



Feminism and Bar in the 1960s to 1970s in America

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Abstract. Breaking down racial segregation was a crucial part of the American civil rights movement, but spatial segregation was not only a problem for blacks but also one of the issues that women needed to address. This paper pays attention to the gendered spaces in America during the 1960s and 1970s. It shows that men occupied many public commercial and civic spaces, especially bars. So, during the second wave, women were committed to breaking down gender segregation in public, no less than the civil rights movement of the same period, gaining access to some physical spaces formerly reserved for men. The conclusion drawn from the work is that the bar, as a specific public space, played an important role in liberating women and advancing the feminist movement. This work points out that how feminism was connected with physical space, which is a new perspective to see the second wave.

Keywords: feminism, the second wave, gendered space, bar

1 Introduction

Although women still faced spatial segregation in many public spaces until the 20th century, this issue did not get enough attention in the academic circle now. When discussing segregation, people first think of racial segregation and the civil rights movement, women issues were always ignored. But if we focus on the second wave of feminism, most studies discuss women's economic and employment rights, reproductive rights, education rights, etc., the spatial segregation for women remained a blank on both sides.

In Lynn Hunt's book, *Inventing Human Rights A History*, she has mentioned that the popularity of the novel evoked people's empathy in the 18th century. This helped women gain more autonomy in private spaces, such as in family matters or love affairs, but not much help for women in the public sphere [1]. Anne Enke's monograph, *Finding the Movement: Sexuality, Contested Space, and Feminist Activism*, gave enough attention to women in public space. He focused on the "exclusions and hierarchies" deeply embedded in public spaces, used this new perspective to illustrate the second wave of feminism. For Enke, feminism was deeply influenced by physical public spaces, and these spaces can also consolidate women's status and identity. As he states, Feminism took shape as a popular movement around the limitations and possibilities of local geographies. And the creation of women's institutions in commercial and civic

spaces (bars, ball fields, bookstores, and coffeehouses) proves that women challenged patriarchal, racist and heterosexist practices [2].

Bars play an essential part in the public commercial space. As Enke states, “whether conventionally heterosexual or queer, bars organized sociality, social status, and social norms [2].” It is because the bar had always been unwelcoming to female customers and proposed many norms to them that women across race, class, and gender expression used the marketplace to make collective claims on public. Black lesbian women in Detroit established Dollar parties to constitute a community-minded culture and finally took over weekend management of the Barbary Coast Bar in the early 1970s[2]. White gay women organized many other women in the Twin cities to turn the Town House bar in St. Paul into “the women’s bar” by 1975, creating a space where women could be treated with more respect. Finally, bars and such commercial spaces gradually became the key sites of women’s activism, and these women became a constituency capable of making collective political demands on the public landscape[2].

This research will build on Enke’s idea by further focusing on what feminists did to break down gender segregation and discrimination in public spaces. Enke has already mentioned that lesbians promoted the emancipation of women in public spaces through bar spaces. But at the same time, women’s organizations, feminists, and many ordinary women were also speaking out against gender segregation in public space, and their actions were very important to reversing the plight of women. This paper will focus on the bar space, paying attention to a case, the McSorley’s Old Ale House, which had served only men for 116 years, to see how women and feminist organizations protested and made progress against this gender segregation. There were a lot of news reports about the McSorley when they first opened their door in 1970. By using various newspapers at that time, this paper will recover the whole thing from why this bar opened to its influence. In the work, feminism and space were interwoven with each other, spatial segregation led to the rise of feminism, and women finally reshaped the public space by their efforts, greatly contributed to the advancement of feminism.

2 The history of gendered space

Gender segregation in public spaces actually has a fairly long history. The idea that men dominate public space and women belong in the home has been around throughout the history. Even as the concept of human rights emerged in the 18th century, it failed to change women’s dilemmas in public space. Women did not have enough public space open to them. Women were not allowed to enter the café, which was a very important public place to get news and discuss politics. Women must be accompanied by a man if they want to go to the concert hall. Many of the modern sports also belong to men, like soccer, swimming, cycling, tennis, ice skating, both athletes and spectators were all male, not surprisingly, the stadiums as well as the sports clubs were also occupied by them [3].

In the 20th century, with the growth of feminism, women did gain more rights in the public place. However, public space has been dominated by men for so long that gendered spaces still remained even in the 1960s and 1970s. Many commercial spaces, like

restaurants, bars, and hotels, only served men. A women publications editor in Oakland called Arleen Krippene said, "there are not enough decent places in downtown Oakland where women can go for a quiet drink and a business lunch [4]." This situation was not only in Oakland. Miss Morris was refused to get in The Recess restaurant and Back Room bar in Detroit because the manager said that male-only is the original concept and women sitting alone was a solicitation for men [5]. Some places are not completely unavailable for women, but they only recruit escorted women or only served women at certain times. The Salamandre Bar in Detroit did not let women in because a woman was not with a man. It also did not serve women at lunch hour because of the discrimination that women would not give enough tips [5].

The club was a place that can reflect the sexual segregation more directly because many of them have the tradition of only allowing male members to participate. In 1970, when the Gridiron Club's annual stag dinner was held at the Statler Hilton on a Saturday evening, women journalists and many members of Women's Liberation picketed outside for excluding women in the stag dinner [6]. In 1974, dozens of women invaded Posh S.F. club, a commercial club in the financial district, to protest a 123-year-old policy that excluded females from their membership. This policy made a lot of women embarrassed when they came to the club's building with their male clients for lunch [7].

3 Women and bar

During the 20th century, most women wanted bars to become a convenient place to sit or have a drink, and at the same time, they could avoid harassment. "I'd much rather sit at the bar," said one girl who occasionally likes to drop in for a drink when she's out shopping. "The bartender can always run interference if some man does bother me. I'm in there to have a pleasant drink, not to find company [8]."

But the reality was just the opposite. Instead of providing a space for women to rest, the bar created new problems for them. A large number of bars that did not welcome women or had sexism towards women made women feel so awkward in the bar space. Many bars in the 1960s and 1970s did not serve unescorted women because they thought these women were troublemakers. They believed that bars were men's territory. A waiter in the Sands Motor Hotel seemed astonished when a woman wanted to sit at the bar. He refused this woman based on the bar's long-standing rules that did not allow women to enter.

4 Mcsorley's case

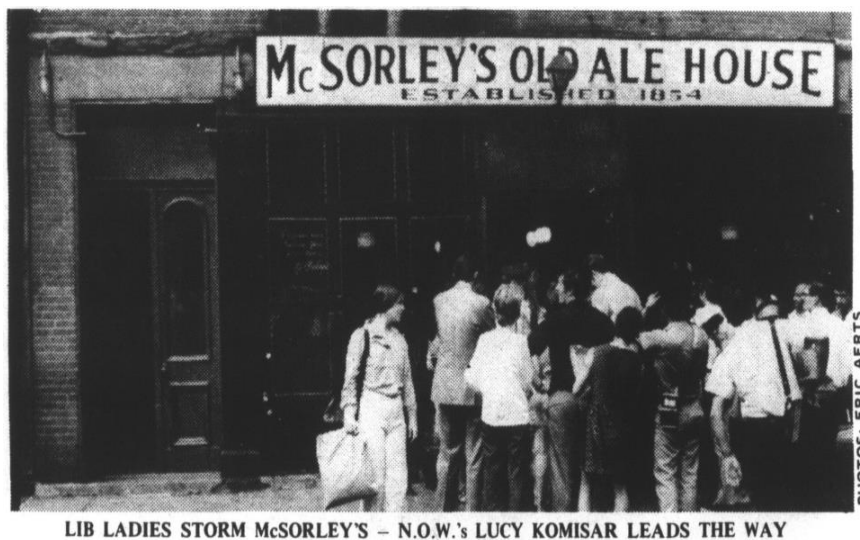
McSorley's Old Ale House was just one of the many bars that did not allow women to enter until the 1970s. It's one of the oldest bars in New York city, with over one hundred years of history. In its 116 years of business, the bar only allowed men to enjoy its beer, ale, strong cheese, and onions.

But all things changed in 1970. In 1969, two women, Faith Seidenberg and Karen DeCrow, who were officials of the National Organization of Women, were refused

admittance to the bar [9]. This incident angered the two women, so they appealed to the court. On June 25th 1970, the federal district court judge broke the gender segregation in McSorley's bar. The judge thought it was reasonable that men desire to escape from the gaze of their wives and women to have their own space but "The answer is that Mcsorley's is a public place, not a private club, and that the preferences of certain its patrons are no justification under the equal protection clause. Such preferences, no matter how widely shared by defendant's male clientele, bear no rational relation to the suitability of women as customers of Mcsorley's [9]." Judge Walter R. Mansfield not only affirmed the right of women to enter public places but also attempted to break the sexism in the bar, which is another important claim for women. Just as what he said in the court, "Outdated images of bars as dens of coarseness and iniquity and of women as peculiarly delicate and impressionable creatures in need of protection from the rough and tumble of unvarnished humanity will no longer justify sexual separatism [9]." Besides the judge, the new city law signed by Mayor John V. Lindsay further forced the McSorleys to open the door to women. In 1970, John V. Lindsay signed a law prohibiting discrimination in public places on the grounds of sex [10]. After this law, women headed for going to the oldest drinking bar.

However, even though women were allowed to get to the McSoelrly's by law, they were still not welcomed and faced much discrimination. One of the first female customers was the National Organization of Women vice president, Lucy Komisar [10]. On August 10th, 1970, she went to the Mcsorley's shortly after 4 p.m., but she could not get in at the first time. But Dennis Lynch, a waiter in the McSorley's, prevented her from entering. Although Lucy had provided her driver's license as proof that she was over 21, the writer still did not let her in. She was told that she had to present either a birth certificate or a draft card, and that any other identification would be regarded by the management as insufficient proof of age [11]. Because of this, Lucy and the writer had a conflict, Lucy tried to push past the writer, and they struggled until the bar owner, Daniel Kirwan, let her in. Then, she also got into an argument with a young man who showed her an obscene poem he scribbled on a piece of paper. Lucy tried to snatch the paper while the man insulted her with words and dumped a stein of ale over her head. The young men had soon been escorted outside, and the night manager apologized to her [10].

These things were no doubt a shame for Lucy, so she headed back to the bar two days later and organized women to have a protest [11]. She was back at 8 p.m. on the evening of August 12th, lining up with her sisters to have their IDs checked. In Figure 1, the bar was crowded with people outside, there was no doubt that women's protesting got a lot of attention from both men and women. Then the men inside started to jeer when they saw women stepping in, and they yelled, "Go home," "Get out of here." And suddenly, the door was shut by the doorman. He explained that he was forced to close the door because the bar was becoming overcrowded, which was clearly an excuse. Fourteen women were left outside, and only six were in. Lucy made her way through the crowd at the bar and handed Dennis Lynch the summons with a patrolman armed. The men in the bar started yelling again, "Throw her out!". Finally, the patrolman ordered Lynch outside, and Lucy also went with them. The remaining feminists still stayed in the bar though men did not welcome them[11].



LIB LADIES STORM McSORLEY'S – N.O.W.'s LUCY KOMISAR LEADS THE WAY

Fig. 1. Lib Ladies Storm McSorley's [11]

5 Bar space and feminism

5.1 Bar organize different women

It is evident that from the 1960s to the 1970s, feminism became concerned about some physical

spaces that were formerly reserved for men and were committed to breaking down gender segregation in public spaces. The McSorley's case has attracted a lot of media coverage and feminist organizations' concern, particularly the National Organization of Women, which was deeply involved in this case. The vice president's two visits to the bar were enough to show their concerns. And according to the NOW's document, they also had added new ideas and actions in 1969, focusing on "male-only" establishments and designing a "Public Accommodations Week" to demonstrate, sit in, and picket around the bar and restaurants in the nation [12]. Their actions at the McSorley's bar were a continuation of this commitment.

In addition to feminist organizations, gender segregation in public space did bring more so-called non-feminists into action. These women were not political feminists, they were simply fighting for the necessary power in their daily lives, and such activism furthered the development of feminism. Wendy, a girl who first wasn't interested in breaking the tradition of McSorley's, was called up by her sisters to liberate the all-male bar in April 1970 [13]. She didn't do it because of her political stance but because she thought women had the right to enter the place where men had ruled for so long. It was time to break down the tradition that women were always placed at the bottom of society's ladder in public spaces. These women raised a large framed headline, "Oldest Bar in U.S. Won't Allow Women" and sat in the bar to protest [13]. Also, on the day

that McSorley's are forced to open their door to women, besides Lucy, a half dozen women had been inside the bar by 5 p.m. One of them was Maureen Medonald, a psychiatric nurse, dressed in a scoop-necked sweater and dungarees, sipping ale quietly at a back table with some friends. She said, "I came because it's a matter of principle, even though I'm not connected with the women's liberation movement [10]." Through the reaction of these women, it could be seen that there were more concerns about spatial segregation, which accelerated the emancipation of women in public spaces.

While feminists were one of the major forces behind the liberation of the bar, they were almost there for political goals rather than personal needs. Lucy, the vice president of the National Organization of Women, said on her first visit to the McSorley's that the men there were lower-class men who had a lot of problems with their masculinity [10]. Those who claimed to be feminists were mostly educated, upper-middle-class women who didn't want to get involved in such a messy place with some lower class. They went simply because of their organization's political opposition to sexism.

However, many women acted because they wanted to get into the bar. Some women just wanted to rest or have a drink in the bar but were eventually refused, so they protested by publishing their experiences in the newspaper. For example, Joan McEwan showed her anger in an interview about how the waiter turned her down for trying to read at a bar table at night in the Sands' cocktail lounge [8]. At the same time, lesbians were thirsty to get a place in the public to have their social circle, just like in gay bars. But they were usually excluded from bars because of their female identity [2]. That's why Enke says that in breaking down spatial segregation in public space, women can be united regardless of political position, race, class, and sexual orientation [2]. "Bar space" effectively organized a variety of women to work together for the liberation, though they might have different goals.

5.2 Bar destroy discrimination

Through the space of the bar, women were also seeking broader equality. They not only wanted the same right to go to all public places as men but also to be treated with the same services as men, without discrimination.

The bar is a space that was always filled with all kinds of discrimination against women, especially in all-male bars. Men always thought that unescorted women in the bar tend to prostitute. Even the bartenders only hint at the most delicate term, like "commercial girls" or "girls looking for the action," these made a lady feel offended [8]. In the McSorley's case, when men saw women come in, they always yelled, "Why don't you go home where you belong" or "This ain't no place for a lady [11]." It showed that women were still bound to the family, which was what women wanted to overturn. There were also beliefs that women are not capable of drinking or should not drink. Like the manager, Daniel O'Connell-Kirwan in the McSorley's said in response to the opening for women, "I've never seen a woman eat Liederkrantz and drink ale [14]." Some bar even has a dress code for women. The idea that women must dress in skirts while pants belong to men was strengthened in the bar because some bars do not allow women in pants to enter [2]. In McSorley's, a man protested to a woman, "I am not a

lady; I've got on my pants, see [11]?" This is clearly discrimination against women based on dress code.

The presence of women in bars and their struggle to gain equal rights in the bar space has undoubtedly helped liberate women from these prejudices further. In this way, women were intended to prove that the old concept, women were belong to home and men were the dominator in the public space, was outdated, they should have the same rights, enjoy the same service as men in the public.

5.3 Bar liberate more public space

Finally, by protesting and fighting for the bar space, the Civil Rights Act was proved to be equally applicable to women, providing strong support to feminists further to overturn spatial segregation and discrimination in public spaces. In McSorley's case, the judge recognized that McSorley's bar, as a public place, must comply with equal protection laws [9]. This was undoubtedly a step forward in the law that amended the Civil Rights Act to prohibit discrimination because of sex in public accommodation. However, some women groups pointed out that it may have some limitations because it only applied to the place where the state could control it. As one member of the New York bar said, "The McSorley's case itself had a very serious purpose, and it culminates a series of legal actions asserting the right of women to public accommodations [15]." In Pennsylvania, in 1969, women's and civil rights groups also won the fight and have access to restaurants and bars barring women at lunch because the Governor signed a law to prohibit discrimination in housing and public accommodations, just as the one in New York [16].

Not only making more bars and other commercial space opened for women, they even created new space only for themselves. While women fight the all-male bars, some of them even created women bars as a revenge, to provide a nice place for them to relax or meet others. In 1972, two students in the College of St. Elizabeth, Sue George and Sue Bragga, planned to establish a rathskeller managed solely by women as their answer to the all-male McSorley's bar [17]. This women's bar opened on the April 7 in 1973 and men were excluded from it, only admitted as guests of women students. The most usual guests were male professors, and just as the founder Bragga said "it provides an informal place to entertain and meet" [17]. In 1972, Sean and Peggy Doyle also held the first "Ms. Night" in their East Side bar in the New York [18]. The bar was not closed to man but the night was definitely controlled by women, the newspaper describes the bar as "womaned by women". Not only customers, the service staff were women too, and women customers were encouraged to sidle up to male strangers and offer to buy them drink, which is usually reversed in a bar [18].

6 Conclusion

In conclusion, the McSorley's case represented women's victory in fighting for equal rights in public space during the 1960s to 1970s. Women successfully had access to some physical spaces formerly reserved for men. Moreover, it was undoubtedly a step

forward that the bar space finally organized different women together, breaking down a series of discriminations and liberating more space for women. By linking feminism and public space and analyzing a specific case, this work focuses on more grassroots movements and diverse voices, which were always neglected. It also provides a new perspective for studying the second wave of feminism, focusing on the gendered space. Further research can be focused on other commercial or civil spaces and how women transform social space after breaking down gender segregation in society.

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