

Nova Scotia

Halifax's only LGBTQ-dedicated bar closed last year. It may be part of a trend

Expert in gender and health says this decline may lead to a shift in more affirming and safe places

[Feleshia Chandler](#) · CBC News · Posted: Apr 26, 2021 6:00 AM AT | Last Updated: 4 hours ago



From left: Tim Humphrey, Jason Spurrell and Brad McRae, also known as the Queens of the Glamazon, perform on stage at Menz and Mollyz. (Submitted by Brad McRae)

Menz and Mollyz, Halifax's only bar dedicated to the LGBTQ community, closed last year. A year later there is no replacement.

Many businesses have closed during the pandemic. But when it comes to LGBTQ-dedicated bars, a Dalhousie University professor who specializes in health promotion and LGBTQ health and gender says losing them could be a symptom of the overall decline of queer bars across Canada.

"Mobilization and community-connected places have kind of slowly dissolved, either because of economic reasons or because the demographic who inhabited these spaces are now older and the younger generation is not as fussed about having a gay space," said Jackie Gahagan.

Gahagan said businesses serving the queer community, like bookstores and bars, have been on the decline for years.

A study called ["Are Gay Bars Closing?"](#) cited that 36 per cent of LGBTQ bars in the U.S. closed between 2007 and 2019.

It seems like Canada is following suit, which doesn't surprise Gahagan.

Menz and Mollyz wasn't the only LGBTQ-dedicated bar to close in Canada during the pandemic.

The Beaver, a well-known dive bar in Toronto, closed last July. Fredericton's Boom! Nightclub, the only gay bar in that city, [closed permanently](#) in June.

Even long before the pandemic, drag venues such as the 30-year-old Centretown Pub and nearby EDGE Club and Lounge in Ottawa shut their doors.





Jacqueline Gahagan says the younger queer generation may not be as interested in queer bars. (Submitted by Jacqueline Gahagan)

"There's political, economic, and social reasons as to why this is all happening," said Gahagan.

Gahagan said the political times have changed. She suggests that perhaps now, due to progress the LGBTQ community has made over the years, there may not be the same need for dedicated spaces as there once was.

It hasn't been financially feasible to stay open for some, either due to lack of patrons or rent being too high, especially during the pandemic, said Gahagan.

She said people have more options when it comes to meeting other LGBTQ people. "There's newer technology that allows people to connect."

Jason Spurrell, a local drag queen and long-time performer at Menz and Mollyz, said society hasn't advanced to the point of no longer needing LGBTQ-dedicated venues for those 18 and over.

Spurrell, who performs as Rouge Fatale, said gay bars are still considered a safe place for many young and old queer people he knows to gather and connect with like-minded people, especially in smaller communities.

"We go there to grieve when we lose somebody," said Spurrell. "We go there to celebrate during Pride. We go there to celebrate any milestone within our lives as a group."



From left: Garry Williams, at the piano, Kristi Anderson and Zach Faye of DaPoPo Theatre, performing at an event in 2013 at Menz and Mollyz. (Emily Jewer)

Garry Williams, co-artistic director of DaPoPo Theatre, said the company performed at Menz and Mollyz for years and losing the space has been difficult.

"Everyone should have the right to a public space," said Williams. "I think for a certain section of the queer demographic losing Menz bar means they are being denied that right. In our case, as queer artists, for a queer artist to thrive they need queer-inclusive space."

Williams also said that just because a bar says its LGBTQ-friendly doesn't mean the space is welcoming.

"You run the risk of feeling that you're being tolerated, or fetishized or tokenized in other spaces," said Williams.

Gahagan said she agrees that queer spaces are important, but maybe a lack of venues like Menz and Mollyz will encourage other establishments to work with the LGBTQ community to make existing spaces more safe.

"This sort of ongoing decline of the queer community might be an inevitable part of our history," said Gahagan. "Maybe it's [about] finding new ways of connecting with people in virtual spaces but also pushing the envelope and make all spaces queer-friendly and affirming."

Spurrell said he's optimistic about establishments coming together to help make LGBTQ people feel more welcomed in the province but this isn't the end of LGBTQ bars in Nova Scotia.

"I've seen us fall to nothing in this city before and have it explode back up again," Spurrell said. "It's the way the nightlife community lives," said Spurrell.

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