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Still, all of the women I talked to affirmed the spatial significance of the lesbian ‘community’ of Park Slope.

But it’s interesting because we [lesbians and queer women] all talk about Park Slope as this sort of Shangri-La of lesbian safety. ... I guess it doesn’t really matter, I suppose, because if people feel like something’s a lesbian neighbourhood, than by dint of their believing it, it is.
Sarah ‘85 (age 41)

The lesbian or lesbian-queer neighbourhood is a slippery idea, and for many women throughout the world it is an elusive ideal, even in LGBTQ meccas such as San Francisco, London, Berlin, and New York City. Renowned enclaves such as the Castro district, Soho, Schöneberg, West Village, Lower East Side, and Chelsea developed as cities within cities, where LGBTQ people could safely find one another and build communities together. But practices of territory-making and place-claiming are antithetical to women’s economic and social abilities in the urban sphere, and the urban is a historically unwelcoming environment for women. I suggest, then, that lesbian-queer neighbourhoods, then, do not work in ways identical to gay and queer men’s neighbourhoods, but, as Tamar Rothenberg’s quote reveals, they are still spatialised ‘communities’. As Sarah, a participant from my research, describes in the quote above, the Park Slope neighbourhood in Brooklyn is produced as lesbian-queer in the way it affords these women safety and refuge. So what then is a lesbian-queer neighbourhood to lesbians and queer women? What does it afford them in their everyday lives? Dynamics of gender, race, and class have not been fully accounted for in studies of LGBTQ neighbourhoods; however, recent work has begun to confront assumptions
that all LGBTQ people will be granted equal access and can politically and economically maintain such properties over time (Manalansan, 2005; Taylor, 2008; Moore, 2011). This chapter attends to these absences and differences by showing not how these groups have failed to make successful neighbourhoods, but how our imagining and understanding neighbourhoods in new ways affords possibilities for connection, self-understanding, and work towards justice.

Queer theory affords ways of understanding practices, processes, and ways of being that refuse the normative. The work of ‘queering’ heralds and makes room for difference, questions the powers behind the purported ‘normal’, and situates pleasure and politics side-by-side. My deployment of queer theory in this chapter is in step with the idea that queering reveals ‘inconsistencies of social boundaries and their discourse’ (Elder, 1999: 89). In turn, queer theory provides recognition and consideration for alternative perspectives that break from norms. Adding another interpretation, the feminist concept of ‘intersectionality’ is a core organising principle to confront supposed normativities by describing the complicatedness of everyday life. The examination of intersectionalities helps to illuminate how people (and spaces) are co-produced through our multiple subjectivities of gender and sexuality and race and class and age and generation and so on (Crenshaw, 1996; Taylor, 2007). Together this feminist-queer frame uses the standpoint of experience to unpack not only normative values but limiting and unjust spatial models as well.

Drawing from inter-generational group interviews with 47 lesbians and queer women who came out between 1983 and 2008 with mental mapping and artefact sharing exercises, as well as archival research, I examine and reinterpret the ways these women experience and find meaning in the space of the lesbian-queer neighbourhood. Participants were attached to the idea of neighbourhoods as important lesbian-queer spaces even when their lived experience often did not match the ‘typical’ idea of neighbourhood. I was curious to understand what spoke to participants in their experiences and ideas of this type of space. As such, I pay special attention to what the lesbian-queer neighbourhood affords participants over time. In this chapter I focus on Park Slope, the LGBTQ mecca of New York City’s only lesbian neighbourhood is not the only one in the U.S. I suggest that the meaning and survival of Park Slope is not predicated on retaining physical territory. Rather, I propose it is derived from the mobile, fragmented, fleeting social, cultural, historic, economic, and political elements of a neighbourhood. Lesbians and queer women continually piece together these elements to claim not only a politics of visibility but also a politics of and space for recognition. I argue that the model of the LGBTQ neighbourhood must be queered, that is, rethought against the grain of normative paradigms of property ownership-as-success, in order to address the experiences and concerns of women, working class people, and people of colour. Rather than