

# LICK MY LEGACY:

ARE WOMEN-IDENTIFIED SPACES STILL NEEDED TO NURTURE WOMEN-IDENTIFIED DJs?

— FEATURE ARTICLE —

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## ABSTRACT

This article documents Lick Club; a Vancouver, BC lesbian bar that operated from 2003 until 2011, employing predominantly female (as well as trans and non-binary) DJs. Specifically, this study examines the effects of Lick's physical space on the careers of those DJs in the region, focusing on the queer DJ network that evolved from the club. The author bases her findings on qualitative data generated from interviews with key players in Lick's localized DJ network. The interviewees describe how their participation in Lick provided them with access to mentors, DJ equipment and performance opportunities that proved to be integral to their development as professional DJs. This research corroborates other studies of female DJs in the USA (Farrugia 2004, 2012) and Europe (Gavanas and Reitsamer 2013, 2016) that demonstrate how mentors are of acute importance in fostering the careers of female and non-binary DJs. This study concludes that, although female and non-binary DJs are becoming more common in Canadian nightclubs and festivals, networks such as the one fostered by Lick are still significant to the careers of DJs whose identities do not afford them access to the "boys' club(s)".

KEYWORDS: DJ, gender, female, Canada, lesbian

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## INTRODUCTION

If I had not had those experiences at Lick, had our group not been given the opportunity to go in there and create space and make something happen and create this really awesome vibe and culture that started to flow from the Lick Club... I mean I can't even count how many DJs started and moved through and actually became involved in the music scene in Vancouver. And I would even go so far as to say specifically because of Lick they had the opportunity in a safe environment that wasn't a super huge club, that they were really super supported in and could really... own their space. If I didn't have that experience I wouldn't be in Winnipeg doing the same thing.<sup>1</sup>

This article assesses Lick Club, a Vancouver, BC lesbian bar that operated from 2003 until 2011, employing predominantly female (as well as trans and non-binary) DJs. Specifically, this study examines the effects that the club's physical space had on the careers of said DJs in the region, focusing on the queer female, trans and non-binary DJ network that developed out of the club. A physical space such as Lick that caters to female, trans and non-binary DJs (thereby side-stepping male-dominated DJ networks) can be a significant factor in bringing beginner DJs and mentors together. My research corroborates other studies of female DJs in the USA (Farrugia 2004, 2012) and Europe (Gavanas and Reitsamer 2013, 2016) that demonstrate the acute importance of mentors in fostering the careers of female and non-binary DJs.

My findings are based on qualitative data generated from interviews with key players in Lick's local DJ network. The interviewees describe how their participation in Lick provided them with access to mentors, DJ equipment and performance opportunities that proved to be integral to their development as professional DJs. I also draw on my own emic experience as a DJ and promoter at Lick. This study concludes that although female DJs are becoming more common in Canadian nightclubs and festivals, networks such as the one fostered by Lick are still significantly important to the careers of DJs whose identities do not afford them access to the "boys' club(s)".

To begin, I invoke Halberstam's (2005) assertion that it is important for academics to document queer and underground cultural environments. The methodology identifies key ethical concerns regarding my hegemonic identity relative to Lick's other central agents, and my position as an insider studying a population of which I am a member. I outline a brief history of Lick and the building that housed it in order to both temporally and contextually situate the club. I present findings from my interviews with key Lick participants, wherein interlocutors stress the importance of queer, female-centered spaces and communities to support the progress of female and non-binary DJs—wherein mentorship is specifically discussed. I subsequently explore the impact that Lick's closure had on the developing pool of female and non-binary DJs in Vancouver as well as on the city's underground queer club scene. I finish with a brief consideration of other female and queer-focused DJ collectives and networks in Canada.

## VANCOUVER'S LICK CLUB (2003–11): A QUEER TIME, SPACE AND PLACE

I guess kind of feeling in touch with [a queer] community or wanting to feel more in touch with that community because it wasn't something that I had access to growing up? And you know I really support the idea of having spaces accessible for queer people... I just really like the idea that it was just this little hole in the wall club and it was grimey and people just came as they were and didn't give a fuck, you know what I mean? At that point that was kind of my mentality, I don't give a shit, whatever.<sup>2</sup>

Queer lesbian subcultures have rarely been discussed in the existing literature and they offer a new area of study for queer cultural producers and queer academics (Halberstam 160).

In *In a Queer Time and Space* (2005), Halberstam emphasizes the importance of documenting queer cultural spaces such as Lick. As the title suggests, Halberstam argues that people develop the use of "queer time and space" not only to oppose dominant societal institutions such as family and heterosexuality, but also in accordance with other logics such as "location, movement and identification" (1). Thereby, Halberstam takes up notions of queer subcultural practices as alternative modes of living and relating to other people in society. Halberstam illustrates the need for queer academics to engage in documenting queer culture in a way that allows for interpretation and conveys a sense of its diversity and complexity. Radical cultural work is all too often co-opted by the mainstream media and therefore it is important to generate as many records of queer culture as possible, in order to assert the existence of our cultural communities (2005).

Informed by Halberstam's thesis, I posit that Lick's community of workers and clients comprised in and of themselves a queer nightclub subculture, one that developed in opposition to the dominant, heteronormative nightclub scene, and the (often unwelcoming) gay male scene. As an academic still closely connected to Lick's DJ network, I am taking up Halberstam's call to action by exploring Lick as a site that encouraged queer subcultural practices outside of the general male-focused, homosocial DJ and nightclub networks in Vancouver. Importantly, all of the interviewees for this study expressed a desire to have Lick documented and remembered.

## METHODS

The core data informing this study stems from semi-structured, informal interviews that took place over Skype between March and May of 2012, ranging in duration from twenty-seven to forty-seven minutes. I interviewed seven DJs that played Lick regularly, and two promoters who have been heavily involved with the Vancouver lesbian party scene since the late 1990s. Six out of nine people interviewed for this article identify as female. The three exceptions are Revoked, who identifies as a trans man, Skylar Love, who identifies as masculine non-binary, and Stacy Clark, who identifies as gender queer. Four out of nine participants identify as people of colour: DJ She, DJ T, Mandy Randhawa and Revoked. I

also incorporate my experience as a white, cisgendered, middle-class and queer<sup>3</sup> female as empirical data.<sup>4</sup> Additionally, I draw on research conducted for my forthcoming dissertation, in order to situate the experiences of the Lick DJs in relation to a national sample. This second data set is generated from a survey of one hundred and four female DJs (including seven respondents who identified as non-binary), from most regions of Canada. It should be noted that 23% of respondents resided in Vancouver when they completed the survey, which ran online from May 2014 to April 2015.

### ETHICAL CONCERNS

There are many ethical concerns to be discussed; yet it is beyond the scope of this article to do so thoroughly. Therefore, I can only outline a few crucial concerns. All of the people interviewed for this article are friends of mine to some degree, and the attendant intimacy might hinder this research if it caused a subject to withhold critical comments for the sake of not disrupting the project. Conversely, my friendships with my subjects might potentially enhance the data if our relationship facilitated increased trust and thereby transparency. Given the complexity of the relationships between my participants and myself, self-reflexivity is important (Rogers 2010; Oakley 1988, as outlined in Olszanowski 2012).<sup>5</sup>

In that vein, I acknowledge that I possess many hallmarks of hegemonic female identity and that women like me are already reflected in the existing literature on gender and DJ culture. However, unlike me, many of my subjects fall outside of hegemonic norms of race, sexuality and gender, and as such are not currently adequately represented in extant literature. Because I strive for a critical analysis that extends beyond my own perspective, I have attempted to centre the discourse of my interviewees as much as possible. I also try to evaluate how my social location affects my research process and analysis, and plays upon my status as an insider (Acker 2000).<sup>6</sup> In order to ensure that I do not “construct” my participants’ experiences, and/or collapse them with my own, I try to give as much room to their comments and opinions as can be allowed. Furthermore, in doing research on people that occupy marginalized positions, I have to critically interrogate my stake in documenting Lick’s history, so that I am not exploiting the knowledge they have shared with me.

For example, I am careful in exploring the idea that Lick was a “safe(r) space” that vastly enabled its participants to become professional DJs. The fact that I experienced Lick in that way<sup>7</sup> immediately calls into question my white privilege and how my comfort may have been at the expense of more marginalized participants at Lick.<sup>8</sup> Realizing that not everyone experienced the club the way that I did, I have to try not to paint Lick as a utopia without tensions, conflicts and problems, as those things were always present.<sup>9</sup> Yet, it is hard not to treat Lick as utopic, as its very concept is just that: a nightclub run by and for queer women and other members of Vancouver’s queer community. Moreover, Lick was not under any significant pressure to generate a profit, and therefore the club for the most part was left alone by upper management. This autonomy enabled the club to cater to the needs of its community, as discussed in the next section.

## THE LICK CLUB: A BRIEF HERSTORY

Lick was a depressed bar in an economically depressed area of town with lots of troubles all around it and it was by no means a destination location and so it didn't have a lot of the class issues that I think a lot of the other bars had ... Like along the Granville strip that had the taxis driving up... this was a very different ... there was a lot of work, community work, to create safe space for all gendered peoples (Clark).

A key aspect of Lick's success in developing a network of female, trans and non-binary DJs was that the club occupied a permanent space throughout its eight-year run, an impressive amount time for any type of nightclub to remain open. The fundamental reason that Lick existed for so long is that it was not required to turn a profit, and so it is worth briefly outlining the special circumstances surrounding the creation and financing of the club. The building that housed Lick, The Lotus Hotel, was built in the 1920s and is itself a part of a historically diverse (racially and sexually), working-class, downtown Vancouver community. The Lotus Hotel still occupies the corner of Abbott and Pender Streets, thereby bordering three (formally) low-income and working class neighbourhoods: Gastown, China Town and the Downtown East Side (commonly referred to by its acronym: DTES). During Lick's existence in the 1990s and 2000s, the DTES was branded the poorest postal code in North America. Statistically speaking, the DTES was not the poorest area in North America during the time that Lick was open, but it was close (Skelton 2010).

During the 1980s the Lotus Hotel became a queer destination with political overtones. By example, AIDS Vancouver held their first monthly meetings there in 1983. Throughout the 1990s the hotel contained three different gay bars. The Lotus was a dance club in the basement that held a weekly women-only night on Fridays called Meow Mix. Charlie's Pub had a weekly lesbian night on Saturday (Claveau 2003). Chuck's Pub, which was the smallest venue and eventually became Lick, housed drag shows and gay men's dating game nights (NB: This was in the pre-to-early Internet years). On top of these three queer venues there was a low-income hotel containing Single Occupant Residencies (SORs). Therefore, the physical space that Lick occupied was already constructed on an intersectional foundation layered with race, class, gender and sexuality.<sup>10</sup>

Multi-millionaire Mark James bought the Lotus Hotel in 2000—informed by a mandate to serve the queer community in order to honour his late mother's memory. James' mother was a prominent ally and activist in the struggle for gay rights and visibility in Vancouver. The entire building was renovated over a period of two years and re-opened in 2002. The downstairs venue became the Lotus Sound Lounge and focused on house and techno music, two genres that had not yet become commercialized and therefore heteronormative. Charlie's became Honey Lounge, which focused on more “lounge-y” musical genres such as R&B, Motown and down tempo electronic music. However, the popular weekend drag performances remained. In order to maintain his commitment to maintaining a queer space, James directed that the smallest club, previously Chuck's, remain branded as a gay bar, and initially it was called Milk. Within a year of being open, Stacy Clark and a man who was

part of Vancouver's fetish community approached James with the idea of making Milk into a women-only lesbian bar that also welcomed trans women and men.

As discussed, James was committed to creating and maintaining a queer space. Under different circumstances, Lick would have faced economic pressure to compete in Vancouver's highly saturated nightclub market, whereby management might have had to charge a higher cover at the door, and/or sell liquor at a more expensive price point. Because Lick was able to keep prices down, it was more accessible to women, trans and young people (who earn less income overall due to systemic discrimination in the workforce) than the other gay nightclubs in Vancouver (which primarily catered to gay men).

When Milk was re-branded as Lick in 2003, I was hired to DJ there. I was already spinning next door in Honey Lounge and successfully branding myself as an up and coming DJ in Vancouver's queer and fetish scenes. Lick's management also asked me to find other female DJs for the club. I brought in two DJs that I knew from Vancouver's (very small) female hip-hop scene: DJ T and Skylar Love (who then went by the name DJ De Lux). Both of them were under nineteen years old at the time, and therefore not legally allowed in bars.<sup>11</sup> In retrospect, I have come to see our flouting of the liquor laws as another way by which we carved out our own countercultural space.

### (QUEER) SPACE IS THE PLACE

How Lick became a safe space for transgendered DJs starts with the history of Lick opening as a women's-only bar, period . . . there was a lot of dialogue . . . around . . . well, what does it mean to be a woman and . . . what is the idea of safe space and what about trans people and how does everyone fit in the community and we're looking for a space for this group and this group and this group so we're having community based dialogues . . . and being able to have those dialogues with people in a way that was really productive and community building . . . really led to . . . policy changing and saying, "ok, we're not a women's only bar, we're a queer bar . . . realizing that the idea for Lick was not to create this space for "women-only" but . . . to create this space where people who were not represented by the dominant society could come and feel welcome and supported (Clark).

When Lick opened, its admittance policy was "women-only". However, trans people were also (informally) welcome. Above, Clark elaborates on the events that led Lick to abandon its "women-only" policy after just a few months. As more time passed, the management of Lick decided to also admit heterosexual men who were considerate of being in a queer space. Lick's management had no interest in policing gender; rather, they sought to create a space free from unwanted, straight, cisgendered male attention. Clark described how Lick was created to fulfill the desire to have a fun, nighttime destination for queers: "this was a nightclub. We were coming from a very sex positive, kink positive place. . . . [Lick] changed as a result of . . . embracing queer politics, relative to gender and race and class". For this reason, the club was a safe(r) space to socialize in a queer and sexually charged environment.<sup>12</sup>

In a racially segregated and mainly white city, where—by example—black people comprise 1% of the city’s population (Compton 2016), Lick’s demographic did little more than reflect the general population of Vancouver. That said, several people of colour, including resident DJs, bartenders and management, were key players in shaping Lick’s environment through their programming and presence. Revoked was involved with Lick almost from its inception—first as a DJ and drag king performer, and then as a bartender and a bouncer until finally he became the General Manager of all three venues up to their closure when the hotel was sold in 2011.<sup>13</sup> Revoked was one of the “faces” of Lick, seen behind the bar, on the door, on the decks and onstage hosting drag king performances and other theme nights. In addition to these roles, Revoked acted as Lick’s resident handyman for almost its entire lifespan. Revoked’s role in shaping Lick’s vibe contributed a great deal to the club’s ability to be welcoming to trans and gender fluid patrons, staff, and performers.

During our interview Revoked spoke about the sense of familiarity experienced by attendees and staff, another key factor that made Lick a potent breeding ground for performers and DJs as—again—it was a safer space than mainstream, heteronormative nightclubs: “I believed in the space. I really liked the grassroots fundraising aspect of it. It was really small so it was really intimate and you’d actually meet a lot of people there. And I knew everybody... it was like Cheers for gay people!”<sup>14</sup> Revoked’s comments articulate how Lick’s small size and intimate nature fostered a close-knit community of people who worked, created, and partied together. The fact that Lick was the site of numerous fundraisers for local and grassroots causes also contributed to a sense of an inclusive, caring community.

Lick held almost weekly drag king nights and fundraisers; often, these events were a combination of the two. In keeping with its mandate of community service, Lick would frequently open and staff the venue free for fundraisers. By example, Lick hosted several top surgery fundraising parties for trans men, thereby playing a crucial role in the transition of specific community members. When I interviewed Revoked in 2012, a year after Lick closed, he expressed his grief over losing the club:

It was our goal . . . to try to sponsor somebody[’s] chest surgery every year and raise enough money [through Lick to pay] for that . . . that’s like \$15,000 . . . I was really bummed out [as] that [money] could have gone . . . to a lot of people who . . . needed it.

Despite being a nightclub known for debauchery, Lick was also a political space inhabited by a politicized community.

During the eight years that Lick was open, its DIY ethos encouraged amateur performers and DJs to take up space in the club through practicing and performing. Although Lick was small, dark and dirty, Clark stresses the importance of having a permanent, physical space to build a local queer cultural community:

The reason that I kept participating in [Lick] and [why] it really morphed into what it became was that it provided an opportunity for female promoters, DJs, performers, [and] bartenders to actually have a space to come and work and feel like they were part of it. [T]o the best of our ability we tried to create a really collaborative environment

so that people had the opportunity to come and promote, DJ, dance, do drag [and burlesque] performances . . . and this whole community just kind of grew out of a really cool concept (Clark).

In speaking about the cultural community that formed around Lick, Clark alludes to its significant impact on queer and lesbian culture in Vancouver. Lick also impacted Vancouver nightclub culture in general. Despite the prevalence of sexism and heteronormativity, several of Lick's DJs, including myself, went on to achieve professional status in the wider Vancouver scene and beyond.<sup>15</sup> In addition to Revoked, some of these DJs have been interviewed for this project, specifically Kasey Riot, Skylar Love and DJ Rhiannon. They all describe how Lick played an important part in their entry into Vancouver's DJ scene, and credit Lick's queer and female focus as creating a safe space for DJs to gain chops and cultivate an audience in Vancouver.

### THE POWER OF DJ NETWORKS

Lick was different in that it was predominantly run by queer management, they actually promoted female DJs learning and working there; that had happened in the past but never in that kind of capacity. . . . I think every DJ that we know now probably came through Lick at one point or another. I think it was hugely important . . . [to have] the space . . . you got to have space to perform . . . to practice and play, you have to.<sup>16</sup>

In DJ culture, both real-world and online social networks play a crucial role in a DJ's ability to get booked (Rogers 2010; Farrugia 2012; Weiss 2016). Feminist scholars of DJ culture have demonstrated that female DJs benefit from forming collectives and other formal or informal networks (Gavanas and Reitsamer 2013). Being part of a localized network gives female DJs the opportunity to receive support from colleagues in invaluable ways, such as getting advice on skills and technology, and opportunities to play for an audience (Mitchell 2016; Weiss 2016). For example, Charity Marsh (2002) cites the Canadian Campus and Community Radio (CCR) sector as a common entry way into DJing for women, as well as opportunities created by queer women's spaces that favour female DJs. M. Bredin (1991) also demonstrates how female and queer women's shows on CCR stations provide favourable conditions for women to learn skills from one another and support each other in the process of producing a radio show. A report commissioned by the National Campus Radio Association and funded by Status of Women Canada corroborates these findings (Zelege 2004).

In her study of American female DJs, Rebekah Farrugia looks at the success of San Francisco-based DJ collective Sister SF in providing supportive spaces for female DJs both online and off:

[T]o a large extent the strong presence of women in [electronic/dance music] stemmed from the efforts of SisterSF, a women-centered DJ collective. . . . Sister SF maintained a space for female electronic and dance music DJs both online and offline, by offering a space where they can write themselves into DJ Culture (2004).



Farrugia points to the importance for female DJs to fight for their place in DJ culture, stating that women are engaged in a “constant battle to claim space for themselves” (2004: 237). She identifies how “getting access to bookings at local clubs—which is where most DJs begin their careers—depends heavily on who you know” (2004: 246). Her findings corroborate those of Gavanoas and Reitsamer (2013, 2016) who demonstrate the ways that DJing is gendered in several different cities in Europe, and more specifically, the homosociality of DJ networks.

Reflecting on Lick’s impact on Vancouver nightclub culture, I argue that there were two crucial factors that enabled the club to foster female, trans and non-binary DJs. First, we had a permanent, dedicated space and financial support. The second crucial factor was that Lick’s management had a mandate of booking local, up and coming female, trans and non-binary DJs. Lick provided a space for the “face to face networking” that both Farrugia (2004: 257) and Gavanoas and Reitsamer (2016) identify as an essential function of male DJ culture. While Lick replicates other networks of female DJs in many ways, it was unique in that its network of DJs and other nightlife personnel was rooted in the physical space of the nightclub, and that most members of the network were “out” as lesbian, gay or queer.

In order to get a sense of how many female DJs worked in Vancouver in the decade before Lick opened, I interviewed Leigh Cousins and Mandy Randhawa<sup>17</sup> of Flygirl Productions. Flygirl has produced lesbian parties at various Vancouver venues since the late 1990s; Cousins had already produced lesbian parties in the mid-1990s. While they threw a few parties at Lick during its run, Flygirl events mainly happen in big venues on a monthly basis. Despite Lick technically being “the competition”, Cousins and Randhawa recognized its community standing and supported the club, and Randhawa often came out to party with the crowd.

Cousins stated that prior to Lick opening, there were no dedicated spaces for female DJs to play, nor did she see many female DJs in Vancouver, save for at the lesbian parties produced by Flygirl or one of the few other lesbian promoters in the city. Cousins and Randhawa both felt that there was a marked increase in local female DJs after Lick opened, resulting in a larger pool for Flygirl to select from.<sup>18</sup> They stressed that the reason they booked DJs that played at Lick was because they felt that those DJs were highly skilled and “took their craft seriously” (Cousins). DJ She also felt that Lick’s existence increased the number of female DJs in Vancouver:

I feel like when Lick closed, that was the only place where most of us were playing, you know, aside from a few queer events here and there. And now that Lick is closed, I feel like a lot more female DJs from that pocket of people are getting a lot more play in the city at straight events and different events...definitely there’s a lot more females in the scene for sure.

In fact, all of the people interviewed for this article shared the view that Lick had fostered an increase in skilled and experienced female DJs in Vancouver.

Stacy Clark was residing in Winnipeg and DJing under the moniker Jonny Mexico when I interviewed him over Skype in 2012. It was interesting to discover that Clark had started DJing, as that was not the case when he lived in Vancouver. Rather, Clark filled almost every role at Lick except that of a DJ, working instead as a manager, bartender, bouncer, promoter and drag king. Clark also spoke about the importance of having a physical space such as Lick to foster local DJs,<sup>19</sup> describing how his time at Lick resulted in his surprise at the dearth of female, trans and non-binary DJs in Winnipeg's club scene. To combat that lack, Clark started Queerview, a queer DJ collective explicitly welcoming to queer, trans and non-binary people. When I spoke with Clark, the collective had built a significant presence in Winnipeg over two years. In addition to throwing parties, Queerview collaborated with a queer youth group to throw all ages parties and teach DJing to youth group members.

Clark remarked that it had become more common to see entire bills of female DJs in queer clubs and parties in Winnipeg—women who were not just opening for male DJs, but also headlining. He stated that this increase was due not only to Queerview's initiatives, but also the efforts of other Winnipeg DJs to recruit and train more female, trans and non-binary DJs. By example, Mama Cutsworth started her "DJ School for All Women" in 2012, in response to the lack of female DJs in Winnipeg. When I interviewed her in 2015, she told me that after four years, fifty-five students had graduated from the school.<sup>20</sup> Clark points out that the success of parties featuring female DJs caused local nightclubs to take notice for financial and creative reasons:

I think if this collective wasn't together, that type of progress wouldn't be made with [the] clubs. And it could be a factor of . . . these guys are throwing parties and selling out every time, maybe we need to get in on that . . . [maybe] a female DJ doesn't equate to lost revenue for the night, [rather] it equates to creating a different vibe and actually making some money for the club.

Clark highlights how a nightclub's drive for profit influences DJ booking practices. If female DJs draw crowds, and those crowds spend money, nightclubs will book more female DJs—if they exist locally. By providing a relatively safe space to learn and practice, both Mama Cutsworth and the Queerview collective increased the number of female DJs in Winnipeg. The results achieved by Lick, Queerview and Mama Cutsworth demonstrate the importance of mentors in encouraging burgeoning female, queer and non-binary DJs.

### I WAS MEANT FOR MENTORING YOU (BABY)

I know that when DJs would come in [to Lick] and play they were under a close eye . . . If they had an issue, we were there to help them with it . . . if they felt intimidated, we were there to support them. I think there was just a lot more support versus just kind of showing up at some open decks [night in a club], know what I mean? Like, we would actually book them in and make them a little event and make them a [flier].<sup>21</sup>

Most DJs interviewed for this article stated that Lick had been a crucial aspect of their journey from amateur to professional. Still, I was surprised to learn that several interviewees had either their first ever gig or their first regularly recurring gig (referred to as a “residency”) at Lick. During our interview, Skylar Love listed the names of six DJs that they felt had launched their careers at Lick, including themselves.<sup>22</sup> In addition to providing fledgling DJs with equipment and an audience, Lick also supported DJs by promoting their event and ensuring that they had on-site technical assistance. Love stated that they “wouldn’t be half the DJ I am today if it wasn’t for that place”. When I interviewed Love in 2012, they were managing a Vancouver DJ school in addition to gigging, thereby supporting themselves entirely through DJ-related activities. Yet, Love admitted that they were in a fairly unique situation for a female or non-binary DJ in Vancouver. They stated that there was only one female student out of ten attending the school at that time, and Love made a point of mentoring them: “nowadays I feel like I have to . . . break barriers for women to be able to kind of get in. It’s like, I’m the old mama now and I got my foot in the door, and I’m scooping in my little . . . kin”.

Kasey Riot was DJing and producing music in London, UK, when this article was written in 2017. She started coming to Lick in 2006 while still underage, and cited Love as someone who inspired her to pursue DJing: “Skylar was like a role model . . . because I started going to Lick and I was like, oh, that looks like fun, I want to do that . . . and... female artists in general I think, motivated me to get out there and do my thing”.<sup>23</sup> DJ She also cited Love as a role model as well. DJ She also stressed the importance of seeing local female DJs, thereby having role models that one could actually interact with. After moving to Vancouver, DJ She had her first local gig at Lick, eventually progressing to playing at clubs throughout the city. DJ She also managed Vancouver’s premier record store for DJs, Beat Street Records, from 2007–9. DJ She elaborated on the importance of female DJs being represented in media:

I always kind of looked to female DJs, because, you know, again, just how ridiculous the industry is. At the time I was always hearing about male hip hop DJs, and when following the history of hip hop there was never any light on females, so, when I started getting into house music I was more on the tip of DJ Heather mixes, or Collette.

DJ She revealed that although she did find a few examples of female DJs in popular culture, while growing up in Prince Edward Island and then living in Calgary she did not know of any local female DJs to seek out as mentors. The importance of local DJs to act as role models and mentors was mentioned by almost all of the interviewees.<sup>24</sup>

## CONCLUSION: GONE BABY GONE, LICK IS GONE...

Lick closing has definitely left a void in the scene, and particularly for people that are up and coming, I think it might be a deterrent to people... to not have a safe, comfortable place to kind of get in with people, but, at the same time it’s kind of forced people to look beyond that and kind of open their minds a little bit (DJ She).

Many interview participants expressed concern that the loss of Lick resulted in a lack of spaces wherein underground queer youth culture could develop. Randhawa's comments are salient in this regard: "There were many younger kids that consistently knew that Lick was there, the first space that they would know to go would be Lick. So, that was my first [thought]: where are those kids now?" Both Love and Riot declared that with the loss of Lick came a loss of space wherein to play underground music—the music that most interests them. By example, Love, echoing Randhawa, stated: "I think with the loss of underground . . . options all that's left is Top 40 and mainstream [music], and the mainstream is going to call on a certain demographic . . . I don't think a lot of the younger kids even know . . . about queer culture, so that's even more sad". Love also pointed out that Lick fostered not only female, trans and non-binary DJs, but also an underground, queer musical sound that was cultivated by, and reflected in, the musical styles of the Lick DJs.

DJ She also lamented the loss of Lick, as she felt it anchored a somewhat "stable" queer club scene centered around the space and the opportunities it provided for queer DJs specifically:

At the queer parties I've gone to I haven't seen any up and coming DJs, it's all people who have been around for at least five years... I kind of feel bad for people who are coming up because it's like how do you get into that scene or have access to it, you know what I mean?

Revoked also felt that Vancouver was lacking in queer spaces in general, and commented: "I'm not even worried about [Vancouver having] a queer women's space... I'm more looking for a queer space where people can chill and get their gay on and be whoever they want to be". However, it is interesting that both DJ She and Riot were able to find a silver lining with regards to Lick's closure, as they felt that it forced Vancouver's queer women's scene to branch out into other clubs and spaces in the city.

The title of this article asks if female-focused spaces are still needed to foster the careers of female, trans and non-binary DJs, and the answer is both "yes" and "no". While women-centered spaces are certainly not a necessity for female, trans and non-binary people seeking to become professional DJs, I have demonstrated that women-centered spaces definitely do foster the careers of female, trans and non-binary DJs. Other studies have confirmed the value of female and/or queer networks for fostering female, trans and non-binary DJs in Canada. Recently, David Madden (2016) demonstrated how Montreal's DJ Mini "benefitted from a local mixed queer network of people working in various music-related clusters of street level activity . . . who acted as mentors and collaborators throughout her career trajectory" (34).

There are several examples of past and present all-female DJ networks, crews, club nights and festivals throughout Canada. For example, the Calgary-based DJ collective Girls On Decks was founded in 2003 to create opportunities for women to DJ (Girls On Decks' Facebook page).<sup>25</sup> The fact that this collective is still active after thirteen years demonstrates not only women's avid interest in DJing, but also the continued need for female-based DJ

networks. Created in 2009, the collective DnB Girls is also heavily comprised of Canadian DJs.<sup>26</sup> A further example of the strength of collectives can be found in “Yes Yes Y’all”, a Toronto-based crew comprised of queers of differing genders and ethnicities whose monthly club nights have operated since 2008 and routinely sell out.<sup>27</sup>

Although Lick closed in 2011 when the Lotus Hotel was sold, its spirit lives on in monthly “Lick Club Reunited” parties held in Vancouver that feature former staff, DJs and promoters from the club.<sup>28</sup> In addition, the monthly drag king night “Man Up!” that began at Lick in 2008 is still very popular after relocating to another underground Vancouver venue, The Cobalt.<sup>29</sup> It is apparent that although Lick may be gone, it certainly has not been forgotten.<sup>30</sup>

## NOTES

- 1 Stacy Clark, interview with the author (on Skype), 15 April 2012. All subsequent references are from this interview.
- 2 DJ She, interview with the author (on Skype), 22 April 2012. All subsequent references are from this interview.
- 3 I identify as “queer” because I do not ascribe to cultural norms around sexuality.
- 4 I had a long-running and intimate relationship with Lick as a DJ and promoter for the club. I worked there from its opening during Vancouver Pride in July 2003 until I moved to Toronto in 2009. I played a significant role in the club during the first two years of its existence by DJing there on a weekly basis, hiring other DJs to play at the club, and creating and promoting events at Lick. The frequency with which I DJ’d at Lick during the first few years of its run definitely contributed to my growth as a DJ. Throughout my time at Lick I was committed to the club because I loved being in a female-and-trans-positive, queer cultural space devoted to music, dancing and activism. I was the most comfortable working in that environment, having been involved in feminist and queer activism since my late teens. As a female DJ who had worked hard to establish a name for herself in Vancouver, I had a personal mission to make things easier for other female DJs and to do my best to destabilize the “boys’ club” of DJ networks that predominated Vancouver DJ culture.
- 5 Feminist research is defined by a refutation of claims to objectivity, a reciprocal relationship with the research subject and the concept of reflexivity. In looking at concepts of reflexivity, I am attracted to Brooks et al.’s discussion of Harding’s concept of “strong reflexivity”, which “requires the researcher to be cognizant and critically reflective about the different ways her positionality can serve as both a hindrance and a resource toward achieving knowledge throughout the research process” (Brooks et al. 2007).
- 6 My role as researcher intersects with my involvement with Lick and places me within an indigenous-insider framework, as I both work in, and study, my own field (Hill-Collins 1991; Acker 2000). Basing a theoretical framework on an insider perspective has unique challenges and limitations (Visweswaran 1994). Although I may share a similar worldview as other group insiders, gained by experiencing the problems that characterize our community, multiple aspects

- of identity also shape research experience and not just that of being an in-or-outsider (Hesse-Biber and Piatelli 2007). My subjectivity, including my membership status in relation to those who participated in the research, is a crucial and ubiquitous aspect of the investigation.
- 7 Although I had much busier residencies in bigger nightclubs in Vancouver during the time that I was really “coming up” as a DJ in Vancouver (2003–05), when I played Lick I felt more confident and uninhibited. This feeling of comfort and ease in turn encouraged and enabled me to take more risks, leading to a steady increase in my skill level. In these ways Lick’s low pressure, supportive and intimate environment nurtured my growth as a DJ. I also experienced Lick as a welcome reprieve from the sexism that I often endured while working as a DJ in heterosexual and mainstream nightclubs.
  - 8 Moreover, for a few years my live-in partner was managing the three Lotus venues, which further contributed to my safety and security as an employee of Lick.
  - 9 It must also be stated that Lick was likely not utopian for the residents of the DTES, who were impacted by the role of Lick and the Lotus Hotel as a business contributing to the gentrification of the DTES and the subsequent displacement of its residents.
  - 10 Notably, all three of the aforementioned neighbourhoods have rapidly gentrified since the early 2000s, and as mentioned, the Lotus Hotel has been a part of that gentrification.
  - 11 I knew that Skylar Love was only eighteen when they started at Lick; however, I did not know that DJ T was also underage when she started DJing at Lick until I interviewed her for this article. With regards to the former DJ, perhaps it speaks to the lack of female DJs in Vancouver that I felt it justified to recruit a DJ that was not legally allowed to work in a nightclub. The fact that it did not seem to bother anyone involved with the venue, nor the public it served, perhaps also underscores that Lick flew under the radar of the mainstream nightclub industry in Vancouver along with all of its attendant institutions, including the police and the Liquor Control Board.
  - 12 As a result, things were quite wild during Lick’s first few years. By example, the bathroom toilets were in need of repair after almost every weekend due to people having sex in the stalls. For a sense of how sexually-charged the atmosphere at Lick was, see *Georgia Straight* (2004) and Riot (2011).
  - 13 Revoked was hired by my then-partner to replace him as the general manager of the Lotus Hotel and the three venues when my partner moved to Toronto in 2010.
  - 14 Revoked, interview with the author (on Skype), 24 May 2012. All subsequent references are from this interview.
  - 15 In this case, “professional” connotes that these DJs earned a portion, if not all, of their income from DJing or DJ-related activities, such as throwing and promoting DJ and performance based parties.
  - 16 Leigh Cousins, interview with the author (on Skype), 5 April 2012. All subsequent references are from this interview.
  - 17 Mandy Randhawa, interview with the author (on Skype), 5 April 2012. All subsequent references are from this interview.
  - 18 For example, as the 1990s progressed into the 2000s, Flygirl relied on one local DJ in particular, Tracey D (whom I interviewed in 2014 for my forthcoming dissertation). Flygirl then brought in internationally famous DJs such as Kimberly S from San Francisco for their

- bigger parties, and Tracey D opened. When Tracey D stopped playing for Flygirl during the early 2000s, I was hired in her place, because at the time I was one of only a handful of well-known female DJs, and I had ties to the queer club scene.
- 19 Clark states: “It was a proving . . . ground, a place where they worked through their skills, developed more skills, networked with other DJs, other performers, other promoters, built a resume as well, in a really positive environment”.
- 20 Mama Cutsworth, interview with author (on Skype), 8 April 2015.
- 21 Skylar Love, interview with the author (on Skype), 3 April 2012. All subsequent references are from this interview.
- 22 Three of the DJs that Skylar named were also interviewed for this article: Kasey Riot, Revoked and DJ T.
- 23 Kasey Riot, interview with the author (on Skype), 20 March 2012.
- 24 Referencing the survey that I conducted for my dissertation, approximately 54% of respondents indicated having been mentored by another DJ (or DJs). Moreover, 52% of respondents indicated that they had received support and encouragement from within their social circles. Overall, only 23% of respondents specified that they did not have any mentors or people who enabled or encouraged them to pursue DJing. Therefore, approximately three out of four DJs surveyed affirmed that they had benefitted from some kind of mentorship and/or supportive relationship, again demonstrating the importance of mentors and community with regards to supporting beginner DJs.
- 25 Girls On Decks’ Facebook page: <<https://www.facebook.com/Girls.On.Decks/>>.
- 26 See the DnB Girls’ Facebook page: <<http://www.facebook.com/drumandbassgirls/>>.
- 27 See the Yes Yes Y’all Facebook page: <<https://www.facebook.com/groups/52141184423/>>.
- 28 See Lick Club’s Facebook page: <<http://www.facebook.com/groups/lickclub/>>.
- 29 For more information on “Man Up!” view “King for a Day” on *Shamelessmag.com* (2011). See also the “Man Up!” Facebook page: <<https://www.facebook.com/manupvancouver/>>.
- 30 In 2003, the agency casting extras for the television series *The L-Word* recruited people by posting signs in Lick’s washrooms, and as a result myself and several other Lick staff and patrons ended up as extras on the television series. In this way, part of Lick lives on in the lesbian cultural imaginary of the TV series. Sometimes *The L-Word* used the other two Lotus Hotel venues, the Lotus Sound Lounge and Honey Lounge, as locations for shooting, with Lick utilized as the extras’ holding area.

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