

GENERATION LOUD AND PROUD

How does the absence of accessible, inclusive and Queer targeted spaces contribute to the segregation of the older LGBTQ+ community from the broader culture, and what effects does this have on this marginalized demographic?

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Glossary

In this essay, I will use the following terms as defined in the glossary below. These definitions have been carefully developed through my research to reflect the precise meanings intended for this study.

Queer-Targeted -

"Queer-targeted" refers to spaces, services, or initiatives specifically designed to cater to the unique needs, experiences, and identities within the LGBTQ+ community. These are often created with an understanding of the cultural, social, and emotional aspects of LGBTQ+ lives, aiming to provide affirming, and inclusive environments. In this essay "Queer-targeted" is mostly used regarding spaces which typically prioritize visibility, support, and community building for LGBTQ+ individuals.

The Community -

"The community" is an umbrella term referring to the LGBTQ+ community as a whole. LGBTQ refers to anyone who identifies as lesbian, gay bisexual, transgender or queer. The + is representative of anyone who may not be included within the acronym.

Inclusive Space -

"Inclusive space" refers to spaces that are designed with a diverse group of people in mind and should cater to all their unique needs and experiences. An "inclusive space" is a place that fosters a sense of belonging, safety and visibility for people.

Accessible Space -

"Accessible Space" refers to space that is designed with all users experiences and abilities in mind. A space that is fully accessible should be usable for everyone and caters to all needs.

Older LGBTQ+ Generation -

"Older LGBTQ+ generation" refers to people who identify as LGBTQ+ and are above the ages of 65.

Chosen Families -

"Chosen Families" refers to the support network an LGBTQ+ individual creates for themselves, often as a result of challenging relationships with their biological family.

Introduction

In the LGBTQ+ community, socializing and creating solidarity were crucial in overcoming hardships and prejudice. In an environment where like-minded individuals are present, you can be unapologetically yourself with others who understand and share your experiences. This sense of belonging, visibility, and community is essential for mental well-being. However, many older LGBTQ+ individuals face segregation from these vital communal spaces, resulting in an overwhelming sense of isolation and loneliness as they struggle to maintain a connection to the broader LGBTQ+ community.

In this essay, I aim to examine how the absence of accessible and inclusive safe spaces contributes to the segregation of the older LGBTQ+ community from the broader culture, and the effects this has on this marginalized demographic. Spaces that address the unique needs of older LGBTQ+ individuals are vital and would ensure these individuals feel valued, reconnected, and supported. I will aim to understand what a queer-targeted space looks like using existing spaces around Manchester and how these spaces serve the younger LGBTQ+ members differently compared to the older individuals in the (LGBTQ+) community. I will further investigate the social and psychological impacts of such segregation on older LGBTQ+ individuals.

Research Methods

For this essay, I employed a combination of primary and secondary research methods to explore the accessibility and inclusivity of queer-targeted spaces in Manchester, particularly for older generations within the LGBTQ+ community.

Primary Research

My primary research involved observing and visiting existing queer-targeted spaces in Manchester to assess their design, accessibility, and programming. By immersing myself in these environments, I was able to evaluate how these spaces function and identify whether they cater to diverse age groups. Field observations provided valuable insights into how physical accessibility and social activities contribute to or hinder inclusivity for older LGBTQ+ individuals.

Secondary Research

Secondary research was conducted to contextualize my observations and explore broader themes related to LGBTQ+ spaces, community dynamics, and the experiences of older generations. Drawing from academic resources, I reviewed literature on the design and purpose of queer spaces, intergenerational inclusivity, and the specific challenges faced by older members of the LGBTQ+ community. Through thematic analysis, I identified significant gaps in the literature, particularly the limited focus on age diversity and the unique needs of older LGBTQ+ individuals.

These gaps in the existing research (figure 1) informed the development of my central research question and sub-questions, which aim to address the lack of acknowledgment and regard for different age categories within the LGBTQ+ community. This dual approach of primary and secondary research forms the foundation of my essay, enabling a comprehensive examination of how queer spaces can better serve all members of the community.

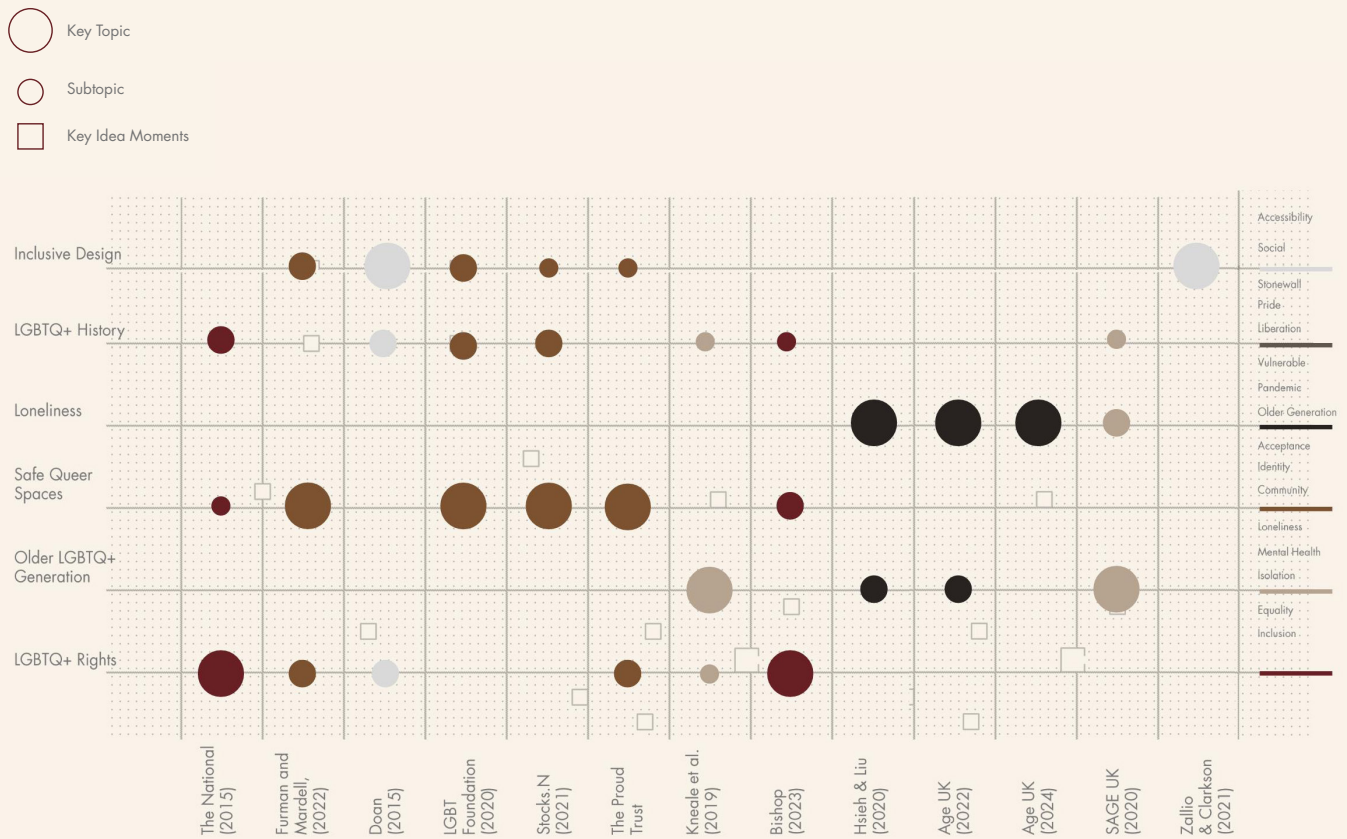


Figure 1 - Thematic Analysis diagram, using 10 most influential sources to outline the themes, by Beatrice Allen September 2024.

Discussion

Historical Context of the LGBTQ+ Spaces

LGBTQ+ spaces have historically served as sanctuaries, providing safe environments where LGBTQ+ individuals can find community and identity affirmation. In the mid-to-late 20th century, these spaces often took the form of underground bars and clubs that provided sanctuary from pervasive societal discrimination and persecution (The National Archives). The LGBTQ+ community has long found ways to resist social injustices and stay connected, creating safe spaces free from prejudice that have been crucial to its growth and resilience. Socializing has always been at the core of the LGBTQ+ experience, ensuring that individuals feel seen, heard, and free to express themselves openly. Queer-focused spaces remain essential to preserving this sense of belonging and unity, enabling the community to thrive together. These spaces were designed, fiercely fought for, and preserved by the generations before us. (Furman & Mardell, 2022.) However, these spaces have typically evolved with a focus on younger LGBTQ+ generations, particularly as youth activism grew. In recent years, increased social media coverage, public visibility, and pride night-life have led to queer life often being associated primarily with younger generations. This focus on youth-centred activities means that queer identity is frequently perceived through the lens of younger people's experiences, overshadowing the diversity within the LGBTQ+ community across all ages. As society has shifted to increasingly recognize LGBTQ+ rights, queer spaces have proliferated; however, they often target more mobile, younger individuals. This evolution has sometimes neglected the unique needs of older LGBTQ+ individuals, who may lack access to mobility or may feel disconnected from the cultural shifts of contemporary LGBTQ+ community activities. (Doan, 2015).

Discussion

Existing Queer Targeted spaces in Manchester

Stocks (2021) describes Manchester's Gay Village as a "structuring presence in personal lives, regardless of class, race, or relationship status," a community that champions inclusivity, free from prejudice. This statement highlights the Village's aim to welcome all who wish to participate, yet notably omits age as a factor in its inclusivity. This may seem like an oversight, but when considering the Village's demographics and activities, it becomes evident that older generations are largely excluded from its core offerings. Figure 2, a map of queer-oriented spaces around Manchester, reveals that most of these venues, concentrated in the Village, are bars and night-life spaces—a setting that is less accessible or appealing for older individuals. Many older adults may face barriers here, including physical discomfort, loud music, limited accessibility, and an emphasis on drinking and dancing that may not align with their interests or needs.

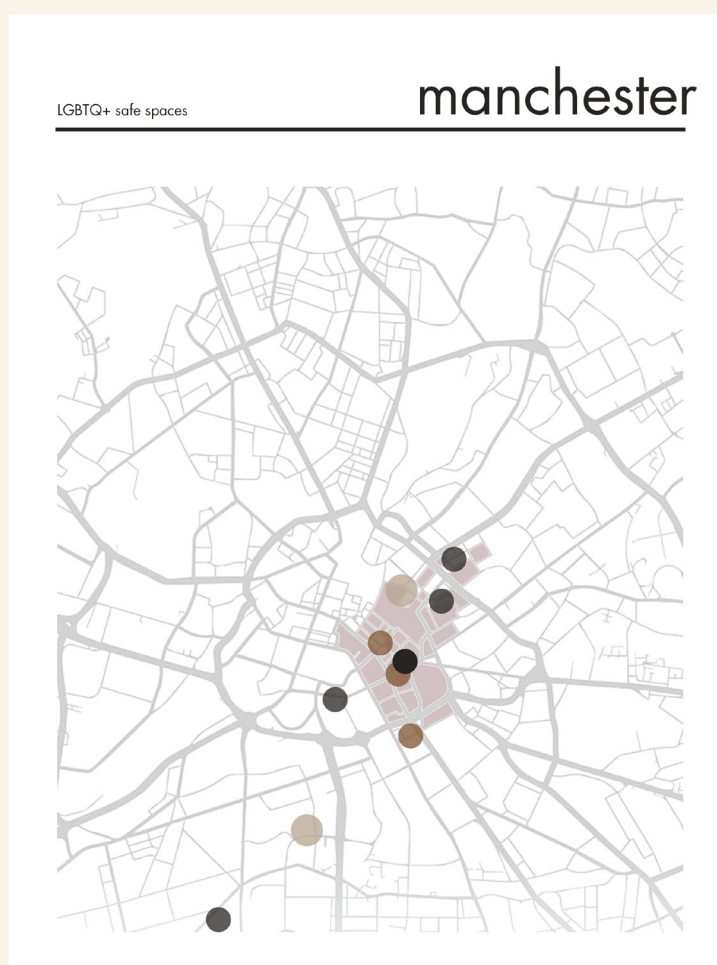


Figure 2 Map of existing queer targeted Spaces in Manchester, by Beatrice Allen, September 2024

Additionally, while there are commendable initiatives like "The Proud Trust"—a charity supporting LGBTQ+ youth—there is a visible gap in similar support, or social spaces tailored for older LGBTQ+ individuals. This reflects a broader issue in the Village's inclusivity: while under-18s are rightfully provided safe spaces outside night-life (due to age restrictions on bars and clubs), no equivalent considerations appear for older adults. This exclusion leaves many older members of the LGBTQ+ community without spaces designed to meet their needs or provide them with a sense of belonging.

While Manchester does feature queer-friendly cafés and spaces, such as "Feel Good Club" and "Queer Lit" bookshop, my primary research (see Figure 4&5) found that these spaces, though more accessible, tend to foster a trendy, youth-focused atmosphere. This may inadvertently discourage older adults from engaging, as they may feel like outsiders among younger individuals. Feeling "out of place" or unable to find others they relate to can significantly impact one's sense of visibility and belonging, both crucial elements of community support. For the Village to truly be inclusive, the creation of spaces that welcome all ages is essential, fostering an environment where older adults feel as visible and valued as any other member of the LGBTQ+ community.

Discussion

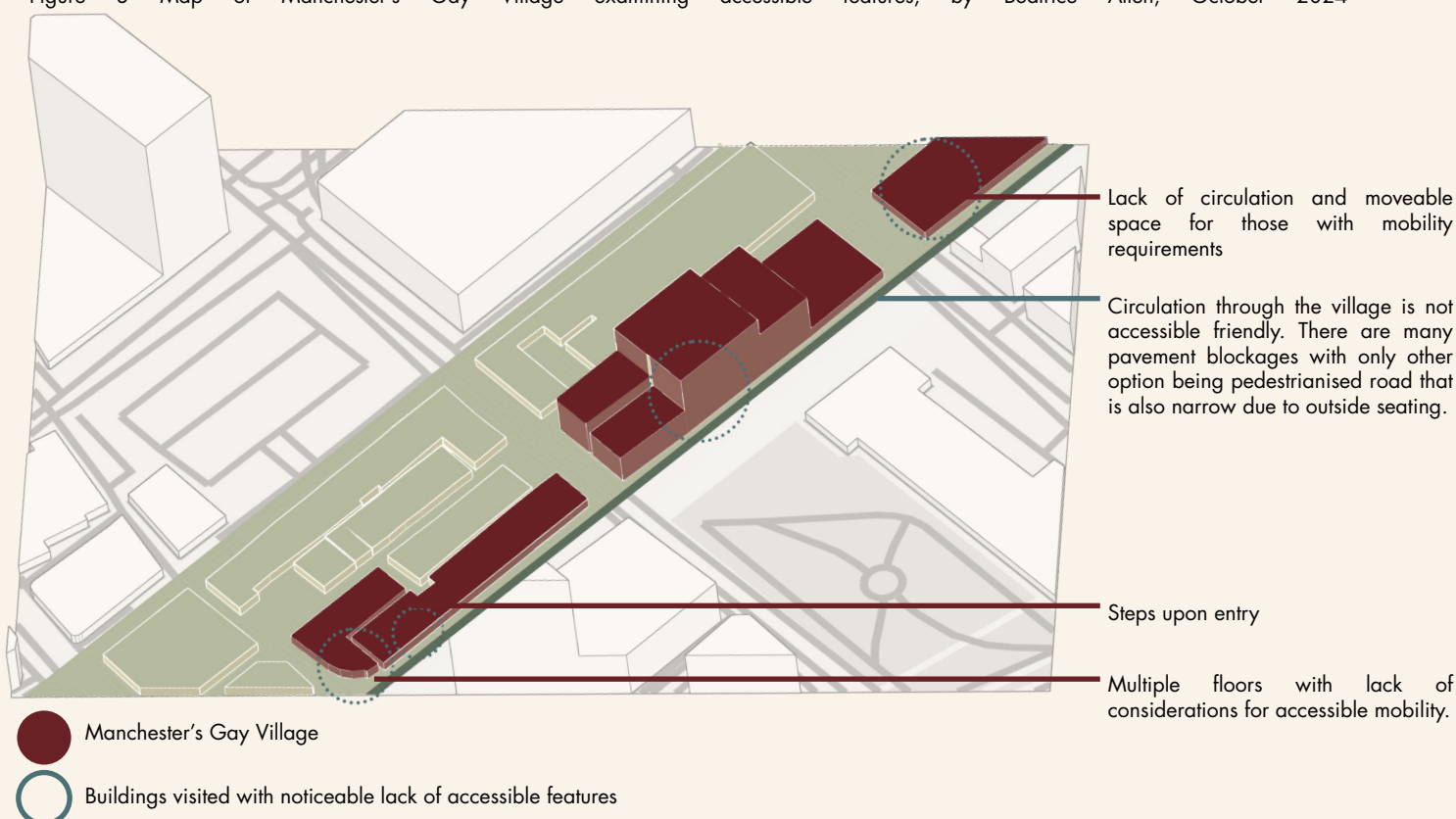
Queer Spaces and Accessibility

Through my research I have defined “Accessible Space” as space that is designed with all users’ experiences and abilities in mind. A space that is fully accessible should be usable for everyone and caters to all needs.

Whilst considering these existing spaces, it is also important to understand that they are not only socially excluded but also physically excluded. (Doan, 2015) Many queer spaces, particularly in urban centres like Manchester, are not queer by design but are instead repurposed venues adapted to meet economic demands (Stocks, 2021). During the design process, queer spaces are often not created or adapted with all members of the community in mind. This is largely because such spaces are predominantly centred around bars, clubs, and night-life, with their design tailored to attract a specific clientele. (Giesekeing, 2018) When viewed through the lens of queer theory and architecture, this approach raises critical questions about inclusivity. Queer theory advocates for inclusivity and accessibility. (Vallerand and Vallerand, 2020). At its core, queer theory calls for the disruption of traditional design norms and the creation of spaces that genuinely reflect the diverse identities and needs of the entire LGBTQ+ community.

However, if the physical spaces that represent the queer community fail to uphold the foundational value of inclusivity—ensuring that all are welcome—they contradict the very principles they aim to embody. By excluding certain groups, particularly those within the community itself, such as older generations or individuals with accessibility needs, these spaces fall short of their potential as inclusive environments. For older generations, this presents significant barriers to participation. The physical design of these spaces often fails to accommodate the needs of older individuals, many of whom may have reduced mobility or other accessibility requirements. Venues may be housed in older buildings with limited accessibility features, such as stairs, narrow entrances, or inadequate restroom facilities. These barriers not only make it difficult for older LGBTQ+ individuals to physically access these spaces but also send an implicit message that their presence is not prioritized or valued. Figure (3) presents the findings from my primary research on the accessibility of several bars within Manchester’s Gay Village. This research examines key accessibility features, including ramps, entryways, and circulation spaces, to evaluate how these venues accommodate the diverse needs of their clients. The analysis highlights significant disparities in accessibility, emphasizing the challenges faced by individuals with mobility issues, in navigating these spaces.

Figure 3 Map of Manchester’s Gay Village examining accessible features, by Beatrice Allen, October 2024



Discussion

Queer Spaces and Accessibility

Accessibility is not merely a question of physical infrastructure but also of cultural and social attitudes embedded within these spaces. (Zallio and Clarkson, 2021) The assumption that all LGBTQ+ individuals share the same needs or preferences leads to a one-size-fits-all approach that erases the unique identities and experiences of older generations. True inclusivity would require designing spaces that actively address these diverse needs, offering physical environments and social cultures that reflect the full spectrum of LGBTQ+ life. This includes creating daytime activities, ensuring physical accessibility, and fostering environments where all members of the community—regardless of age—feel welcome and seen. Socially, the existing queer-targeted spaces (Figure 2) are predominantly associated with activities surrounded by drinking and night-life. These activities are often tailored to younger audiences and fail to consider the needs and preferences of older generations. This oversight further reinforces the lack of visibility and consideration for older LGBTQ+ individuals within these spaces.

Referring to Figure 2 and the mapped queer spaces, the “Feel Good Club” exemplifies a venue that prioritizes physical accessibility, incorporating ramps and inclusive design features (see Figure 4). However, my primary research (see Figure 5) reveals its social activities cater predominantly to younger generations. Originally alcohol-free, the venue now hosts events catered around drinking culture, excluding older LGBTQ+ individuals who may prefer quieter, daytime events. While its physical design is inclusive, its programming reflects a limited understanding of accessibility. Highlighting the need for queer spaces to address diverse generational needs and create meaningful intergenerational connections within the community.

In Manchester and similar urban contexts, the reuse of existing spaces, driven by economic necessity, limits opportunities to design truly inclusive queer spaces from the ground up. These spaces often default to reinforcing the dominant culture of queer night-life without considering the broader needs of the community they aim to serve. Without intentional efforts to address these shortcomings, older generations remain excluded, highlighting the urgent need for a more inclusive vision of what queer spaces can and should be.

Challenging injustice, inclusivity, and fighting for accessibility remain a core value for queer theory and design. However, it is an intricate and multifaceted value that proves difficult to cater to all those included. (R, Broce 2024) However, by acknowledging and addressing these issues, the LGBTQ+ community can begin to challenge not only heteronormative structures but also the homonormative practices that marginalize its older members.



Prioritise things that bring you joy

WHAT'S ON AT



2 OCT	FREDDIE LEWIS LIVE	Live music	
3 OCT	HIT SO HARD	Film screening	
4 OCT	KARAOKE PARTY	Hosted by Papa Sage	
5 OCT	MISS CHIEF	Drag Queen cabaret	
11 OCT	QUEER AS F*CK	Halloween special!	
17 OCT	THE MUSIC OF AMY WINEHOUSE	with The Untold Orchestra	
18 OCT	LESBIAN FILM CLUB	Jennifer's Body	
19 OCT	THE PLANET PARTY	A sapphic social inspired by The L Word	
22 OCT	THE PLAYERS KEEP	A live DND play through	
25 OCT	LESBIAN FILM CLUB	Black Swan	
26 OCT	QUEER ARTS MARKET	Halloween Special	

Figure 5 Photo of flyer from The Feel Good Club Manchester showing social activities for that month, by Beatrice Allen, October 2024

Figure 4 Collage of accessible design features present in The Feel Good Club Manchester, by Beatrice Allen, January 2025

Discussion

The effects of Ageism within the LGBTQ+ Community

The recurring theme of loneliness and isolation has emerged prominently within this essay. The segregation of older generations from the wider community, coupled with a lack of inclusion, consistently points back to the profound impact of loneliness on their lives.

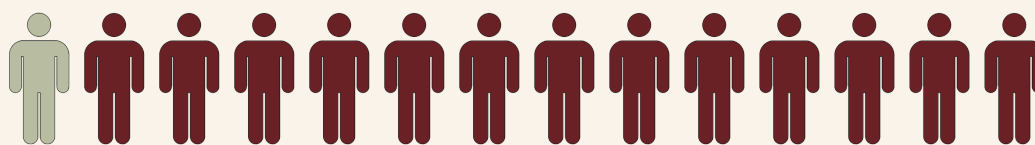
What is loneliness?

"Loneliness is the unwanted feeling we experience from the absence of connection," as defined by Stanford University (Stanford University, n.d.). During my research, I came across many definitions of loneliness and its various forms. Two forms stood out as most relevant for this essay (NHS, 2021):

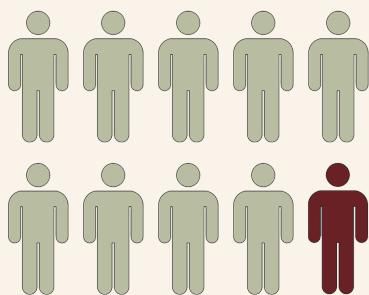
- Social Loneliness: A lack of friends to spend time with or a community to share your experiences.
- Existential Loneliness: Feeling excluded and alone, even when surrounded by familiar faces or people you know.

Figure 6 illustrates how in extreme cases, loneliness can significantly contribute to both physical and mental health conditions (NHS, 2021) (AGE UK, 2024).

According to a study carried out by Age Uk
(AGE UK, 2024)



1 in 14 people aged 65+ equivalent to 940,000 older people in the UK are often lonely



9 in 10 older people who are often lonely also being unhappy or depressed compared to four in 10 of those who are hardly ever lonely



By 2034 there will be 1.2 million people over 65 in England who will often feel lonely

Figure 6 Infographic to show the effects of loneliness, by Beatrice Allen, January 2025

Discussion

The effects of Ageism Within the LGBTQ+ Community

Prevalence of loneliness unique to the LGBTQ+

Loneliness is a significant issue among older lesbian and gay individuals. In a study exploring loneliness amongst the older LGBTQ+ community Kneale et al., 2019 found their mean loneliness scores are much higher than those of the general older population (Kneale et al., 2019). This highlights a clear disparity compared to their heterosexual counterparts. The difference stems from the unique challenges faced by the LGBTQ+ community.

Loneliness affects all groups within the older generations to some extent (AGE UK, 2024). However, it is especially prevalent within the LGBTQ+ community (Hsieh and Liu, 2020). In addition to the common struggles of aging, older LGBTQ+ individuals face distinct issues that their heterosexual peers may not encounter. These challenges directly contribute to the loneliness epidemic within this group.

One key factor as discussed throughout this essay is a lack of connection to the wider LGBTQ+ community. Community bonds offer emotional support and play a vital role in the history and future of LGBTQ+ individuals. The absence of these connections intensifies feelings of isolation. Beyond this, several recurring issues uniquely impact older LGBTQ+ individuals. These factors further deepen their experiences of loneliness, as explored below.

Loneliness Factors

-Relationship status

Relationship status is a significant predictor of loneliness among older LGBTQ+ individuals, primarily due to the lower likelihood of having a partner and reduced levels of family support (Hsieh and Liu, 2020). Unlike their heterosexual counterparts, many LGBTQ+ individuals face greater strain in their friendships and often lack the traditional family structures that typically provide support in older age. These inner layers of relationships—family and partners—play a crucial role in reducing loneliness.

Strengthening partnerships and familial connections is essential to addressing the loneliness gap among sexual minorities (Hsieh and Liu, 2020). Nurturing existing relationships can help build support networks that provide emotional security and companionship, alleviating feelings of isolation. However, finding a significant other and someone to confide in can be particularly challenging. Limited opportunities for socializing and meeting new people often make forming these connections difficult.

-Community Connection

A lack of community connection significantly contributes to loneliness among older LGBTQ+ individuals. Social groups and networks tailored to LGBTQ+ individuals play a crucial role in promoting well-being and protecting against isolation in older age (Wilkens, 2015). However, the scarcity of such groups leaves many older LGBTQ+ individuals without emotional support and meaningful social interaction. The absence of accessible and inclusive community spaces exacerbates feelings of exclusion for those who already struggle to find acceptance in mainstream environments. This lack of community resources highlights a critical gap in support systems for older LGBTQ+ individuals, contributing directly to their isolation and loneliness.

-Chosen Family

For older LGBTQ+ individuals, their chosen family is often a key source of support. Unlike their heterosexual peers, many do not have traditional family networks to rely on in later life. Instead, they turn to friends or “chosen families” for care and connection (LGBT Foundation, 2020).

While these networks provide belonging, they are not always reliable. As chosen families can age alongside them, their capacity to provide necessary support often decreases. The reliance on aging networks highlights a serious gap in long-term support. As a result, the absence of intergenerational connections places older LGBTQ+ individuals at an increased risk of isolation.

-Social and Cultural Contexts

Older lesbian and gay individuals have lived through periods when homosexuality was criminalized and stigmatized, leading to feelings of disconnection from wider society. These historical experiences have contributed to patterns of social isolation. Possible learned behaviour of being ashamed and alone (Kneale et al., 2019)

Discussion

The effects of Ageism With in the LGBTQ+ Community

Health Implications

Mental health and loneliness are interconnected, often exacerbating each other (Mental Health Foundation, 2022). Our health naturally declines as we age (World Health Organization, 2024), making it harder to remain as healthy as we once were. With the addition of loneliness, maintaining this wellness becomes even more challenging. Managing health alone can feel overwhelming. For older generations, maintaining health and wellness is crucial. However, without someone to care for them or a support system to rely on, many may struggle to prioritize their well-being. These challenges leave the older LGBTQ+ generation especially vulnerable, compounding their risk of poor health and isolation.

Loneliness affects not only mental health but also human behaviour, altering how we perceive and care for ourselves over time (NHS, 2021). Prolonged loneliness can reshape self-image, leading to neglect of basic self-care. For instance, individuals may question the point of getting dressed or even getting out of bed if no one is there to see them.

When opportunities to socialize do then arise, loneliness can trigger intense anxiety about going out in public (NHS, 2021). This could result in avoiding social events altogether. The LGBTQ+ community is particularly vulnerable to loneliness, (Mental Health Foundation, 2022) making them more likely to experience these patterns.

Avoiding social events and neglecting self-care further isolates individuals. Distancing them away from their community and from society. For the older LGBTQ+ population, this isolation can deepen their loneliness and make re-establishing connections even more challenging. If loneliness can heighten health issues in a generation already vulnerable to them, reducing this should become a priority. Alleviating loneliness is essential for fostering a healthier future. As discussed earlier in this essay, socializing and reconnecting with communities could play a pivotal role in reducing these feelings of isolation. However, what remains missing are the inclusive spaces needed to support and accommodate this group.

Designing Communal Spaces to Combat Loneliness

My research has revealed that re-establishing older LGBTQ+ generations within their community and fostering meaningful connections with like-minded individuals is crucial. Being segregated from their community often leads to overwhelming feelings of loneliness and isolation. This loneliness, in turn, becomes a significant contributing factor to poor health.

While poor health is common among older generations, older LGBTQ+ individuals face additional challenges. Unlike their heterosexual counterparts, they are less likely to have a stable support network to provide care. Many are also unaware of or apprehensive about accessing available social care services, further compounding their vulnerability (LGBT Foundation, 2020).

The LGBT Foundation's findings highlight disparities in access to care. For instance, 43% of respondents did not know where they would receive care in the future, and many expressed concerns about having to hide their identity in non-LGBTQ-affirmative environments. This uncertainty contributes to a deep sense of insecurity and isolation as individuals navigate aging without adequate community ties or institutional support. (LGBT Foundation, 2020)

Discussion

Designing Communal Spaces to Combat Loneliness

LGBTQ+ Targeted Communal Centres and Groups

As previously discussed, re-integrating older LGBTQ+ generations into the wider community could be achieved through queer-targeted social groups or community centres. These spaces could host a variety of activities designed to bring people together. Community centres offer older generations a place to connect with friends through planned events specifically tailored to their age group. They also provide a physical space for forming new connections, meeting potential partners, or building “chosen families”. There is a clear need for more queer-targeted physical spaces, such as community centres. These centres could include cafés, wellness areas, and other features that cater to the diverse needs of older generations. For those wishing to socialize outside of their homes, these spaces would provide a welcoming and inclusive environment. A community space would not need to cater exclusively to older generations. It could also foster intergenerational connections, creating a setting that appeals to people of all ages.

However, accessibility remains a significant challenge for community centres. While mobile members of the older LGBTQ+ community may find these spaces easy to attend, those with limited mobility could still face barriers. This would leave a significant portion of the older generation excluded. While community spaces could alleviate loneliness for many, they may not be suitable for everyone. Highlighting the need for additional solutions to ensure true inclusivity.

LGBTQ+ Targeted Care Schemes and Housing

A lack of LGBTQ-affirmative housing and community spaces leaves many older LGBTQ+ individuals feeling isolated (LGBT Foundation, 2020). In a study carried out by The LGBTQ Foundation regarding “Housing, Aging & Care” over 50% of their respondents reported discomfort with non-LGBTQ-specific housing, with fear of prejudice and a need for spaces where their identities are respected (LGBT Foundation, 2020). For these individuals, inclusive housing is more than a preference—it is a necessity.

A significant 21% of respondents indicated plans to move to more accessible or LGBTQ-affirmative housing. Others felt their current homes were unsuitable due to safety concerns, lack of accessibility, and the isolation they experienced living in heteronormative environments (LGBT Foundation, 2020).

LGBTQ-targeted retirement homes offer a promising solution to these challenges. 74% of respondents expressed interest in moving to LGBTQ-affirmative care schemes (LGBT Foundation, 2020). These spaces provide safety, inclusivity, and a sense of community, addressing the unique needs of older LGBTQ+ individuals. Designing more such retirement homes could help alleviate loneliness and foster meaningful connections, creating environments where older LGBTQ+ individuals can thrive. These spaces could be situated in larger cities with established LGBTQ+ communities, allowing older generations to remain close to the broader community they are already a part of.

Conclusion

Conclusion

Based on my findings, the absence of accessible, inclusive, and queer-targeted spaces significantly contributes to the segregation of older LGBTQ+ individuals from the broader culture. Physical spaces for the LGBTQ+ community were hard-won, serving as both evidence of the community’s history and hubs for fostering connection. These spaces provide a place where individuals can be themselves, surrounded by friends and chosen families. When these spaces fail to consider all in the community, they inadvertently exclude a wide range of individuals, particularly those from older generations.

Conclusion

Conclusion

Inclusive and queer-targeted spaces must be designed to welcome older generations who cannot access existing venues—whether due to physical limitations or the social focus of these spaces. Older LGBTQ+ individuals still need places where they can connect with others like them, feel included, and remain part of the broader community. Without such spaces, we risk subjecting them to lives of loneliness and isolation.

While broader societal issues cannot be resolved through design alone, thoughtful design can play a key role in alleviating loneliness. By creating hubs that foster meaningful interactions, we can build spaces where older LGBTQ+ generations feel seen, valued, and supported. These spaces can serve as places of comfort and inclusion, offering opportunities to engage with others who share their experiences.

LGBTQ+ targeted care schemes and housing have the potential to transform the lives of older generations, providing access to healthcare and a sense of belonging in a community free from discrimination. These spaces can combat isolation and foster inclusion, offering a future where older LGBTQ+ individuals feel safe and valued. I firmly believe that design has the power to help shape an inclusive future for this generation. The question remains: How do we bridge the gap between recognizing the problem and implementing real solutions?

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Image Reference List

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