The empirical material comes from two different studies in a Swedish context, consisting of 33 interviews in total. They were carried out between 2009 and 2013, using a similar theoretical framework as points of departure, queer theory, and critical gerontology. The first study is an ethnographic study based on participant observation and interviews with 13 nonheterosexual cis and trans women between the ages of 60 and 94 years at the time of the interviews, born between 1916 and 1952. All participants lived in the Stockholm area and took part in subcultural communities (lesbian feminist or LGBTQ-communities) in different degrees and with various engagement over the years.¹

The second study is based on interviews with 20 people identifying as LGBTQ.² They were 64- to 88-year old at the time of the interviews, born between 1922 and 1950. The participants lived all over Sweden, in cities, villages, and in the countryside. It varied among the participants if and to what extent they had been part of subcultural contexts.

Both studies were approved by the Regional Ethics Committee in Sweden. Life story interviews were used (Atkinson, 1998) and thematic analysis conducted (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The interviews were transcribed and coded

parallel to the process of conducting fieldwork, to open up for a development of the interview work through interesting discoveries in the coding process (Silverman, 2006, p. 337).

During the analysis, we worked with a theoretical framework to understand concepts of community and belonging throughout the life course. We have used Sara Ahmed's concept of orientation to explore how bodies are situated in time and space, where different spaces and contexts make it more or less easy to feel comfortable and at home. Ahmed also offers an understanding of how following what she refers to as "the straight line"—as in norms and expectations for what a heteronormative life path should look like—is intertwined with a promise of happiness (Ahmed, 2006, 2010). We have also worked with anthropologist Valentine's (Valentine, 1995) term lesbian *time-spaces* that she introduced to make sense of processes of identification, describing them as material and discursive productions including linguistic, spatial, and bodily dimensions. Here, we expand the term to *queer time-spaces*, looking at both similarities and differences when it comes to nonheterosexual cis women, cis men, and trans older adults' experiences of participating in subcultures over time.³ These will be explored in the following analytical sections of the article: *Coming in, coming home*; *Spaces with friction*; and *Aging, bodies and community*.

Analysis

The analytical themes were developed in relation to the focus of the special edition of the journal, LGBT older people and subcultural spaces as local contexts. They were derived using materials from both studies as a point of departure, where both of the authors shared interview quotes with the other that we interpreted as relevant. Most of the quotes have been used in previous work, a few are published for the first time. We then cooperated on organizing the material thematically, ending up with five to six themes and then narrowed it down to three overarching themes. The themes represent important topics in our individual studies, but combining our materials has implied a broader selection of voices and perspectives, allowing for a more complex critical analysis.

Coming In, Coming Home: Finding Spaces of Belonging

In a time where *coming out* (to a judgmental heteronormative society) might not be an option, *coming in* (to a subcultural community) was crucial to be positively confirmed in a counternormative sexuality and gender identity.

During the 1960s, there were a few gay bars and clubs in the bigger cities, and it was also during that same decade that the first trans groups were formed in Sweden. For those coming out during this time, it was not always apparent how to find these spaces or how to enter them. Lars, a gay man who moved to Stockholm in the beginning of the 1960s "experienced a time where there

were clubs, but you had to bring your passport and driving license and ID yourself as well as be recommended by someone else.” When he went to the gay club Timmy, there were “closed heavy velvet curtains, so no risk that someone from the outside would be able to see in.” This illustrates how local discourses, time, and place play into conditioning LGBTQ lives and the possibilities to meet and shape community. Lily and Lena, both identifying as trans women, remember the early trans groups and how they were characterized by secrecy. Lily had to apply by mail to enter a group for transvestites where everyone used secret names and addresses. Lena talks about how the early trans group she was in contact with had locked doors and encouraged people to never talk about their trans experiences outside that room. The secrecy around these spaces, aiming to offer anonymity and a sense of security from a heteronormative world, also had the effect of excluding people who were not already in these networks. But once in, doors often opened to new worlds with new friends, communities, and meeting spaces.

To find these spaces is often described as very important and meaningful, sometimes life-changing, in the life narratives. Lena and Lily describe their first experiences of meeting with other trans people as “liberating” and as something which made them feel “super strong, like no problems existed.” Harald, a gay man who went to a men’s camp organized as part of a male liberation movement in the 1970s where he met other gay men, describes it as “totally revolutionizing, I fell in love with four guys during that week (. . .) These camps have meant very very very much to me.” Tora describes her first meeting with the lesbian movement in the mid-70s in similar ways. Her first summer at the lesbian feminist camp on the Danish island Femö was the starting point for the personal and political transformation when joining the lesbian feminist movement. Ingrid, a lesbian participant who also came into the women’s movement in the 1970s, describes that the women’s center in which she was active “became a home for me.” Weston (1991) has pointed out how “coming home” to a community is about finding invisible kinship and how it connects the meaning of coming out and living close to other gay and lesbian people (pp. 127–128).

The participants who had been politically involved talk about the value of doing things together with people who they shared experiences with, finding strength collectively. Saga, who identifies as a lesbian, migrated from Finland to Sweden to be able to live a lesbian life. She got involved with a lesbian-feminist group and says many of the people she met there are still in her life. When asked what this context meant for her, she replied:

It has strengthened me a lot. When I meet my old classmates, even if they understand that I am gay I feel that I have my own life, I belong somewhere and I have my own context and that is so very important, so I am really happy for the struggle that has been fought.

Saga refers to “the struggle,” pointing to a collective resistance where people have come together to demand livable lives, thus collectively sharing this history of struggle. Saga’s quote also points to how leaving the “straight line” does not necessarily mean merely to end up “out of line” and outside, but that it also can mean finding something meaningful, a belonging to something beyond the heteronormative world. Ahmed writes about how being lesbian is not only about sexuality, but also about sharing lived experiences of being “out of line,” to live outside the contours for what is considered a good and happy life (Ahmed, 2006, 102ff).

Our empirical material illustrates how it is not only about sharing sorrows and hard experiences but also about formulating one’s own spaces that become meaningful through shared experiences beyond hard ones. As Valentine and Skelton point out from their empirical study, it can mean a lot to be seen and confirmed for who you are, and that being able to take part in spaces where you can feel comfortable can lead to a better sense of self (Valentine & Skelton, 2008, pp. 853–854). The creation of queer spaces can be seen as attempts to create “safe(r) spaces” aiming to create other norms and contexts where one does not need to worry about being harassed, and where one can meet like-minded people to relax, get strength and formulate strategies for change (Ambjörnsson & Bromseth, 2013, 21ff.).

Among the people who were politically involved, it is common that they still in later life have close relationships and strong networks from this time. Harald who was involved in various groups talks about the gay choir in the 1980s.

We had several people who were HIV positive and died. And some of them got so skinny. We sang up at the Rosenlund hospital for those who were hospitalized there, and for some it was so secret that they did not even come out of their rooms but just opened the door so they could hear us. Their parents had no idea they were HIV positive. It was pretty horrible.

Along with Harald’s quote about how people have collectively cared for and taken responsibility for each other, other experiences in our empirical material support this as well. Friendship and chosen families are given great importance in the narratives and resemble other empirical studies where gay and lesbian participants talk about friends and family as those who have been there to support each other socially and materially, who have been through conflicts and faced repression together, and who share a history that can be measured in months or years and that is counted as kinship (de Vries & Megathlin, 2009; Weston, 1991, p. 113). It is, however, important to point out that this does not apply to all people, some of the interviewees did not take part in subcultural contexts, some had very small networks and little support in everyday life. Factors that played a role in this were health status; geography—where rurality and smaller cities often did not offer closeness to LGBTQ contexts; and class—

where social, cultural, and economic capital mattered for the possibilities to access LGBTQ contexts.

Spaces With Friction: Uncomfortable Spaces

In creating their own spaces and establishing countercultural narratives of good lives where gender and sexuality are verbalized as liberating and strengthening, there are simultaneous experiences of friction and negotiating narrow norms of acceptable ways of identifying and expressing gender and sexuality. This could sometimes be caused by the surrounding heteronormative society, where renting facilities for a gay or trans club could be met with prejudice and rejection. Klara, who started a correspondence club for transgender people in the 1960s, wanted to also create a space where the members could meet and have dances. They found a place where

it worked out for a year or so. And then, suddenly it came someone working as a caretaker and said that the other people in the house felt uncomfortable with “strangely dressed gentlemen coming here, so we want you to move somewhere else.”

The overarching risk of being rejected when renting a meeting space led to strict requirements from the members to act discretely: “When they started this organization, no one was allowed to talk about them being trans. They were not supposed to show themselves, never go out (. . .) Nobody could come in, the doors were locked” (Lena).

For the ones with strong identification with subcultural spaces, the relation between the individual and collective in creating a sense of belonging is important. Ross (2012), studying older lesbian adult community and relational practices in Italy, claims that the ideological values and visionary grounds for good lives outside of heteronormativity created in subcultural environments are important for the individual personal relations, also contributing to a sense of belonging in periods where group activity is low. This is particularly true for the lesbian feminists in the study, whose ideological grounds in the international second wave feminist movements have remained strong roots for identification, where community with *women* was central and where joining the women’s movement was also a political choice because of the male dominance they experienced in the lesbian and gay community.

The story of long-term relations with the lesbian “sisters” are often told by our cis-gendered lesbian participants while simultaneously being lined with friction for Klara, a lesbian trans woman. Her access to the lesbian community has always been strongly dependent on whether she was accepted as a woman or not. After years of participating in building the women’s movement, she experienced being questioned and excluded during the 1990s. Beyond Klara’s

experience, there are other narratives of being trans in an LGBTQ context. Kjell, who identifies as nonbinary, has been involved in the local LGBTQ group where they live. They thought that people within the LGBTQ group would be knowledgeable about trans issues, but they experienced that there was as much ignorance there as elsewhere in society. This is also due to the early gay movement and the early trans groups being careful about keeping separate from each other (Siverskog, 2016). When the Swedish Federation for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer Rights (RFSL), the largest LGBTQ organization in Sweden, included trans people as their target group 2001, these different groups were expected to share spaces, struggles, and experiences. Sture, a transfeminine person, expressed how it was hard at first to feel included in those spaces and that he felt that when trans people arrived to those spaces, they were often stared at and that there was a lot of prejudice in those contexts. Here, the queer space does not become a place where the body can be comfortable and take up space, rather there are frictions happening. This corresponds to other empirical studies where trans people have experiences of LGBTQ being reduced to “gay” through which trans realities are made invisible and marginalized (Browne & Bakshi, 2013, p. 89). Trans people have also reported less social support and feeling less at home in the LGBTQ community (Fredriksen-Goldsen et al., 2013).

Lesbian feminist spaces could be characterized by restricting norms as well. Several of the lesbian participants talk about how they experienced these narrow norms. Maj talks about how it was important to identify as lesbian, whereas bisexuality was not accepted. Another recurrent narrative surrounds femininity and how there were strict norms for how to present. Maj says

you were expected to have long hair and a Palestinian scarf, jeans but you were not allowed to wear a skirt. You see this was very hard for me to adapt to. I felt terribly choked by all of this.

Kari, another lesbian woman, talks about how she went to a lesbian weekend shortly after coming out; “they were all very butch and I wore a flower skirt that summer” and that she felt stared at since she stood out with her feminine presentation. These strict norms can be related to the time spirit, where bisexuality really did not have a place during the 1970s and where people identifying as bisexual were considered people who did not have the guts to really be out (Norrhem et al., 2008). Hanna Hallgren who has been studying the lesbian-feminist movement during 1970s and 1980s concludes that the women involved had to balance their gender expression. A “too feminine” presentation was not accepted, but a “too butch” expression was not desirable either due to the linkage of masculinity and its working class attributes. Thus, the sisterhood was conditioned on the ability to become a lesbian-feminist woman beyond traditional femininity and masculinity (Hallgren, 2008, 226ff).

Aging, Bodies, and Community: Continuity and Change

Some of the participants have been involved in subcultural spaces for many years and have aged with(in) these movements. The queer subcultural map has also been redrawn over time, where there, today, are local RFSL groups in smaller cities, Pride events take place in over 80 different places throughout Sweden, and where the Internet has drastically changed the preconditions.⁴ As Browne, Bakshi, and Lim (2012) state in their empirical study of LGBTQ communities in Brighton, aging does not mean that subcultural spaces become less important in later life. Identification with subcultures continues in old age. But what does old age mean within these spaces, and what is it like to enter them in later life?

I haven't been at the Mermaid Pride in many years, I think last time was in Copenhagen. And then I just felt "What am I doing here?" I walked there with two other ladies with grey hair and we looked at each other and then there was a lot of gay guys in spandex around us, I mean I felt I had more in common with the cops who walked there. (Kari)

Kari's experience illustrates how entering these kinds of spaces in later life can lead to a feeling of being disconnected to the other participants which may be both due to differences in age as well as a subculture which changes over time, thus having a different meaning for people coming into the space at various points in history. The same spaces that previously felt like home can, in old age, be experienced as spaces where one does not really belong. For the gay male participants, the dominating stories around this concern dating, and how that can be harder in later life. Ivar, a 67-year-old gay man who is not out, when asked if he had been in any relationships, says that for him it has mostly been casual sex and no long-term relationships:

The older you get, the more you have to count on that you won't meet anyone younger than forty, that is not happening. Through that internet site, they promise they will respond and meet up but they just want to make fun of me, I write that I am 67, my profile says I am born 1942 "Are you *that* old?". (. . .) So that in turn leads to a situation where people don't exactly come running for this old man, no. (Ivar)

When Ivar talks about who he would like to meet, he says that he wants the guys to be at least more than 18 years, but that he never gets to date an 18-year-old since they probably think of him as "that old fat hubby." In Ivar's quote along with other narratives in the material, the aging gay male body is constructed as increasingly unattractive and a disadvantage, where dating in later life requires a well-preserved body that can pass as youthful as well as slim, also tying in to

norms on class and respectability (Skeggs, 1997). Simultaneously, the guys one hopes to meet are construed as more attractive the younger they are. Experiences of old age being a disadvantage in the dating world, where there is an emphasis on younger, thin, muscular bodies are recurrent in the interviews as well as in other empirical studies on LGBTQ aging. These ageist norms can work to make older gay men feel excluded from these spaces as well from a community at large (Heaphy, Yip, & Thomson, 2004; Jones & Pugh, 2005; Slevin & Linneman, 2010). Queer communities are not free from internal structures and hierarchies, where age among other factors is at play in including and excluding individuals. But it can have multiple dimensions. Anita talks about how her age can become advantageous, especially in context with many younger people:

They had a party now in Gothenburg and arriving there when everyone is in their 30's, then I can feel that I am not so interesting to them. Not when it comes to flirting. But there are different dimensions to this. I am thinking more ideologically and when it comes to ideas, conversations and role models, then I think we have a positive position. (. . .) I feel the younger feminists are kind of admiring. They want contact and want to do things together. (. . .) If you are an old activist, I think there is a positive appreciation of us. There are women here who came before and kind of plowed the way for better times for homosexuality and lesbians. (Anita)

Here, old age is not merely equivalent with becoming less interesting in relation to dating but rather a valued position of experience and history. It also points to an intergenerational community, where invisible kinships are shared through experience among lesbians in different generations. Anita also says later in the interview that she thinks that there is "less focus on appearance among us lesbians" which she describes as positive, a sentiment which echoes other studies pointing to how there is often less ageism and focus on appearance in lesbian spaces (see Heaphy et al., 2004). Thus, old age can be a disadvantage as well as something that may add to one's social capital within these subcultures.

Taking part in communities in later life may be different due to how society has changed, but people also talk about how they themselves change over time, with aging. Saga describes how when she was younger she was "running out a lot to bars and clubs and thought that was exciting, but now I think it is pretty worthless." She says it can be nice to go to parties where she can meet up with people she has known for many years, but that in general "one changes with age." Marianne describes how the context she was in changed over time, along with herself:

I went to this lesbian party every year and met a lot of people I had not seen in a long while. But then after a while, one noticed there were fewer and fewer of us,

and in the end there were only a bunch of people in their 20's there. And there we sat, a few friends and looked with big eyes at these young people dancing to their music. (. . .) After a while one kinda felt like, we are too old for this. I guess that is what happens when you become older, you hang out more at home, eat dinner together and such things. (Marianne)

What changes can, as Marianne's quote illustrates, be a shift in interest, but it can also be about an aging body, or a body restricted because of a disability. For Nils, access to queer spaces was severely restricted when after an accident in his 40s, he developed mild brain damage, making it difficult to go out to clubs and social events with many people. "Returning" to the LGBTQ community 20 years later, he experienced the subcultural spaces as more varied and was enthusiastic about "coming in" again through the calm activity of a gay reading group:

The reading group has been at the community house twice, and at those occasions they have also arranged the open café for newcomers [LGBTQ people with migrant backgrounds], and there was also lots of youth from everywhere there. For me the gay world was drinking, dancing and fucking, but now, this is so much fun, that so many people show up and that there is no alcohol either. (Nils, 60)

In the 1980s, after the outbreak of HIV and AIDS, state repression as well as more general homophobic atmospheres in society were heightened. In 1987, the Swedish state created legislation forcing saunas, which had previously been important meeting spaces for gay men, to close (Svensson, 2007, p. 60). Inge, a gay man born in 1922, talks about how the saunas had worked as safe spaces for men to meet, while the parks and outdoors were dangerous places; "the gaybashers had their high season and there was a lot of violence at the time." In response to this, Inge started another meeting space for older gay men who today still meet every week:

In Stockholm older people don't go out at night. There are so many people who previously have been bashed. Because of that we meet in the gay senior group between 3pm and 5pm. Even those who have been officers and cops and that you think are very tough, they really aren't, and I think this is an important point. Even if you had a tough job, that toughness does not necessarily stick, because you age which makes you more scared for this contact. It is because we been subject to so much violence we are scared. And we have code locks everywhere and at the doors. (Inge)

This illustrates not only how previous experiences of violence affect the movement patterns in later life but also how meeting spaces are created in response to repression directed at LGBTQ groups.

Discussion

To use Ahmed's (2006) concept of orientation, the well-trodden heteronormative path is often easy to walk, since many people have walked there before. The tangled paths leading to other lives are harder to find as well as more complicated to walk, but might also guide one to new worlds and possibilities. In this article we have explored the processes of finding, entering, and creating subcultural spaces, how they are situated in and shaped by historical and geographical context, and how meanings of community, belonging, and subcultural spaces among aging LGBTQ people relate to age and aging. Using Valentine's (1995) term with a twist, how can *queer time-spaces* contribute to making sense of processes of identification, as both material and discursive productions including linguistic, spatial, and bodily dimensions? A general finding is that LGBTQ communities have been central to many of the participants, in creating a *sense of belonging* and identifying outside of heteronormativity, something that confirms existing research. The experiences of subcultural spaces in different periods of one's life are further *recalled* as meaningful and strong, in particular regarding the recollection of identity confirming practices, representing a powerful element in queer life narratives of coming in (Formby, 2012).

Our study has illustrated how old age can be a disadvantage for entering or participating in queer subcultures, especially when it comes to dating. However, the empirical material has also pointed to how old age can be something that adds to one's social capital within these subcultures. Critical gerontologists Katz and Marshall (2003) points to how unreasonable demands of not aging and living "outside time" are put on older people, and that a resistance to this could be to emphasize time, tradition, wisdom, memory, change, and generations against this pressure. Instead of distancing oneself from one's old age, age and experience could be used and emphasized in constructing oneself as well as the history of one's community. The ability to refer to a collective history and struggle of which one has been a part of can give a sense of belonging in old age (Browne & Bakshi, 2013).

As we have seen, access to material subcultural spaces was strongly affected by trans- and homophobic attitudes and legal frames in Sweden, as when the government decided to close down the saunas because of the HIV and aids-epidemic in the 1980s, or for the transclubs, struggling to find localities to rent. Yet again, not only lesbian feminists, marginalized in the gay and lesbian movement, oriented themselves toward the women's movement, participating in building meeting spaces and women's houses for women, but also lesbian separatist spaces to create politics and community on their own terms (cf. Hallgren, 2008). The character of these spaces and places were colored by the historical time they were created—also in terms of who was considered to be a part of the "we"—boundaries that have changed over time. Bringing the T into the lesbian and gay community, in the wave of queer theory, has had a big

impact on welcoming trans people, as Klara's story shows, even if there are still transphobic attitudes within lesbian feminist environments.

Chosen families and importance of community are emphasized in research, but our study illustrates how taking part in community may also be conditioned by ability to access and participate in these contexts. Geography, class, economy, health, and social networks are all factors playing in to this. Analysis of community and relationships among older LGBTQ people needs to take social, cultural, and economic resources into account as factors playing in to the choice and ability to have relationships (Heaphy, 2009). Furthermore, what happens to a sense of community over time? Using a life course perspective in research on LGBTQ-aging needs to be developed more in a Swedish context, since the focus has to a large degree been on LGBTQ-history—or on young or middle-aged informants. We also need to look further into the meanings of subculture and community over time, of how age normativities structure LGBTQ-politics as well as the shaping of social spaces. Whereas safe space for younger queers are enhanced as crucial for strengthening mental health, focus on inclusive and confirming spaces also for an older LGBTQ-adults could be addressed in senior policy as well as within the LGBTQ-community to a larger degree.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The authors declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Funding

The authors received no financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

ORCID iD

Janne Bromseth  <http://orcid.org/0000-0003-3680-7941>

Notes

1. The project was called Queerkids, babybutches and lesbians. Life conditions and resistance strategies in two generations of nonheterosexual women and queer youth and consisted of two empirical studies of older LBT-women and younger queers and was carried out in cooperation with Fanny Ambjörnsson (Ambjörnsson & Bromseth, 2010).
2. These interviews were 1.5-4 hours long and were conducted by Siverskog within the dissertation project Queer lines. Living and aging as LGBTQ in a heteronormative world (Siverskog, 2016).
3. See also Halberstam (2005).
4. See www.svenskapride.se for an overview.

References

- Ahmed, S. (2006). *Queer phenomenology: Orientations, objects, others*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Ahmed, S. (2010). *The promise of happiness*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press Books.
- Atkinson, R. (1998). *The life story interview*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE.
- Ambjörnsson, F., & Bromseth, J. (2013). Inledning: Aktivism [Introduction: Activism]. *Lambda nordica*, 1(13), 1-31.
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77-101.
- Bremer, S. (2011). *Kroppslinjer: Kön, transsexualism och kropp i berättelser om könskorrigering [Bodylines: Gender, transsexualism and embodiment in narratives on gendercorrection]*. Göteborg, Sweden: Makadam.
- Bromseth, J., & Siverskog, A. (2013). *LHBTQ-personer och äldre: Nordiska perspektiv [LGBTQ and ageing: Nordic perspectives]*. Lund, Sweden: Studentlitteratur.
- Browne, K., & Bakshi, L. (2013). *Ordinary in Brighton? LGBT, Activisms and the City*. London: Routledge.
- Browne, K., Bakshi, L., & Lim, J. (2012). Ageing in gay Brighton. In I. R. Ward, I. Rivers, & M. Sutherland (Eds.), *Lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender ageing: Biographical approaches for inclusive care and support* (pp. 165-182). London, England: Jessica Kingsley.
- de Vries, B., & Megathlin, D. (2009). The meaning of friendship for gay men and lesbians in the second half of life. *Journal of GLBT Family Studies*, 5(1-2), 82-98.
- Formby, E. (2012). *Solidarity but not similarity? LGBT communities in the twenty-first century (Project Report)*. Sheffield, England: Sheffield Hallam University.
- Fredriksen-Goldsen, K. I., Hyun-Jun, K., Emler, C. A., Muraco, A., Erosheva, E. A., Hoy-Ellis, C. P., & Petry, H. (2011). *The aging and health report disparities and resilience among lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender older adults*. Seattle, WA: Institute for Multigenerational Health.
- Hallgren, H. (2008). *När lesbiska blev kvinnor: Lesbiskfeministiska kvinnors diskursproduktion rörande kön, sexualitet, kropp och identitet under 1970- och 1980-talen i Sverige [When Lesbians Became Women - When Women Became Lesbian. Lesbian Feminists' Production of Discourses Regarding Sex, Sexuality, Body and Identity During the 1970s and 1980s in Sweden]*. Göteborg, Sweden: Kabusa Böcker.
- Heaphy, B., Yip, A. K. T., & Thompson, D. (2004). Ageing in a non-heterosexual context. *Ageing & Society*, 24(06), 881-902.
- Heaphy, B. (2009). Choice and Its Limits in Older Lesbian and Gay Narratives of Relational Life. *Journal of GLBT Family Studies*, 5(1-2), 119-138.
- Halberstam, J. (2005). *In a queer time and place: transgender bodies, subcultural lives*. New York, NY: New York University Press.
- Jones, J., & Pugh, S. (2005). Ageing gay men lessons from the sociology of embodiment. *Men and Masculinities*, 7(3), 248-260.
- Katz, S., & Marshall, B. (2003). New sex for old: lifestyle, consumerism, and the ethics of aging well. *Journal of Aging Studies*, 17(1), 3-16.
- Lindholm, M., & Nilsson, A. (2005). Rum, liv, identitet: Kvinnligt och manligt homoliv [Space, lives, identity: Female and male gay life]. In: D. Kulick (Ed.), *I Queersverige* (pp. 288-306).

- Norrhem, S., Rydström, J., & Winkvist, H. (2008). *Undantagsmänniskor: En svensk HBT-historia [People of exception: Swedish LGBT history]*. Stockholm, Sweden: Norstedts Akademiska Förlag.
- Public Health Agency of Sweden. (2014). *Utvecklingen av hälsan och hälsans bestämningsfaktorer bland homo-och bisexuella personer. Resultat från nationella folkhälsoenkäten Hälsa på lika villkor [Development of health and health determining factors among homo- and bisexual people. Results from the national survey Equal Health]*. Solna, Sweden: Folkhälsomyndigheten.
- Public Health Agency of Sweden. (2015). *Hälsan och hälsans bestämningsfaktorer för transpersoner—En rapport om hälsoläget bland transpersoner i Sverige [Health and health determining factors for trans people - A report on health among trans people in Sweden]*. Solna, Sweden: Folkhälsomyndigheten.
- Rosenfeld, D. (1999). Identity work among lesbian and gay elderly. *Journal of Aging Studies*, 13(2), 121–144.
- Ross, C. (2012). Imagined Communities: Initiatives Around LGBTQ Ageing in Italy. *Modern Italy*, 17(4), 449–464
- Silverman, D. (2006). *Interpreting qualitative data: Methods for analyzing talk, text and interaction*. London, England: SAGE.
- Siverskog, A. (2016). *Queera livslopp: Att leva och åldras som lhbtq-person i en heteronormativ värld [Queer lines: Living and ageing as an LGBTQperson in a heteronormative world]*. Linköping, Sweden: Linköpings universitet, Institutionen för samhälls- och välfärdsstudier.
- Skeggs, B. (1997). *Formations of Class and Gender: Becoming Respectable*. London, UK: SAGE
- Slevin, K. F., & Linneman, T. J. (2010). Old Gay Men's Bodies and Masculinities. *Men and Masculinities*, 12(4), 483–507.
- Svensson, I. (2007). *Liket i garderoben: En studie av sexualitet, livsstil och begravning [The corpse in the closet: A study of sexuality, lifestyle and funeral]*. Stockholm, Sweden: Normal.
- Valentine, G. (1995). Out and About: Geographies of Lesbian Landscapes. *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, 19(1), 96–111.
- Valentine, G., & Skelton, T. (2003). Finding oneself, losing oneself: The lesbian and gay 'scene' as a paradoxical space. *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, 27(4), 849–866.
- Weston, K. (1991). *Families we choose: Lesbians, gays, kinship*. New York, NY: Columbia University Press.

Author Biographies

Anna Siverskog is an assistant professor and a Postdoctoral scholar in Social Work. She has a PhD in Ageing and Later Life. Her research interests revolve around age, gender, sexuality, power, and the life course with a specific interest in LGBTQ ageing. Her post doc project explores LGBTQ people's experiences of receiving eldercare.

Janne Bromseth, PhD, has researched and published on queer ageing and LGBTQ-inclusive geriatric care in Sweden and Norway since 2009. She was, with Anna Siverskog, editing the anthology *“LGBTQ-people and ageing. Nordic perspectives”* (2014) [“LHBTQ-personer och åldrande. Nordiska perspektiv.”] Today she is working with research and education on gender, sexuality and person centered care for health care staff in Oslo commune.