“House and Techno Broke Them Barriers Down”: Exploring Exclusion through Diversity in Berlin’s Electronic Dance Music Nightclubs

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ABSTRACT

Berlin is heralded worldwide as being a city that is open, innovative and diverse: a true multicultural metropolis. Music plays a central role in the city’s claim to this title. Go to any one of Berlin’s many notorious alternative nightclubs and you will hear techno, house and electronic dance music blasting out to hoards of enthusiastic partygoers. Many of these clubs and their participants claim that these parties represent diversity, acceptance, equality and tolerance: Spaces within which social divisions are suspended, difference is overcome and people are united. This ubiquitous discursive assertion is referred to in this thesis as a “diversity discourse”. This “diversity discourse” will be deconstructed and situated within a wider political context, with a specific focus on perceptions of race, ethnicity, sexuality and gender. Engaging with theories of intersectionality, post-colonial theory (looking specifically at Jasbir Puar’s important work on homonationalism) and employing qualitative methods such as in-depth interviews and autoethnographic inquiry, it will be argued that the “diversity discourse” works as a mask to conceal a reality of social segregation. Far from being sites of equality and diversity, it will be suggested that access to these nightclubs is premised on the possession of societal privilege. That being said, it will also be argued that research into EDM nightclub participation refrain from viewing these clubs within a binary framework of “good” or “bad”; Rather, they should be seen as complex sites of ambivalence, within which multiple identities are acted out and explored. The project contributes to the current body of work within the (post-) discipline of intersectional gender studies, arguing for the need for theorisations in the field to encompass notions of intersecting privilege and disadvantage.

Keywords: Electronic dance music, EDMC, nightlife, diversity, post-colonial theory, homonationalism, intersectionality, race, sexuality, gender, identity, discourse, multiculturalism, Berlin, Germany.
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Think of the city of Berlin and many people think of the vast array of nightclubs and parties on offer. These nightclubs are known for their long operating hours, their impressive line-ups, their openness and their international and diverse crowds. Electronic dance music (EDM) scholarship often looks to Berlin for examples of how EDM – as both a genre of music as well as a “scene” and a movement – has developed, with the fall of the Berlin Wall often being cited as a pivotal moment that symbolised freedom, acceptance and the smashing of social barriers. Since this historical moment there has been a prevalent, discursive understanding of Berlin’s EDM nightclubs as being spaces where all crowd members are equal, that welcome “everyone” and that attract a “diverse” array of people. It is as though these nightclubs have managed to temporarily suspend social divisions and unite all people under one roof.

I have lived in Berlin for the last four years now and have spent a great deal of that time enjoying the nightlife that Berlin has to offer. I have attended all of the clubs that are to be looked at in this thesis and have spent countless hours sharing moments with the people (friends as well as strangers) I interacted with there. These experiences have been exciting, invigorating, humorous, bonding and exhausting. That being said, there has always been something somewhat unsettling about these social settings, the enjoyment of which seemed to be premised on their exclusiveness. I began to become frustrated when I would witness what I saw to be racial discrimination by bouncers at the doors of these clubs. I was also increasingly disheartened when I would frequently hear homophobic and sexist comments from numerous participants, mentioned in passing conversation, which were used to justify social segregation when it came to EDM nightclubs in the city. All of this seemed to me to be happening whilst participants were at the same time proudly boasting about how uniquely accepting and open these nightclubs were. Upon looking into the growing body of work in the discipline of EDMC¹ (electronic dance music cultures) I saw an evident lack of critique

¹ For clarity, I want to highlight my differing use of the abbreviations “EDM” and “EDMC”. With “EDM” I am referring simply to “electronic dance music”: A genre of music that will also be used extensively to describe the type of nightclubs that are to be analysed in this thesis. “EDMC” – standing for “electronic dance music cultures” – on the other hand refers to an overall area of scholarly interest, which (unlike my thesis) may include the researching of electronic dance music spaces that are not limited to nightclubs (such as raves or warehouse parties).
when it came to this “diversity discourse”, something that I saw as very much needed. The personal experiences described here were the catalysts for this research.

One may question why research into an area so seemingly frivolous and hedonistic would be necessary. I agree with sociologist and cultural anthropologist Kira Kosnick who writes, “It would be a grave fallacy to assume that public leisure is simply a domain of personal freedom, untouched by the constraints and power dynamics that shape young people’s lives in other domains” (Kosnick 2015: 15). I believe leisure spaces are important sites of social research, as it is from there that we can see and better understand broader patterns of social segregation. With this research I hope to further understandings of social inequalities and the processes and institutions through which they are maintained as well as to contribute to critical theorising of intersectional identity formation.

**Aims and Research Questions**

The overarching aim of this thesis is to critically look at the representation of crowd participation of EDM nightclubs in Berlin. It will examine the popular discursive understanding of them as places within which “everyone is welcome”, where social hierarchies are broken down and “diversity” is celebrated (this shall be referred to as a “diversity discourse” in the thesis). I will problematise and complicate this discursive construction, paying particular attention to representations of race, ethnicity, sexuality and gender. My interest is not in examining the truth or falsity of these claims, but rather to examine the operating logic of this discourse. With this in mind, my main research questions will be:

- What role do these nightclubs play in participants’ lives?
- How can we understand the claim of EDM nightclubs as inclusive of *everyone*?
- Which accounts of inclusion and exclusion can be traced in EDM participants’ representations of these spaces?
- What role do ideas of “diversity” play in participants’ experiences of EDM spaces?

With this thesis I hope to contribute to the body of EDMC scholarship with an intersectional feminist and post-colonial perspective. I will ask what the incorporation of privilege into
analyses of social disadvantage and discrimination might do for broadening perspectives in this field.

**Thesis Outline**

In order to fulfil these aims and to answer these research questions, my analysis will develop in a number of different stages. I will begin firstly by introducing the reader to the “diversity discourse” that I mention here and give some historical and contemporary context to its inception and current use. I will then look at the role of these EDM nightclubs in aiding participants in exploring and performing aspects of their identities, as well as the emotional and personal attachments that many have to them. I will then focus on highlighting the potential cracks in this discourse and look at the contradictions in my interviewees’ claims to diversity. After that I will highlight the pervasiveness of Othering practices that occurred during my interviews (as well as at club nights that I myself attended), mechanisms that my participants, in my interpretation, used in order to make sense of their own descriptions of social exclusion. I will also attempt to theorise identity as multifarious and changing in different spaces, times and contexts. Finally I will provide my own theorisations about the role of this “diversity discourse in participants’ experiences of EDM spaces.
This thesis will build on a feminist poststructuralist epistemology, which emphasises the importance of language, textual analysis and theory-making (Holvino 2010: 258) and critiques discourses that encourage universalising grand narratives. Within a poststructuralist analysis, identity is to be understood as multiple, unstable and inessential (ibid.), intersecting with various identity categories in different ways. This undertaking also importantly calls for reflexivity on the part of the researcher (2010: 259) and building on postmodernist ideas about subjectivity, critiques the belief that a researcher is able to detach themself from “the world and the objects of study, and then form an aloof and elevated position of surveillance”, producing “objective knowledge” (Lykke 2010: 4–5). The thesis aims to incorporate these notions that challenge traditional ways of “doing science” and “doing research”.

This idea that categorisations of identity intersect with one another is one that is closely associated with the theory (and methodology) of intersectionality. Intersectionality was first named as such by critical race theorist Kimerlé Crenshaw, who wrote the seminal article ‘Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics and Violence against Women of Colour’ in 1989 (although intersectionality dates back to the 1970s with activists such as the Combahee River Collective developing similar notions) (1981). Intersectionality places a focus on the intersections between different forms of oppression and domination. It proclaims that people’s experiences are marked by not one, but multiple identities, which intra-act (Barad 2003, cited in Lykke 2010: 50-52) and affect how people experience inequality and privilege. The development of intersectional theory was pivotal for feminist theory, because it highlighted the danger of viewing oppressions as isolated from one another and stressed the need to understand them as constantly interrelating. Looking specifically at the unique experiences of women of colour in the US, Crenshaw drew attention to the way in which Black women can be left marginalised by their exclusion from discourses surrounding anti-sexism and anti-racism (Crenshaw 1991: 1243). Crenshaw’s work has been adopted, adapted and used by numerous writers and academics in various different fields, with many focusing on the numerous intersections of, for example, race, ethnicity, nationality, age, caste, class, dis/ability, gender and more. My thesis will pay particular attention to the representations of race, ethnicity, sexuality and gender, acknowledging that they are categories that interweave
with one another and this interweaving contributes to individual’s particular experiences (experiences that are often overlooked).

The discussion in this thesis is also situated within a post-colonial theoretical framework, which I see as complimenting poststructuralism well. Post-colonialism is a theory that seeks to respond to the effects of the cultural legacies of colonialism and imperialism. A major contention of post-colonial studies is that European colonial domination constitutes global repercussions in the contemporary world (Childs and Williams 2014: 3). A major contribution to the post-colonial theorising, that will feature in this thesis, is the discursive understanding of the world within binary couplings, such as East/West, dominant/subordinate, barbaric/civilised, familiar/exotic, normal/abnormal, good/bad, gay/straight etc. The creation of these dichotomous identities (centering on Europe and “its Others”) was central to European expansion and the maintenance of European hegemonic power (Loomba 2005: 43). In his infamous book ‘Orientalism’ (that is said to have inaugurated post-colonial discourse) (Loomba 2005: 43), Edward Said argues that “orientalism” was (indeed still is) “a political vision of reality whose structure promoted the difference between the familiar (Europe, the West, “us”) and the strange (the Orient, the East, “them”) (Said 2013/1979: 43). This practice of separating an “us” and a “them” is what is known as “Othering”. Crucially, Othering creates an exclusionary matrix (Culea 2014: 95) within which those with power are able to decide the rules and the norms for those designated binary opposites. These forceful historical narratives very much influence contemporary thinking and politics and I will argue that these EDM “scenes” are no exception to this.

Post-colonial theory and intersectional feminist theory have much in common, in that they are both “oppositional discourses which attempt to redress an imbalance in society and culture” (Childs and Williams 2014: 198). Post-colonial feminist theory was developed as a crossover of these two fields of interest. Broadly speaking, feminist post-colonial theory centres on drawing attention to the way that anti-racist and anti-colonialist discourses have ignored gendered power differentials, whilst also arguing critically against white, Western, middle-class feminist discourses that overlook issues of race in their work (Lykke 2010: 53). Feminist post-colonial theory aims to challenge historical, patriarchal and colonialist binary understandings of the world.

One such example of feminist, post-colonial (and queer) theorising is Jasbir Puar’s work on “homonationalism”; something that will be called upon extensively in this thesis. As
I will explain in the sub-section “Othering mechanisms”, Puar developed the conceptual frame of homonationalism in Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times (2007), “for understanding the complexities of how ‘acceptance’ and ‘tolerance’ for gay and lesbian subjects have become a barometer by which the right to and capacity for national sovereignty is evaluated” (Puar 2013: 337). In this thesis I will explore how the nationalist and racist co-optation of sexual identity has impacted upon my participants’ understandings of crowd diversity in these EDM nightclubs.

I see deconstruction as a methodology that is in accordance with this theoretical and epistemological framework and it will be used when interpreting my interviews (and autoethnographic excerpts). As literary theorist and cultural critic Martin McQuillan explains, deconstruction is a methodology that is often associated with poststructuralism (McQuillan 2001: 2). Deconstruction usually involves the taking apart of a text “along the structural ‘fault lines’ created by the ambiguities inherent” in it (Holland 2006). It is helpful here because it encourages one to “rethink the conceptual and non-conceptual foundations of the Western tradition” (McQuillan 2001: 8). Derrida claimed that the whole of Western thought is structured in terms of binary oppositions, one of which is always privileged over the other (ibid.). The task of deconstruction then is to identify and undo these binary oppositions and to reverse the binary logic (McQuillan 2001: 12). As we will see, undoing this binary logic will take a central role in the analysis of participants’ perceptions of EDM nightclub diversity.
METHOD, MATERIAL AND ETHICS

Considering my research questions, as well as my epistemological standpoint and choice of theoretical framework discussed above, I decided that the best methods to carry out this research would be interviews and autoethnographic inquiry. I felt this would be the most effective and interesting way to respond to my particular aims and I will discuss why I felt this to be an appropriate choice of material in the following sections.

The Interviews

My five research participants were acquired through a variation of the snowball sampling method. I asked friends and friends of friends if they knew of anybody who fit my requirements (namely that they knew Berlin’s clubs well and partied frequently) and who might be interested in participating in my study. Through those people I found further participants. This technique was also used by Luis-Manuel García (an EDMC scholar) in his research on crowd solidarity in nightclubs, who found it to be an effective way of addressing the potential problems involved in intruding into the “protected social space” that makes an EDM “scene”² (García 2011: 41). My aim here is not to claim that this method provided me with a perfectly “representative” random sample of EDM “scenes” in Berlin. On the contrary: they represent, as García explains in his research, merely “a portion of an interconnected social web” (2011: 42). It is this “portion” that shall be the focus of this thesis.

My five research participants were, as mentioned, frequent partygoers (or were at least familiar with the Berlin party “scene” and had frequented the clubs at least at some point in their lives). In an attempt to monitor the heterogeneity of my sample of participants, I gave them the opportunity to share their age, gender, sexual orientation and ethnicity (these identity categories were not chosen arbitrarily but rather they were chosen in order give focus to my research and to be able to make connections between these identifications and their clubbing experiences). My participants interpreted my inquiry into these identity categories in rather distinct ways. The first participant (hereafter referred to as “A”) was aged 24, identified as (cis-)female, straight and “caucasian” German. The second (“B”) was 25, (cis-)male, gay, and “white German”. The third (“C”) was aged 24, (cis-)male, straight and “white

² Taking from the work of Garcia, I shall use “scenes” in this thesis to refer to “translocal scenes’…geographically specific spaces of musical activity articulated through translocal circuits (of music, people, information)” (García 2011: 14).
British”. The fourth (“D”) was 23, (cis-)male, straight and “mixed race”. The fifth and final participant (“E”) was 25, (cis-)male, “gay” and “Turkish German”.

I carried out each interview conversation using an interview guide (see Appendix 1), which covered chosen themes, in order to guide the interview conversation as well as for ease of analysis. Having said that, it was of paramount importance to me that my participants felt relaxed and comfortable to discuss topics that were of interest to them, thus I felt it more appropriate to look at the interview as more of a “structured conversation” (Aronson 2003: 909). I felt this was especially important considering the secretive and sometimes illegal nature of some of the topics of conversation (such as talk of public sexual activity, or the buying and selling of illicit substances). I wanted my participants to feel safe and not judged.

What’s more, by not restricting the interviews to rigid guidelines I was able to acknowledge the intersubjectivity between researcher and participant (Kvale 1996: 72) and challenge a traditionalist, positivist notion that I, as a researcher, am somehow not involved in the process of meaning-making in the interview. I wanted to try and create an interaction with the interviewee that was as mutual as possible (although this of course has its limitations, when we consider the unequal power dynamics between “researcher” and “researched”) (see discussions of this in Letherby 2003) with both of us contributing our subjective experiences to the interview. The interview conversation guide revolved around the following themes: what participants liked about their most frequented/favourite clubs; how their chosen clubs differed from other clubs; the types of people who usually attend these clubs and discussions about diversity; and the role of door policies. The interview questions were designed to elicit responses from my participants about their personal experiences with clubbing in Berlin and were relatively open-ended.

I wanted to focus my research on “minimal”-, “tech-house”-, “deep house”- and electronic- catering nightclubs (that is also, “scenes”) in Berlin, but I decided not to choose specific clubs to be talked about before beginning the interview conversations. I wanted to allow a more organic defining of the social spaces to be analysed. I began each interview by asking participants to list up to three clubs that they patronised the most and the rest of the interview revolved around those. The clubs that were chosen by my participants were KitKat Club (specifically the Gegen monthly night), Bassy Club (specifically the “Chantal’s House of Shame” weekly night), About Blank (specifically, for two interviewees, the “Homopatik”
monthly night) and Berghain/Panorama Bar (which was chosen by all five participants), so
the research will focus on these specific clubs.³

It was a difficult decision to decide whether or not to pre-define the clubs to be
analysed. Although this method proved effective in broadening the pool of potential research
participants (I didn’t limit my choice of participant by only speaking to those who went to a
pre-set list of clubs), it is likely to have limited the research in other ways. For example, it has
perhaps resulted in the misrepresentation of “clubs in Berlin” as a monolithic entity. EDM
clubs are divergent not only in terms of music but also in terms of location, price of entry,
size, history, types of people they attract, reputation, door policy, opening hours, length of
being in existence etc. It would have been interesting, for example, to have investigated
crowd diversity at a night called “Gayhane”, a gay and lesbian night held fortnightly at
“SO36” that caters especially for those wanting to listen to “türkischer, arabischer [und]
auch griechischer und hebräischer” [Turkish, Arab and also Greek and Hebrew] (my
translation) (SO36 2015) music. It might also have been fruitful to look at the impact of the
growing popularity of the drug- and alcohol-free “Morning Gloryville” parties, that offer
early-risers the opportunity to “subvert morning culture” and to “lose [their] inhibitions on
the dance floor without anything but caffeine” (Morning Gloryville 2015). Additionally, had I
focused on more “mainstream” or “commercial” clubs (rather than looking specifically at
“minimal” scenes) I might have come across “more racial and ethnic diversity, markers of
lower socio-economic class, and a… [more] hostile environment for queer sexualities”, as
suggested by García (García 2011: 46). With just these three examples, it is clear what a
profound effect the choice of clubs will have had on the research outcomes. That being said,
the decision to investigate just a few similar clubs was a pragmatic one and it meant the
research focus was narrowed down and a more in-depth analysis was possible.

As mentioned, the people who took part in my study were people who knew Berlin’s
EDM nightclubs well. “A” worked in the Berghain/Panorama Bar cloakroom so would be
there once a week, but said she would also go to the club outside of working hours around
three times a month. “B” was the participant who went most regularly to his chosen clubs,
saying that he had been going out at least three times a week since breaking up with his
boyfriend four months ago. “C” said he would go at least once a month, but used to go more

³ For a detailed description of all of these clubs, please see Appendix 2: “Description of the Nightclubs Analysed”.

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frequently when he was younger. “D” explained that he goes through phases of heavy partying, but on average would go out between one and two times per month. Finally “E” said he would go out once or twice a month, but has been through phases of going out more regularly. It was important for me to speak to people who knew these clubs well and who had a wealth of experiences with the participants, the door policies, the type of music being played, acceptable and unacceptable codes of conduct etc. This enabled me to focus on my research aims and answer my research questions. Choosing just to speak to people who went to clubs regularly was a conscious strategy that narrowed my research focus effectively. Nevertheless it does mean that the voices of those who do not (or cannot) socialise in these spaces have been ignored. EDM nightclubs should be viewed as, by their very nature, very exclusive leisure spaces, even before we begin an analysis of diversity of their participating crowds. This, we can see for example, simply by looking at the fact that there is a cost for participation. As García explains, “participation in these scenes (attire, drinks, entrance fees, drugs, travel” requires at least a middle-class level of wealth, or a willingness to divert resources from other needs and priorities” (2011: 43). I would also add to this that participation in these scenes requires an abundance of free time (something that is, of course, linked to class status), whether that be the time literally spent in the clubs or the time spent recovering physically and emotionally from the experience (whether that be from alcohol or drug consumption, exhaustion or lack of sleep). It is also important to say that they are exclusive in the sense that many are difficult to access for people with physical impairments. Clearly, there are a wealth of experiences that have not been acknowledged in this thesis due to my methodological choices. However, as with the above case of the choice of clubs to research, had I included this disparate group of people in this study, then the focus as well as the results would have been wildly different to the one that I present here. Further research could definitely benefit from speaking to those who do not attend these nightclubs on a regular basis.

Inspired by the work of philosopher Jacques Derrida, each of the interviews (as well as the autoethnographic excerpts, which will be discussed in the following section) were deconstructed, with an aim to subvert binary oppositions that uphold dominant ways of thinking and to cast a new light on truths that were being assumed. This is particularly important considering the central role that intersectionality plays in this thesis, with its aims of understanding the interconnectivity of different types of discrimination.
Situating my Voice and Autoethnography

Much effort has been made by intersectional feminist researchers to highlight the importance of acknowledging that knowledge is never value-free and should always be understood as located in its context of production. Feminist philosopher Dona Haraway’s concept of “situated knowledges” has been an important contribution to this. Haraway’s principle of situated knowledges problematises the epistemological foundations of positivism, with its “belief in a faceless, bodiless and contextless knower, who can detach her/himself from the world and the objects of study” (Haraway 1991, cited in Lykke 2010: 4). As Nina Lykke likewise explains, “the knower”, or the researcher, is always a participant in the analysed world and they cannot avoid being co-responsible for the “knowledge” they produce (Lykke 2010: 5).

These epistemological concerns about self-reflexivity and the questioning of traditional ways of doing research are very much connected to the discipline of post-colonial studies. As Edward Said (who was a literary theorist and public intellectual and helped found the field of post-colonial studies); “‘pure knowledge does not exist and there is no way of ‘detaching the scholar from the circumstances of life” (Said 2013/1979: 10). This has likewise been a crucial part of the endeavour of feminist post-colonialist theorising, which aims to dismantle universalist theories of modernity and replace them with an analysis of identity as “located and situated” (Ali 2007: 196).

With this in mind, I see it as important to state my embodied personal and historical position. I see it as important to state that I am a 27-year old, white British, cis-gendered, straight, working/middle class, able-bodied female and my experiences with these societal constructs will have deeply impacted this entire research process. My worldview has been shaped by my experiences with these social categories (and the interchanging privilege and discrimination that I have faced in my life due to these) and this will have had an affect on the questions I ask and the conclusions I draw. I am also someone who has been living in Berlin for the last four years and during this time I have very much been personally involved in that which constitutes EDMCs in Berlin. These nightclubs have been places where I have made friends, shared intimate moments with strangers, reinforced close friendships, reconnected with lost friends, reminisced, laughed, cried and danced until my feet hurt and
experienced the disappointment of coming back down to reality from it all. During the last four years my feelings about these places have oscillated between extremes. One day exciting, exhilarating and boundary pushing, the next addictive and sinister… And now the topic of my master’s thesis. Clearly, just like we will see is the case for my study participants, I have an emotional and personal connection to this field of study. I believe acknowledging this throughout the research has resulted in a much more honest, reflexive and readable final thesis that challenges traditional norms within academia. As I have mentioned, I do not claim to make any universalising grand assumptions about the people who I have studied nor the nightclubs I have looked at. Rather, I see this piece of research as an exploration of the “reality that [I] can ‘see’ from the position in which [I am] materially discursively located in time, space, body and historical power relations” (Lykke 2010: 5). It is a reflection of my own position and my own story.

In an attempt to further acknowledge my subjective position as a researcher, I decided to include autoethnographic material. According to ethnographers Carolyn Ellis and Art Bochner, autoethnography is “an autobiographical genre of writing and research that displays multiple layers of consciousness, connecting the personal to the cultural” (Ellis and Bochner 2000, cited in Ettore 2010: 297). Autoethnographers extract meaning from personal, lived experiences in order to analyse cultural experiences. As a form of self-reflective writing, Bochner explains, it acknowledges that, “the methods and procedures that are employed in research are ultimately and inextricably tied to the values and subjectivities of the researcher” (Bochner 2000, cited in Wall 2008: 42). Rather than try and hide away from them, autoethnographic enquiry faces the fact that all social researchers have pre-determined assumptions about social phenomena head-on.

The purpose of using autoethnographic material was threefold. Firstly, I wanted to challenge the notion that researchers can somehow distance themselves from “cultural shifts, personal tides and personal feelings” (Ettore 2010: 296). I wanted to take my personal standpoint and embrace it and use it as the entrance point into this research. Through autoethnography I was able to think through my own experiences in ways I had never done before and in ways that profoundly impacted upon this research. Secondly, I wanted to attempt to disrupt the unequal power relations between my interviewees and myself. I wanted to place myself beside them in the narrating process and present myself as another character within this story. Thirdly, I wanted to use autoethnography to make the final thesis more
accessible; more readable and enjoyable. Inspired by Laurel Richardson’s work ‘Writing: A Method of Inquiry’ (2000), I wanted to experiment with non-traditional forms of writing in order to challenge the idea that academic research should be available only to a select, privileged few. By making traditionally inaccessible academic writing accessible, academic knowledge can be used in real, transformatory ways. The extracts included in this thesis are a combination of my observations from club events and short autoethnographic vignettes that combine different memories from before this research began (specifically, from experiences at the clubs that have been included for analysis in this thesis).

**Ethical considerations**

As Kvale rightly claims in his book, *Interviews: An Introduction to Qualitative Research Interviewing*, social research is a moral endeavour (Kvale 1996: 109). When it comes to qualitative research, we must consider ethics not just in terms of the consequences of direct social interaction with participants, but also in terms of how the knowledge produced effects our representation of groups within society. This is especially important when carrying out EDMC research, if we consider the sensitive, escapist, often illegal and “underground” aspects of nightlife culture. In ‘Doing Nightlife and EDMC Fieldwork’ García notes that, “[a]ctivities at nightlife events can be transgressive, scandalous, embarrassing, compromising and sometimes clearly illegal; the stakes of privacy and discretion are thus much higher than in everyday settings” (2013: 11). What’s more, “underground scenes” rely wholeheartedly on secrecy and mystery, so ethical considerations about confidentiality are crucial.

There are a number of ethical considerations that I have made throughout this research process in order to try to respond to these concerns. I see it as important to note that ethics should be reflected upon at every stage of the research process and not simply relegated to the material-gathering stage. I tried to adhere to the ethical principle of “beneficience”; that is, guaranteeing “the risk of harm to a subject” is kept to a minimum (Kvale 1996: 116). I tried to subject all my decisions to an ethical critique, from the proposal of the thesis idea, to the final writing up of the thesis.

As mentioned already, confidentiality is gravely important within EDMC research and I tried to ensure this was respected throughout, both for my research participants as well as
those generally involved in the construction of these “scenes”. With regards my interviews, I made it clear to my participants that the interview conversations would be entirely anonymous. This meant that at no point did I take note of their names, neither during the recorded interview, whilst taking notes, whilst writing the interview transcript nor in the final thesis. This is clearly evidenced in my referring to the participants simply using ascribed letters (“A”, “B”, “C”, “D” and “E”). Finally, I tried not to include any identifying information in my autoethnographic excerpts.

Before each interview conversation, I asked the participant if it could be recorded. Due to the proliferation of drug taking amongst these nightlife “scenes”, I made sure to get consent from my participants specifically about talking about drugs before hitting record. I found this to be an effective way of gaining trust and my insistence on confirming this before proceeding with the interview conversation was positively received. I also think that positioning myself as a participant in these “scenes” went some way in putting people at ease.

In order to ensure accuracy and to ensure my participants were being represented in the way that they wanted, I offered my interviewees the opportunity to look over their transcribed interview and to make any amendments that they saw fit. This offer was only taken up by one of my participants (“D”), who only made some minor technical changes to the details in his transcript. The others declined the offer, saying they felt too uncomfortable to read their own spoken words again. I also made sure to be as clear with my participants as possible about what the research was about and I made it clear that they could withdraw from the research at any stage.

There were, inevitably, some problematic ethical dimensions to my research design and execution that might require further discussion. One of those that I see as important to discuss openly is the fact that all of my interviews were carried out in English, which was the native language of only one of my interviewees. This was done due to my lacking German language skills, as well as due to my particular relationship with these friends of friends. I see this as problematic for a number of reasons. Firstly, it may have limited the way in which my interviewees were able to express their ideas. There may have been important communication barriers and moments that were lost in translation. Secondly, it will have affected the interviewer/interview power dynamic, in the sense that I was in a more “powerful” position, being able to speak in my own native language (with little concern for expressing myself in the correct way), leaving my interviewees in a more vulnerable position. The way that power
hierarchies are often created or reinforced within traditional research processes (creating divisions between, for example, men and women, the coloniser and the colonised, those with access to conventional forms of knowledge and those without, etc.) is a deep concern for feminist and post-colonialist research and this is something that I have tried to be mindful of throughout the entirety of the research process. Unfortunately I see the fact that all of my interviews were carried out in English as something of a drawback to the research, but acknowledging this allows me to think through these ideas pertaining to power differentials and research. Recognising this means I can be more reflexive in future research.

It was also very important for me to see these ethical considerations as just that: suggestions to reflect upon during the entirety of the research process, rather than rigid rules that must be adhered to regardless of context, circumstance, or unexpected direction. This is especially true considering that, as feminist theory insists, “self” and “Other” are not mutually exclusive: As a researcher, I am in a constant process of mutual engagement with the human and non-human matter around me. I found the feminist postmodernist, postconventional ethical approaches of Margrit Shildrick in Reappraising Feminist Ethics: Developments and Debates (2001) to be particularly inspiring in this respect. Shildrick emphasises that postmodernism has “no interest in constructing ethical rules in advance of their application” (Shildrick 2001: 234). She goes on to advocate a (postconventional) theory that is “always fluid and mutable, avowedly risky and unstable” (ibid.). I saw it as inappropriate for me to assume that there are universally applicable “answers” to the ethical and moral dilemmas that I may come across and to know that there is no one rule that can be applied to all situations.4

An opportunity to rethink traditional “ethical values” and their universal applicability was provided to me during my interview phase. As mentioned, I tried to make it as clear as was practically possible to my participants what my research was about and what my aims were, both before the interview conversation as well as during. That being said, I also didn’t want to divulge too many of my own personal opinions, as I didn’t want this to influence how they responded or what topics they brought up for discussion. I wanted to give them a platform on which they could speak as candidly as possible, without the fear of being judged nor the desire to say what I wanted to hear. I was disappointed however to find myself, on a

4 Please note that this last paragraph came from an assignment I wrote for the course ‘Theories and Methodologies’ (course code 757A13), entitled, “Literature review: An affectual exploration of the hidden racism, sexism and homophobia found in Berlin’s alternative dance music scenes” (Rodgers 2014: 11).
couple of occasions, feeling as though I had somehow not been entirely honest with my participants about what I intended to do with their words in my thesis. I was concerned that I had deceived them in some way; something that I reflected on extensively in my research diary. This left me in quite a guilt-ridden conundrum and I clearly struggled to reconcile my desire to make my participants feel comfortable with my desire to be honest about my subjective positions on the topic. There was no easy way to know how to handle this. In fact, the notion that this could indeed be “handled” was probably a flawed aspiration from the start. I don’t see it as a failure to admit that there are limitations to what I can do, as an active subject myself. Although the practical steps I took (in terms of offering to send my interviewees the transcribed interview conversation as well as ensuring anonymity) go some way in addressing this, I cannot claim that I have a particular moral authority over what is deemed “right” and “wrong”.
PREVIOUS RESEARCH AND BACKGROUND

Electronic Dance Music

Electronic Dance Music (or EDM) is, according to García,

a field of styles emerging out of the legacy of 1970s disco that includes house, techno, trance, drum ‘n’ base, jungle, hardcore, ambient, electro, dubstep, garage, two-step, ‘minimal’ sub-styles, hybrid styles like tech-house, and the rest of an ever-expanding field (García 2011: 3).

He explains that the term “electronic dance music” was preferred by scholars, journalists and scene participants over other terms such as “club music” and “rave music”, as these were “limited in scope to a particular kind of event” and didn’t encompass EDM listening and dancing practices as much wider than a nightclub or rave (García 2011: 4). Although the term “electronic dance music” may be a recent concept, EDM has in fact been around for almost 50 years (García explains that the term emerged in discourse during the 1990s, as a broad descriptor that would encompass “the already-diverse panoply of styles that shared a post-disco genealogy”) (García 2014: 4). According to EDM blogger Nick Gibson, the history of EDM can be separated into four different phases: Synthpop and disco of the 1970s; the synth era of the 1980s; commercial modern dance music of the 1990s and finally; the EDM era, from 2000 to today (Gibson 2014). Although the 1970s marked the beginning of modern EDM, it was during the 1990s that EDM began to dominate dance music styles, beginning in the US but eventually spreading further afield to countries like the UK and Germany (edm junkies 2015). This “phase” is closely connected with the proliferation of “raves” and warehouse parties, with the formation of what many EDMC researchers describe as “subcultures” (Finestone 1976; Marshall, Douglas, and McDonnell 2007; Tanner 2015). Hitzler and Pfadenhauer describe this rave scene as originating in the UK, where participation was treated by UK authorities as dangerous and they began to crack down heavily on illegal raves in the country (Hitzler and Pfadenhauer 2002: 92). They cite this as the reason for the

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5 Some of the text here comes from an assignment I wrote for the module, ‘Theories and Methodologies’ (course code 757A13), entitled, “Literature review: An affectual exploration of the hidden racism, sexism and homophobia found in Berlin’s alternative dance music scenes” (Rodgers 2014: 11)

6 The reader should note that some of my interviewees, as well as some of the EDMC scholars that I quote in this study, use these terms interchangeably, occasionally even referring to specific sub-genres as just “techno” or “house”. For ease of analysis, all of these terms should be seen to be incorporated in the term “EDMC” or “EDM”.
“movement” becoming a strongly politicised one (ibid.). It was here that academic interest in the musical and social phenomenon began.

In ‘An Alternative History of Sexuality in Club Culture’ (2014), García makes the claim that dance music culture was born from marginalised communities, something that few (EDMC participants and scholars alike) acknowledge today. He talks of the importance of reclaiming this history and describes the huge influence that queers of colour have had on dance music as a genre and as a movement: From African-American and Latin-Caribbean queers in New York and their role in the development of what would later be known as disco (mixing “soul, funk and Latin music” with “a driving, four-kick drum pattern”); to the important contribution that lesbian women have made to electronic music in Paris since the early 1990s (citing DJ, producer and label boss for “Correspondent”, Jennifer Cardini, as a prominent example) (ibid.). EDM has a rich and interesting history, something that one could easily forget, so García opines, when noticing the domination of straight, white, middle class and cis-gendered participants that tend to dominate mainstream, commercialised parties today.

Germany plays a very significant role in the development of EDMCs. Robb explains that Germany is universally acclaimed as “a creative powerhouse in world techno” with the Berlin Love Parade being viewed as the catalyst for a mass EDMC movement (Robb 2002: 131). For Germany, the “birth” of EDMCs occurred after the fall of the Berlin Wall, in 1989 and this moment apparently symbolised a “liberation from ideology in general”; “in the West from the hegemonic liberal values of the parental 1968 generation, and in the East, from the ideological utopias of the SED” (The Socialist Unity Party of Germany) (Robb 2002: 133). In ‘Breaching the Divide: Techno City Berlin’, popular music and EDMC scholar Beate Peter asserts that Berlin’s history is what has made the city’s sound so unique, saying that it paved the way for “musical exploration, identification and progression” (Peter 2014: 2). Peter also says that the city’s history of appropriating space (for example, the tendency of young people to squat and reclaim abandoned buildings in the former East) (Peter 2014: 6) as well as renegotiating space (Peter 2014: 13) that happened during the 1990s allowed for the flourishing of dance club spaces in the city. As we will see, many of the clubs to be analysed in this thesis are located in old abandoned buildings (such as warehouses or factories). The city has changed drastically though since the 1990s (something that I will look at in more detail in the following section), with gentrifying, urban renewal projects bringing about the
demolition of many of these buildings to make way for new office buildings, hotels and shops (García 2011: 31). That being said, I would say there still remains a certain element of this “anti-establishment” feel to the city’s clubs, with many for example staying open and closing, whenever they want, despite (albeit rather lax) city regulations (García 2011: 68). The fact that it is possible to find an open nightclub in Berlin on any day of the week adds to the city’s reputation as being a party city.

Interestingly, Peter also argues that because prior to German reunification (in 1990) West Berliners were exempt from Wehrdienst (West German military service), it resulted in a constant flow of young Germans migrating to the West of the city, effectively practicing a form of conscientious objection. She maintains that this contributed to what she calls “the collective identity of early techno fans” (Peter 2014: 6). Berlin’s particular historical experience of political upheaval and “social negativity” is said to have invoked “a fantasmatic future – a horizon of possibility, an imagination of participation” (Watten 2003, cited in Peter 2014: 7). Berlin’s history and contemporary EDM “scenes” are portrayed within the literature as profoundly connected to one another.

I believe this particular narrative, which depicts the history of EDMCs as shaped by a distinctly political, ideological and yet anti-(mainstream) politics movement, very much influences the depiction of EDM history as one of unification, acceptance, tolerance, equality and diversity. For example, Richard and Kruger describe techno as a “mass movement” that “unit[ed] dancers regardless of race, class, age, gender or sexuality” (Richard and Kruger 1998: 162). They even go as far as to describe EDM nightclubs as “loving” and “equal” spaces, in which young people have been able to create “a potential blueprint for the whole of society to follow” (1998: 173). This notion that EDM nightclubs, especially those in Berlin, should be seen as spaces of equality and diversity is a claim that will take a central position in this thesis and will be elaborated on in much more detail in the sub-section “Defining the Diversity Discourse”. For now I will just say that within the literature this view very much dominates and any alternative to this narrative is distinctly lacking.

There is, however, some literature that suggests that these EDM “scenes” may not have been as openly accessible to everyone, all the time as many claim them to have been. For example, when looking at the history of sexuality in dance music García discusses how disco of the 70s gradually became mainstream and more “above-ground” and “gradually attracted an audience of white, straight, middle class people” (Garcia 2014). He also critiques the
notion that EDM nightclubs are accessible to all when he describes the fact that disco in the UK historically had much more of a straight, white, working class following in the 1970s, something that could help to explain the explicit segregation of gay and straight acid house nightlife during the late 1980s to the early 1990s (ibid.). These divisions, he claims, were carried to other countries (including the US and Germany) and resulted in the domination of crowds that were “mostly young, white, middle class, suburban and predominantly straight” (ibid.). García quotes Loren Granic, co-founder of A Club Called Rhonda in Los Angeles, who says;

if you take a look at who is running the clubs, managing the labels, booking the artists, and playing the records, the demographics are starkly different from the crowds that got this music started… the majority of the stakeholders nowadays are of the straight male variety. (ibid.)

Clearly the history that García describes will have deeply affected what contemporary EDM scenes look like today.

García also touches upon social segregation in his research on solidarity in EDM nightclubs in Paris, Chicago and Berlin. For example he makes the point that nightclubs (generally) are “semi-public spaces… and yet [they are] segregated from freely accessible public space by social and economic barriers to entry” (García 2011: 119–120). In his discussion on door policies in EDM nightclubs, he explains that there are “processes of selection [that] occur in direct or implicit ways… the assessment of which may ultimately involve factors such as gender, age, race/ethnicity, class, and occupation” (García 2011: 145). However, García’s research does not focus on this social segregation, based on the identity categories he lists here. He does not look in any profound way at what sort of an impact this apparent social segregation might have on participants’ world views, nor does he situate this social segregation within the prevalence of a discourse that (as I described above) boasts that everyone is welcome and that social barriers are broken down in these clubs. Rather, his research focuses specifically on the persistence of intimacy amongst EDM crowds and its vague definition, concluding that this vagueness “enables intimacy in new ways” despite this social segregation (García 2011: 3). He does not encourage his interviewees to elaborate on their perceptions of social segregation in detail and simply leaves the analysis at; “people defe[r] dealing with contradictions between inclusion and exclusion, allowing them to ‘sustain a sense of vague belonging’” (2011: 136). I wanted to take these notions pertaining to EDM nightclubs as spaces of exclusion further and look at what this might be based on, as
well as how this fits in with the discursive understanding of them as spaces of equality, tolerance and diversity. I wanted to explore this ambiguity, something that I have not seen done in any of the EDMC scholarship of this kind.

**Electronic Dance Music Cultures Scholarship**

There has been a rapid proliferation of EDMC scholarship in the last 15 years (García 2011: 4). This research has ranged from analyses of Detroit techno (see 1996), early UK “rave” scenes (see Measham, Aldridge, and Parker 2001) and “classic” house (see Buckland 2010). Within these projects one can find historical projects, close readings, ethnographies of particular scenes and musical analyses (García 2011: 6). Despite the fact that, as we have seen above, Berlin plays a critical role in the development of EDMCs and genres, there is relatively little research on EDMC socialisation, especially with regard intersectional social identification

According to García, it was the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Culture Studies (CCCS) that first began academic research into EDMCs (García 2011: 124). The CCCS was responsible for the creation of what was then called, “subculture studies”, which sought to analyse EDMC participants as legitimate cultural groups (ibid.). In my opinion, there appears to be a clear dichotomy between much of the research that has been carried out within the field of EDMCs. There are those studies that view them simply as a-political sites of non-meaning (Redhead 1993) and those on the other side of the spectrum that see them as overtly political in nature and as a means to rebel against conformity, tradition and the status quo (Beck 1997). Evidence for this dichotomy can be seen in the almost inescapable emphasis on the practice of drug taking in the research, with some cynically claiming that rave culture can only be viewed as a site of unrestrained drug consumption and personal risk (Parker, Williams and Aldridge 2002; Anderson, Kavanaugh, Bachman and Harrison 2007) and others highlighting the positive effects that drugs can have on social interaction (by focusing, for example, on how they can aid solidarity) (Kavanaugh and Anderson 2008). Indeed, with EDMC’s emphasis on escapism, as well as the existence of parties that require participants to be awake for days on end, drugs\(^7\) are widespread within the scene (and take an important role

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\(^7\) Drugs that are commonly associated with EDMCs are ecstasy, MDMA, ketamine, cocaine and occasionally marijuana.
for many of its participants). That being said, it strikes me that focusing one’s attention too ardently on drug taking in order to comprehend the nightclub experience may restrict our understanding of the sociality of the space. It is my contention that research in this area need move away from this type of neat, binary description of EDM nightclubs as either “good” or “bad”. Obviously drug taking is, for some, an unavoidable part of the EDM nightclub experience. Nevertheless, I have purposely avoided placing too much emphasis on drug taking in this thesis and have only mentioned it when it was absolutely necessary. This is because for me, the desire to escape via these clubs is much more complicated than that.

A great deal of EDMC research makes use of critical-philosophical thought and often use Deleuzian formulations such as affect, assemblage and becoming. García’s research is one such example and he uses affect theory to explore the ways in which affective forms of intimacy are created in nightclub crowds. Other examples of research of this kind include Hui Tan’s ‘Flirtatious Geographies: Clubs as Spaces for the Performance of Affective Heterosexualities’ (2013) and Demant’s ‘Affected in the Nightclub: A Case Study of Regular Clubbers’ Conflictual Practices in Nightclubs’ (2013). I find the use of affect in this field of research extremely interesting, however due to time and page limits I was unable to incorporate this area of theorisation into my analyses. It should be noted though that a great deal of this work has influenced the way that I have gone about carrying out the research and the conclusions I have drawn. This can be seen, for example in my emphasis on affect and emotion in my autoethnographic excerpts, as well as my analyses of those emotions (as well as my participants’ comments) as playing a critical role in securing these nightclubs as spaces of personal connection, enjoyment and exclusivity. That being said I chose to focus my research more on discursive understandings of these scenes, as I felt an analysis of how discourse shapes people’s outlooks and experiences was particularly lacking in the body of EDMC research. Whilst García’s affectual study on solidarity is, for example, extremely important and interesting, he himself admits that there is a lack of research on “the category ‘clubber’, to explain how and why a crowd of them should stick together” (Garcia 2011: 126). I wanted to help to remedy that through an examination of the role of the “diversity discourse” (which I will explain in detail later) in illucidating this.
The Berlin Context

According to Peter, Berlin is one of “the most vibrant musical cities in Western society” (Peter 2014: 1). She states that what Berlin has lacked in economic potential, it has made up for in cultural production (2014: 4). She describes it as a city that attracts a lot of young people, due in part to the city having many universities as well as cheap rental conditions (2014: 6). During the 2000s Berlin witnessed the increasing internationalisation of its EDM scenes, through the rise of club tourism as well as the development of “a complex network of local and international music producers and promoters, many of whom relocated to Berlin” during this time (Nye 2013: 156). In 2013, it was said that tourists made up 60 to 70 percent of clubbers in Berlin (Nye 2013: 156–157).

Berlin’s “international” reputation does not just come from the amount of tourists that it welcomes; it comes from its relationship with immigration as well. Peter describes Berlin as having “a diverse pool of international cultural immigrants” (Peter 2014: 4) and says it is “far from monocultural” (2014: 5). It was recently announced in the online news agency The Spiegel that Germany had received more immigrants in 2012 than it had done in almost two decades, with a large majority of those coming from crisis-hit Western and Southern European countries such as Italy, Greece, Spain, Ireland and Portugal (Spiegel Online 2013b). This being said, Peter also contends – and I agree – that Berlin is a city with “growing socio-spatial divides” (Peter 2014: 5). This latter point I see as rather undertheorised in the academic research on EDMCs in Berlin, with many focusing (somewhat blindly) on Berlin as a centre of cosmopolitan “success”.

Berlin’s history with immigration stems much further back than 2012. During Germany’s post-war period, West Germany – in an attempt to address labour shortages – rolled out a number of programmes that attracted a significant number of Gastarbeiter [guest workers], with the largest group of those coming from Turkey (García 2011: 283). The majority of Turkish workers remained in Germany, despite being expected to leave the country after they had finished their working contracts (García 2011: 283). Germany has had a tumultuous relationship with immigration and there has been much debate about how best to “deal” with non-Europeans who request citizenship in the country (Klopp 2002) (seen, for example, with the debate about whether the children born of these “guest workers” should
receive automatic German citizenship or not) (Zimmermann, Bonin and Hinte 2007). Contemporarily, Germany receives the largest number of asylum applications out of the whole of Europe, a great deal of those from people coming from war-torn Middle-Eastern countries such as Syria and Palestine (UNHCR 2015). The debates about immigration in Germany are comparable to those in other European countries, with Eurocentric, Western and colonialist notions of belonging and identity frequently called upon to justify border control and nationhood.

As Kil and Silver recount, immigrants in the city of Berlin face a great deal of social exclusion (Kil and Silver 2006: 95). The city-state has taken out a number of different measures to try and respond to this. For example, Kil and Silver explain that the city coordinates a wide range of policies targeted at disadvantaged populations that promote “intercultural coexistence through billboard campaigns and other programmes” (2006: 96). García interestingly explains that there has always been an “expectation that one would take on the ‘core’ elements of German culture and abandon or modify any former cultural practices that contradicted this core” (García 2011: 285). On a country-wide level, Germany has generally opted for policies that placed importance on assimilation into German culture (Schönwälder 2010). Indeed this tone is quite typical of scholarly research into this area, with Kil and Silver calling for “a new multiculturalism that can offer a positive signal about Germany’s ability to integrate newcomers” (Kil and Silver 2006: 96). Clearly this idea that “immigrants” should adapt to or adopt “our” culture is typical of Western, neocolonialist positions and will inevitably influence the way that my participants comprehend and talk about notions of diversity in EDM nightclubs.

Another factor that of course adds to what Peter describes as the city’s “growing socio-spatial divides” is the rise of gentrification, which has had a huge impact on social and economic aspects on the city. It has resulted in, for example, the cost of rent increasing exponentially (Bernt and Holm 2004: 112) and economically poorer people being out-priced out of their own neighbourhoods (2004: 116); neighbourhoods that are often dominated by ethnic minorities and immigrants. Adding to this, many of Berlin’s EDM nightclubs have benefitted from this process of gentrification and a great deal of these clubs (including those

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8 I would like to draw the reader’s attention to the linguistic hypocrisy that is often present within literature as well as in public debates on this topic. The fact that white and/or European immigrants are more often than not referred to as “expats”, whereas non-white immigrants are simply called “immigrants” is something that should not be overlooked and is as an example of the neocolonialist thinking that is so pervades discourses on immigration.
that are featured in this study) are located in typically “gentrified” areas of the city (Peter 2014: 8), a reality that contrasts sharply with the story of their humble beginnings as abandoned warehouses and factories.

As I described in the previous sub-section, Berlin is frequently cited as a city that sparked EDMC movements (with their claims to freedom, equality and diversity), due to the city’s “international” nature. However I have not as of yet found any research that incorporates the contemporary German political issues that I have described above within EDMC research and I hope my research might contribute to filling this lacunae. I see nighttime leisure spaces as an important and interesting site from which issues pertaining to belonging and identity – issues that are so critical within German politics at the moment – could be explored. It is within this political context (one that is relevant not just to Germany but worldwide too), of social division, exclusion and the reification of difference and “Otherness” that I would like to situate and explore this discursive claim that EDM nightclubs in Berlin are freely accessible to “everyone” and inherently diverse.
“My Night Out in Berlin”: Setting the Scene

// entering the club //

It is 11 in the morning. I am with a good friend of mine and we have just got off the metro and are heading to the club. We are still 20 meters away from the entrance, but already we can hear the loud music coming from inside. This seems to be a very Berlin thing: Whilst the building of the club itself is very nondescript, the thudding music coming from inside gives an unapologetic message to all around that it is there (and will remain open for the entire weekend, make no exceptions).

As soon as we have the club in sight, I sense a slight change between the two of us. It is nothing too extreme, but I am suddenly more aware of myself, of the way I am walking, what I am wearing, the manner in which I express myself, even the way I am speaking. The walk up to the bouncers is both exhilarating and frightening. Bouncers in Berlin are notorious for being ruthless when it comes to deciding who is “cool” enough to enter the club, and turning those away that do not fit in. I don’t expect we will have a problem, but the thought does cross my mind: What if we/I don’t get let in? How humiliating that would be! And above all disappointing. What else would we do with this beautiful sunny winters afternoon?

The two bouncers at the door look us up and down, and after checking that we are aware that we have come to a “gay” night, for whatever reasons decide we are acceptable enough to enter. My feelings of anxiety about not being let in immediately turn to delight when I contemplate the fact that I am passable, I am acceptable. They let us in!

After a rude encounter with the aggressive man who we paid our entrance fee to, we finally enter the club itself. We grapple our way past what looks like a heavy, black shower curtain and enter the main dancehall. It is extremely dark in here, despite the fact that it is so bright and sunny outside. As I take a look around and see the enthusiasm with which people are dancing and the looks on people’s faces, I can tell that I am one of the very few people who are sober in here. There is a strong smell of body odor and people are fervently brushing past me back and forth, either leaving to go to the toilet or to the seating area or coming back. One thing that is incredibly striking about this scene is the fact that it is so dominated by men (the majority of whom are white). Having contemplated this, I suddenly feel even more out of place than before. I really need to get myself a drink!
It’s fascinating how one glass of Sekt [sparkling wine] can transform my experience of the space! I have gone from feeling out of place and self-conscious, to starting to enjoy myself, as I chat and dance with my friends. We are dancing in a tent in the garden now and the music playing is trashy pop from the 80s. I am curious about the drastic difference between the heavy techno in the other room and the cheesy music in this tent. When I ask a friend of a friend if he likes it, he informs me; “of course I like this music, I’m gay!” I also try to get another friend to reflect on the fact that this place is dominated so heavily by men, but his response is quite defensive and he proceeds to point out the few women who are on the dance floor.

I like being in this tent. The music is awful but it’s not taking itself too seriously unlike the hard music in the other room. It is far too dark in that room anyway and the general atmosphere doesn’t match my mood. Despite it being no more than 3 degrees outside, the tent is warm, thanks to the huge ventilator as well as the human body heat. It is warm enough to take some layers off and be able to move freely as I dance. I am joined by others who have done the same, including quite a few men who are dancing in their underwear, some totally naked.

Right now, I don’t have a care in the world. I don’t care what time it is, as I have nothing to do today but this. I feel warm and safe and surrounded by people who I care for and trust.

// leaving the club //

I step out of the club and the bright sunlight shines at me aggressively, as if to say; “Good morning! Welcome back to reality!” What a contrast to the dark cave-like space I have spent the last 24 hours in.

I walk arm-in-arm with my friend towards the subway station, both of us dragging our feet along as we go, trying not to bump into passers-by. I am aware of my surroundings so much more than I would normally be. I feel totally detached from the immediate world around me, like I am stumbling through a dream.

Finally on the train, I am fascinated by the people around me, getting on and off in droves at their desired stops, going about their everyday lives. We are sharing the same journey, yet we are so disconnected. I feel everyone’s eyes on me (although perhaps it’s just sleep
deprivation-induced paranoia that is convincing me of being some sort of entertaining spectacle). Can they tell what I have been doing all night? Is it obvious? The large sunglasses that are covering my face (despite the lack of sunlight on this dimly lit train) are probably a giveaway.

I look over at my friend sitting next to me, who giggles at the ridiculousness of it all. His sunglasses have broken so that they droop slightly over his right eye, providing privacy only for the left one. We look utterly ridiculous. But hey, it’s our little (badly kept) secret!

With this extract I aim to give the reader an idea about what a “night” out at an EDM nightclub might look like for me, looking specifically at the initial entering of the club as well as the leaving the club. This extract should be seen as a point of departure for the rest of the thesis and can provide some context when reading the interviewees’ comments, as well as the other autoethnographic vignette that will appear in the section entitled, “Cracks and Contradictions”. This extract touches upon a number of themes that shall be looked at in the following analysis section, including: personal and emotional connection with the EDM clubbing experience; EDM nightclubs as aiding solidarity and bonding with others; EDM nightclubs as safe spaces (principally for those who identify as being “gay”); EDM nightclubs as spaces of escape from the “real world”; nightclub door policy; inclusionary and exclusionary practices, based on perceived identity categories and finally; the role of privilege in ensuring access.
ANALYSIS

Club Spaces as Sites of Identity Building

As mentioned, the clubs which were brought forward for discussion by the interviewees were KitKat Club (specifically the Gegen monthly night), Bassy Club (specifically the “Chantal’s House of Shame” weekly night), About Blank (specifically, for two interviewees, the “Homopatik” monthly night) and Berghain/Panorama Bar. Each of my respondents chose these clubs because they were the ones that they knew and liked the most. These clubs were places that my interviewees would attend on a regular basis, spending countless hours of their time getting lost, being vulnerable and having fun. They were also spaces that their social group occupied, where they would make friends, meet lovers and dance with complete strangers. They were places in which some of my interviewees would push their own boundaries in numerous ways, be that with experimenting with illicit substances or taking sexual risks with strangers in dark corners. These are spaces of experience creation, of heightened emotion and of extreme behaviour, the type that most described as ones that couldn’t be expressed outside of the nightclub walls. I see it as important to view these clubs as “agglomerations of emotions, expectations and desires” (Cattan and Vanolo 2014: 1158); as places that my participants have an emotional and personal connection to.

One significant thing that most of these clubs have in common is their target audience. About Blank’s “Homopatik” can be seen advertised on Resident Advisor (a well-known online magazine and EDM community website) as the club’s regular “gay party” (Resident Advisor 2015). Similarly, “Chantal’s House of Shame” in Bassy Club is advertised on tourist information webpages as a “legendary” “gay cult party” (Visit Berlin date unknown a). According to “Gegen”’s website, the party organisers are critical of “the institutionalisation of big ‘queer meccas’” and parties that encourage participants to be “queer” just for one night (Gegen Berlin date unknown). They are nevertheless known as being a part of Berlin’s queer nightlife “scene” (Çakır and Bayramoğlu date unknown). There is actually very little written

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9 A number of “gay” or “gay-friendly” clubs in Berlin are renowned for offering partygoers “darkrooms”, which are darkened rooms within the nightclub space that are specifically designated for sexual activity. Berghain is particularly renowned for offering these darkrooms to its patrons but these are commonplace within a number of other clubs as well, including KitKat Club. Although there are no explicit rules declaring who can and cannot enter these spaces, they tend to be dominated mainly by males and exist for the enactment of their sexual desires.
on Berghain/Panorama Bar’s own website about the type of crowd they wish to attract. However, considering that the club is a reincarnation of “gay fetish” club “Ostgut” (Garcia 2011: 116), it is no surprise that the club is advertised far and wide as being “gay friendly” (Nighttours 2015). All of these clubs do their best to attract this perceived grouping of people and it is enforced through their often-stringent door policies.

Given that almost all of the nightclubs that my participants chose claim to be at the very least “gay friendly”, the role that they play in validating or aiding the performance of certain identities cannot be overlooked. As McVeigh explains in *Screening for Straights: Aspects of Entrance Policy at a Gay Disco* (1997), clubs that offer the homosexual community a place to express themselves freely play an extremely important role in society. Gay clubs can (with “varying degrees of success”) provide collective acceptance for particular sexual identities as well as “associated life-style[s]” (McVeigh 1997: 77). What’s more, gay clubs have historically served to provide “seclusion and shelter from the outside (mainly heterosexual) world” (ibid.). Within this context these clubs can be viewed as areas that offer certain people (that is, sexual minorities) temporary relief from the constraints of societal surveillance and judgement.

The idea that these clubs might provide some kind of “shelter” to the interviewees who identified as gay could be seen in the interview with “B”. In a discussion about why he preferred “gay” or “gay-friendly” clubs, “B” told me a story about a recent experience he had whilst attending a “straight” club. He explained, “There was this guy and I was sitting in his chair. I told him I would roll my cigarette and then I would leave, but then he was just doing the fist… And a friend of mine just grabbed me and was like, come on roll there…” (This is juxtaposed with “B”’s description of people in Berghain as “really nice, open-minded” and “not intolerant”). Although it is not clear whether “B” was targeted so aggressively here due to his sexuality, considering that fear of violence and discrimination is a daily concern for much of the LGBTQI community in Germany (European Diversity in Policing 2012) (as it is elsewhere in the world), not feeling physically threatened is bound to be an important factor in “B”’s decision over which club to attend. This idea that nightclub exclusivity provides “safety” for certain individuals will be addressed again later on in the thesis.

“B” also shared a story with me about his experience of moving from a city “with 600 inhabitants” (where you “cannot wear whatever you want”) to Berlin. For him, the Berlin
night time partying “scene” provided him with a liberating opportunity to express his personality in ways that he didn’t feel he previously could. When met with the freedom to be able to wear whatever he wanted in an non-judgemental environment, “B” said he felt like he had entered, “a whole different world”. For “B”, discovering this freedom of expression in Berlin was monumental and seems to have changed his life dramatically. As Valentine and Skelton (2003) explain, the role of urban spaces in the making of gay sexual identities has a long history and the nightclub space plays a crucial role in this process of becoming for “B”.

The emotional connection that “B” has to his chosen nightclubs can be further seen in his explanation that the frequency with which he goes to nightclubs increased to “two or three times a week” since breaking up with his boyfriend. Upon contemplating why this might have happened he said; “I had this finding myself thing… It really helped”. Clearly for “B”, his chosen clubs are not merely recreational spaces of amusement, but rather they are the prominent backdrops to some very pivotal, identity-reasserting moments in his life. He seeks out comfort from partying “two or three times a week” during times of emotional distress and apparently this search is rewarded.

Another commonality that binds these clubs is the genre of music that they play. With the exception of the Chantal’s House of Shame club night and About Blank’s Homopatik (which occasionally also play a broader range of music from bass, to pop and disco) (Resident Advisor 2015; Visit Berlin date unknown a), all of the aforementioned clubs host minimal/ house and/or techno DJs. The style of music being played in a club also contributes to the identity reaffirming process described above.

Whilst trying to understand the factors that facilitate a sense of cohesion amongst crowds within EDM “scenes”, García found that his participants saw a shared taste in music as central to bonding people within a nightclub (García 2011: 136). Many expressed the view that a particular style of music attracted people “of a particular sensory, corporeal, and aesthetic attunement” and this directly correlated with personality compatibility (ibid.). My participants also associated the style of music being played in a club with their own personalities and those of the people around them. For example, when asked what it was about Berghain that she liked the most, “A” said; “It’s definitely the line-up. The great soundsystem… I go there for the music and to be around other people who like that music too”. We can see here that for “A”, being around like-minded people – who she describes here as people who share a similar taste in music to her – is an important factor in her choice
of club. “A” enjoys going to Berghain because she likes to socialise with new and old friends and it is through the existence of these clubs and the type of music they play that she can do this.

Berghain/Panorama Bar was the club that was mentioned by all of the participants. I would agree with García, who states, “it is difficult to overstate the presence and weight of Berghain in the Berlin minimal scene and even in global EDM circuits” (García 2011: 34). It is no coincidence that the club took a prominent role in discussions with my participants and for many it seems the club is synonymous with clubbing in Berlin. O’Brien explains this by describing Berghain/Panorama Bar as “an institution”; one that embodies “a manifesto of social and political freedom” (O’Brien 2011: 2). For my research participants, as well as many people I have spoken to, the club represents something very special. Tourists frequently hop on a low cost Ryanair or Easy Jet flight just to visit Berghain/Panorama Bar for the weekend (Hobson 2011) and queues outside the club often exceed 200 people well past 5am (García 2011: 35). During my last four years of living and partying in Berlin, it has not been uncommon for me to hear people referring to Berghain as some kind of mythical sanctuary, where anybody who knows anything about EDM, or in fact clubbing in general, must attend. Indeed, this was echoed in a conversation with “A”, who matter-of-factly explained to me; “it’s like a temple. It’s like a party temple or a church, as the Berghain people call it”. Although “E” denied the fact that for him Berghain/Panorama Bar was a “temple” or a “church”, he did describe going to the club every Sunday as a “ritual”. He said, “I like to see my friends there, it’s like a ritual. For instance ‘A’; we see each other there on Sundays. We sit at the bar, hang out, catch up for the week. You know, like a tradition”. In looking at the history of the “techno and house” “scene”, Hitzler and Pfadenhauer discuss the way that the movement has tried to install a unifying, globalised concept, one that brings different “clans” together under one banner (Hitzler and Pfadenhauer 2002: 88). In order to achieve that, the movement has often reached for religious motifs, with many event organisers describing “Techno/House” as a “world religion” (ibid.). We can see that this “unification through religious appreciation” rhetoric is also present within the discourse of Berghain/Panorama Bar fans in Berlin.

When I asked “D” about this worshiping of Berghain/Panorama Bar, he agreed that this was a reality for many people. He said, “yeah it’s not just a club that you just go to and then another night you go to another club. Berghain is something special for [partygoers]”.
However, “D” also conceded that this idealisation of a club (to the point where all other clubs seem inferior in comparison) can happen with other clubs too. He explained;

Like my roommate is a real Sisyphos\textsuperscript{10} guy too. He talks about Sisyphos the same way I talk about Berghain – but Berghain is like the strongest in that sense. It’s like, the most intense, it’s the most distinctive.

Here we can get a sense of how important these clubs are in aiding partygoers in performing\textsuperscript{11} and reasserting certain identities.

The idea that nightclubs can be sites from which participants are able to perform different identities was a common theme throughout all of the interviews. Many respondents said they saw the club as unique in the sense that one is able to behave in ways that would be perceived as unacceptable or deviant outside of the club, in the “real world”. As someone who works at Berghain/Panorama Bar, “A” said she gets to “see everybody who comes and goes” from the club and feels she has a particularly good idea about the “kinds” of people who attend as well as the “types” of people who stay right until the club closes (after a weekend this is usually on Monday afternoon, the implication being here that they are the most dedicated fans). “A” explained to me that she had noticed a difference in people’s comportment and attire when they are in the club and when they are outside of it, getting on with their everyday lives. She said, “Sometimes I see those people [the ones she has seen in Berghain/Panorama Bar] on the streets and I always think… Well, he doesn’t really look like a typical party, ‘techno raver’ Berghain guy”. This idea was brought up again on a separate occasion in the interview when she made reference to the men who attend The Lab in Berghain, the male-only fetish section of the club; “If you would see them on the streets during the day, you would never think ‘this guy is into this kind of fetish stuff’… but they really need the space to escape, to get out of their suits and put on… Nothing!” Here there is a clear distinction made between the “outside” of the club and the “inside”. According to “A”, these men must conform to societal expectations whilst outside of the club (such as going to work, wearing a suit or expressing normative sexual desires), but within the club they are given the freedom to explore different

\textsuperscript{10} For a description of this nightclub, please see Appendix 2: “Description of the Nightclubs Analysed”.

\textsuperscript{11} Here I am partly borrowing from feminist philosopher Judith Butler (2007)’s conceptualisation of gender and sex (and sexuality) as performatve, as the effect of repeated “doings”. In her classic book Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity, Butler explains that the existence of “discrete and polar genders” is nothing more than an epistemological social construction; a “cultural fiction” (Butler 2007: 190). Butler’s work on performativity has been extended by a number of scholars to include the analysis of other socially constructed identities as a ‘doing’. It is these ideas, along with Butler’s original ones pertaining to gender and sexuality, that shall be incorporated into the analysis here.
parts of their identities. In describing the importance of EDMC researchers needing to take caution when it comes to taking photographs or videos whilst within a club, García explains that there exist “implicit norms about the separation of nightlife personas from daytime personas” (García 2011: 41). I, too, see the creation of an imagined space that is separate from the “real”, everyday world as a major aspect of the allure of the clubbing experience.

This view that participants can behave in traditionally unacceptable ways whilst in these clubs was echoed by “B”, who – in an attempt to explain to me how Berlin differed from other cities in terms of the clubs on offer – said, “I think everyone has lots of personalities… In Berlin, you can really let them out”. This can be understood by looking at the fact that, as Cattan and Vanolo explain, night-time recreational spaces are generally characterised by a larger degree of freedom, as well as “partial exception from common rules and constraints” (Cattan and Vanolo 2014: 1159). Although both “A” and “B” didn’t talk of necessarily wanting to express alternative personalities within the clubs themselves, it is clear that they perceive the nightclub space as one that is used by many to explore and solidify different identities. As Hitzler and Pfadenhauer explain, “raving” is, after all, a means of “act[ing] out one’s self through dance” (Hitzler and Pfadenhauer 2002: 91).

As we can see from the autoethnographic vignettes in the section “My Night Out in Berlin: Setting the Scene”, it is not just my interview participants who experienced these clubs as important spaces from which they could express themselves. With this extract I present a rather typical night out and return home from a club. I describe the experience of clubbing as (for the most part) an incredibly enjoyable one for me personally. Despite how nerve-wracking I find the process of being scrutinised by the club bouncers on my way in and the brief sense of feeling out-of-place within the club, with some time I begin to feel relaxed. I describe this space as a comforting one, as somewhere that I feel safe and able to “move freely” and enjoy my time with the people who I “care for and trust”.

I also describe what it is like to return home from a club, after having spent 24 hours partying and dancing there. As I have mentioned previously, I see myself as very much embedded within the EDM “scenes” that I describe in this thesis. I see the above autoethnographic extract as an example of the potential that clubbing has, to have a positive and productive impact on my life. On my way home from the club, I feel as though I am sharing what feels like something emotionally huge with someone who I care for deeply, as we make each other laugh and connect over our “badly kept secret”. Solidarity between
myself and my friend is a consequence of a shared experience, a shared secret and the shared participation in something that only a few select people are able to participate in. The fact that myself and my friend were chosen to enter the club – perhaps at the expense of others – is an element that I will explore further, later on in the thesis. For now, what we can say for certain is that many people, myself included, have a strong personal and emotional attachment to these nightclubs.

**Defining the “Diversity Discourse”**

*In my house there is only music…*

*And, you see, no one man owns house because house music is a universal language, spoken and understood by all…*

*And, in this house, the keeper is Jack…*

*Jack is the one that can bring nations and nations of all Jackers together under one house. You may be black, you may be white; you may be Jew or Gentile. It don’t make a difference in our House.*

[Mr Fingers, “Can You Feel It?” 1988]

In this chapter I aim to describe and define what I call a “diversity discourse”. I shall do this by first looking at the dominance of this type of discourse within wider EDM “scenes” and “movements” and then move on to look at a specific Berlin context, with an understanding that the former has affected the latter.

When looking into the way in which Gegen/KitKat Club, Chantal’s House of Shame/Bassy Club, Homopatik/About Blank and Berghain/Panorama Bar advertise themselves, there appears to be a common claim that all of the participant-chosen clubs make: That is, that within each club space one can find a true “mix” of people, a diverse array of participants who are able to socialise together, regardless of social and economic divisions. For example, on Gegen’s website one can see the club night boasting (albeit in a seemingly tongue-in-cheek manner) about the vast array of people who attend including, “queer music producers and artists, gendernauts, punks, bears, kinky ladies, cosmic travellers, intellectuals [and] assassins” (Gegen Berlin 2015). These “oblique creatures of all sorts” can be found there
“sharing the freedom of becoming” (ibid.) together. Similarly Chantal’s House of Shame night is said to host “a colourfully mixed crowd who party together amicably…” which includes gays and heterosexuals” (Visit Berlin date unknown a). In an article about popular club nights in Berlin, Beatport (one of the biggest EDM online music stores), journalist Nick Tsirimokos claims that About Blank’s Homopatik attracts “a diverse crowd across a variety of sub-cultures and social circles” (Tsirimokos 2015). In a similar tone, Resident Advisor boldly asserts that Berghain/Panorama Bar is “famous for its wildly mixed crowd, leaving class and gender divisions far behind” (Resident Advisor 2007).

The claim that EDMC settings can serve to break social barriers can be seen within academic EDMC literature as well. In discussing the history of house and techno music worldwide, Hitzler and Pfadenhauer (2002) look to the “scene’s” strong connection to modern communications media as an explanation for its apparent ability to create a communal identity all over the world. They make a number of bold statements that claim that this has been achieved, for example;

The techno generation overcomes all borders on the data highway… The scene has created a store of symbols and forms of knowledge that exist more or less independent of local limitations, the borders of nation states, and traditional fields of cultural activity and cultural habits. (2002: 89)

This statement provides some context to the message inherent in the track by Mr Fingers at the beginning of this chapter. According to the idea that is reinforced in this track, EDM has managed to overcome all cultural, national or religious differences which had once separated people, bringing them together for the first time in complete harmony. In the lyrics, the “house” that is mentioned refers to both a style of EDM (that is, house music) and is also a metaphor for the unifying space in which people come together to celebrate diversity. Perhaps tellingly, this track has frequently been mixed with Martin Luther King’s “I Have a Dream” speech (Beatport 2015), a fact that I believe shows the strength of the perception of EDMCs as emancipating, unifying and revolutionary.

When it comes to the literature on specific EDM “scenes” within Germany, one can see presented the story of a unifying mass movement that connected young people from different walks of life, regardless of political affiliation. The 1989 Berlin Love Parade (a popular EDM music festival and parade held annually in Berlin until 2003) (Dobberke 2014) is often cited as the beginning of house/techno music, with some even claiming it to be “techno’s hour of birth as a mass movement” (Hitzler and Pfadenhauer 2002: 89). It is telling that the Love
Parade “child” is depicted as symbolising a complete rejection of political ideology (this makes sense given the politically tense situation of the time). Wahjudi explains that “in Berlin [galt] das Tanzvergnügen [...] als Symbol des Überlebenswillens und der Phantasie gegenüber den düsteren Visionen der desillusionierten Punk- und Besetzerszene” [in Berlin the rave was a symbol of the will to survive and imagination against the dark visions of the disillusioned punk and squatter scene] (my translation) (Wahjudi 1992, cited in Robb 2002: 133). For Germany especially, techno was said to be about uniting people under one banner and moving past fixed identity categories such as race, gender, class, age and political affiliation. Indeed East German DJ Paul Van Dyk even claimed that techno was the first area in German society in which unification took place (Messmer 1998, cited in Robb 2002: 134). I see it as important to view these ideas in the context of what philosopher and cultural critic Slavoj Žižek describes as the “post-political” or “post-ideological” consensus, a Western ideology that describes the worldwide spread and domination “of liberal democracy and free-market economics” (Žižek, cited in Sharpe and Boucher 2010: 32). Interestingly, it is the fall of the Berlin Wall (in 1989) which is said to be the birth of this ideology, with it symbolising the collapse of Communism and the domination of neoliberal economics and parliamentary democracy (ibid.). We will see that the falling of the Berlin Wall also plays an important role in some of my interviewees’ conceptualisations of EDM nightclubs and crowd participation.

These powerful narratives – that depict EDMCs as a force of unification – have a big impact on how partygoers make sense of EDM nightclubs today. During my interviews I found this to be most obvious in the frequent mentioning of EDM crowds as immensely “diverse” in their makeup and many stressed difference within crowds as evidence of this unification (that is, unification despite difference). I see this as simultaneously incorporating notions of “tolerance” (notions that have been developed and discussed at length by the likes of Žižek 2008) yet also moving beyond this in focusing on embracing and celebrating dimensions of “diversity” contained within each participant, with an emphasis on mutual respect and inclusion. All of my participants, without exception, enthusiastically boasted that participating in their chosen clubs meant sharing space with a vast array of different people.

As a German and as someone who works in Berghain/Panorama Bar regularly “A” certainly had an acute awareness of these narratives, as she expressed at interview. In describing the Berghain/Panorama Bar “crowd”, she explained to me, “it’s very mixed. You have old and young people partying together, a lot of gays, transsexuals, straight normal
people [sic.], it is a good mixture for sure”. “A” also commented on the history of electronic/techno music and its role in uniting Germany and her comments correspond with that of DJ Paul Van Dyk, as mentioned above. She said,

In Berlin, you know when the wall came down, people were free and could experience different styles of music and really enjoy their freedom and be creative without a government telling them what kind of music you can write and what not. Everyone was together.

It is clear here that for “A” EDM clubbing culture has played a significant role in the shaping of German history and society and from her perspective this has very much been a positive thing. I also see there being quite a clear tension between a supposedly “post-political” environment (as described above) and a clearly very political environment. The tensions that might exist in this discourse will be explored later on in the thesis.

Where gender is mentioned in the historical German EDMC literature, it is repeatedly claimed that techno and house music have had a profound effect on breaking down sexual hierarchies between men and women on the dance floor. In their analysis of German youth cultures in the 1990s, Richard and Kruger for example say that techno is a democratic dance movement that has transformed the way men and women are able to behave on the dance floor (Richard and Kruger 1998: 169). They take examples of other genres of music, such as hip-hop (or “other styles in the black communities” [sic.]) and position this “typical example of a style totally based on male competition through its different expressions, breakdance, graffiti and rap” in opposition to EDMCs (ibid.). This very narrow view is shared by cultural studies scholar Ursula Fritsch, who sees techno – as a culture – as less misogynistic than others (Fritsch 1988). Sociologist and dance theorist Gabriele Klein similarly asserts that within EDM nightclubs, men no longer take the position of standing around the edges of dance floors, waiting to make their move on the female subjects in the centre. Rather, hierarchies are broken down and everybody interacts with each other (Klein 2004: 168–169). For Richard and Kruger, Fritsch and Klein, the growth of EDMCs has had a positive effect on gender relations within society.

The belief that EDM represents a transformative force when it comes to gender was echoed by “A” who, like Richard and Kruger, compared techno music to hip-hop. She said;

hip-hop is very sexual, I mean not in a positive way. They put women in this weird spotlight, these music videos, with naked women on the car, so I would understand why lesbians would not go to hip-hop parties, when a rapper always raps about ‘bitches’ and stuff.
“A” added that in contrast to this innately sexist genre of music, she saw techno as “really neutral”. This notion of “neutrality” is a critical theme in this thesis and will be looked at in more detail in the sub-section “Diversity”.

My other interviewees also produced such a discourse in their interviews. When talking about his favourite clubs in Berlin, “C” described the participants as “just people. Black people, white people, people who are just into the music”. “C” also discussed the history of EDMCs internationally and said,

going back to the eighties… house music and rave culture and parties everywhere… There was this togetherness, everybody dancing, everybody happy… Doesn’t it like break down gender and class and everything? It doesn’t matter what colour you are, gay or straight, where you come from or anything. I think house and techno broke them barriers down… house music became this like, everyone’s welcome. It’s just an experience, because of the music.

Expressing an almost identical idea, “E” said of contemporary EDM nightclubs in Berlin;

[they’re] very diverse. Gay, straight people, they all party together… Black, white, Asian… It’s everything in one. I feel like in a party everyone is the same… It makes [everyone] forget about status, or this and that… We all want to dance and have fun and forget about our problems.

According to these accounts, EDM nightclubs offer people a safe space, away from a wide spectrum of discrimination (with sexism, racism, classism and homophobia being drawn on here). As we will see in the analysis of this research, this discursive notion of EDM crowds as being “diverse” is understood as a quality that is positive and fits into the “good” of a seemingly “good or bad” binary.

The claims being made by EDMC scholars, my interviewees and the clubs themselves are far-reaching and have vast implications for the way that we understand social inequality in this Berlin context. I shall from hereon in refer to this discourse as a “diversity discourse”. This term shall be used to refer to that which has been described above; that is the prevalent assertion that within EDM nightclubs all participating crowd members participate on equal terms within EDMC spaces, do not face discrimination based on traditional societal constraints (with an emphasis here on gender, race and sexuality) and are unified in their shared love of clubbing and EDM. It also encompasses the notion that access to them is open to all and not restricted to a chosen few. The implication of this “diversity discourse” is that these clubs have managed to subvert social divisions. It is hoped that by naming (and subsequently scrutinising) this discourse as such, we come closer to answering my research question of how can we understand the claims of EDMCs as inclusive of everyone. As
mentioned I see this “diversity discourse” as very much connected to contemporary Western discourses on diversity; what Žižek calls “the postpolitical liberal project” (Žižek 2008: 660).

Cracks and Contradictions

It is a Thursday night (read: a school night12) and a few glasses of wine have turned into a few bottles of wine and suddenly I am on a spontaneous night out at the infamous “gay cult” club night Chantal’s House of Shame. Where else would we go on a Thursday night, I hear you ask?

Well, what was previously one of the best ideas I have had has suddenly turned into a reckless one, as I am jostled aggressively to and fro on this crowded dance floor and being forced to sober up.

I begin to engage in a conversation with the man dancing next to me. He notices the “Freedom for Palestine” badge attached to the bag I am carrying and arrogantly shouts into my ear; “You do know that a place like this couldn’t exist in Palestine! The Arabs have a serious problem with homophobia... And they’re really oppressive to women, too!”

I close my eyes for a moment and feel the pulsation of the music throbbing from my feet, all the way through my body.

I ask myself, can I do this? Can I really leave my politics “at the door”? This isn’t the place for political argument. We are all just here for some light-hearted, mid-week fun. Feminist killjoys are not welcome here!

I turn around and battle through the predominantly male crowd in an attempt to find my friend. I am pushed and shoved by each person who walks past me, and one man pushes me so hard that I almost fall to the floor.

I find my friend dancing near the bar, enthusiastically flirting with the cute guy who we had met before. I tug on his sleeve to try to get his attention but he doesn’t notice. Suddenly I feel very small.

“Hey! I’m going home now! Hey!”

I leave the club as fast as the crowds will let me, feeling smaller and smaller as I go, wishing I were even smaller with each step.

12 A “School night” is a British idiomatic expression which is informally used by adults to describe an evening that precedes a day of work.
So far I have explored what these clubs mean to people and seen that many of my participants have a personal and emotional attachment to them. For some, these club spaces are of great importance to enable them to perform certain identities. Participants are able to express themselves in a manner that is seen to be conventionally unacceptable, overcome emotional hardships, perform rituals, socialise amongst like-minded people who share similar interests, escape from the “real world” and obtain “temporary relief” from societal restraints. This is heavily foregrounded (and perhaps, in part, sustained) by a discourse that portrays EDM nightclubs in Berlin as being extremely “diverse” and able to create a communal identity despite social difference. So the affirmation goes, these nightclubs have managed to carve out a space for themselves in which social hierarchies are defunct and heterogeneity prevails without conflict.

Given these vast claims and as mentioned, the implications that imagining such a utopian space (in Berlin, or indeed in any city for that matter) would have on understanding social power relations, my intention is to look a little closer at the claims being made here. I hope to complicate this somewhat simplistic narrative and draw attention to some of the tensions that might exist, with a specific focus on the representations of gendered, racial and sexual minorities. I want to investigate the extent to which this discourse is really inclusive of all members of community groups in the city. There will be two levels of observation throughout this analysis: I will look both at the discursive production of certain minority representations and; the extent to which minority groups are actually granted access to these spaces.

“Diversity”

I want to begin by first looking at the way that the term “diversity” itself was understood and used by my participants, as I believe doing so can help to shed light on just how open and accessible these clubs are to a broad range of people, as is being claimed in this discourse.

For many, “diversity” referred to the types of personalities participants were perceived to have. When I asked “B” whether “crowd diversity” was a driving factor in his choice of club, he told me that it was to a certain extent and that he liked the mix of “different characters” in Homopatik/About Blank and Berghain/Panorama Bar. He also added, “there are some people who are there to have fun and who smile a lot. But there are also some
people who just get wasted”. In a similar manner, “E” understood “diversity” in terms of his personal relationship to the people around him. Speaking about Gegen/KitKat Club, he said:

It’s very mixed, I mean all kinds of people go there. Of course some friends and some old party friends, people I have never met. I also like to see people who are visiting there, some tourists. Maybe some cute guys there, you know.

“Crowd diversity” here is understood to describe a mixture of people who have varying personality traits, behaviour patterns (including varying degrees of alcohol and drug consumption), who live in the city as well as people who are just visiting and who are both known and unknown to the participants.

For “A”, it was the inclusion of people of different nationalities that best signified “crowd diversity” for her. She said, “When you’re in the club you see how many different nationalities are partying together”. “A” was not specific about which “different nationalities” she was referring to, but her response indicates that for her, the inclusion of racial minorities is not necessarily a pre-requisite for crowd diversity in a nightclub. It is also not clear how “A” was able to “see… many nationalities… partying together” and what it was that led to her interpretation of the crowd in such a way.

“C” described a “diverse” crowd at an EDM club as being one that consisted of “just… people who are just into the music”. He explained that EDM exists on its own in its ability to attract such a broad range of people and that other music styles are much more exclusive, saying “you go to a punk party in Berlin and it’s full of punks. You go to a soul night and it’s full of soul boys… punks go to punk nights. You’ve also got your rockers and your metallers…” In contrast to this, he said EDM crowds are inherently diverse and are “just a melting pot of everybody” something that you “can’t really define [give a label to]”. For “C”, “diversity” meant the acceptance of “everybody” and an absence of segregation according to prevailing fashion trends or subcultures.

Through these accounts of diversity, what we see unfolding is the potential erasure of multiple identities from this narrative (despite the initial claims seen in sub-section “Defining the Diversity Discourse”). “A”, “B” and “C” didn’t consider, for example, the presence (or lack thereof) of women within these nightclub crowds, nor whether sexual minorities were represented. In all of the accounts here, the representation of racial minorities is likewise not mentioned as a critical component of crowd “diversity”. This tells us a great deal about who is perceived to be worthy of consideration for inclusion within these spaces.
Through my informal interview conversations I was able to delve deeper into my participants’ perceptions of crowd participation at these nightclubs and to explore further the way that this discourse may work to privilege certain experiences over others. As I mentioned previously, I was especially interested in problematising a discourse that relies heavily on supposedly neutral, sexuality-, race- and gender-less terminology such as “people” and “characters” (as well as “everybody”). Feminist post-colonialist researchers have long sought to draw attention to the way that language can work as a vehicle for the perpetuation of subordination. They have shown that a historical commitment to “objectivity” and “neutrality” (which so much dominates patriarchal Western narratives of history) in fact masquerades the presentation of a universalised, masculine, white, straight, able-bodied, wealthy, cis-gendered (etc.) subject. In talking about the development and legacy of colonialist discourse, for example, feminist post-colonial theorist Ania Loomba explains that “[h]istorical scholarship claimed ‘objectivity’ while being riddled with cultural bias” (Loomba 2005: 46). The prevalence of a (male, white, straight, able-bodied, cis-gendered) normative identity works to silence those voices and experiences that do not fit into this norm. By challenging this researchers have been able to render visible the experiences of historically disadvantaged groups. Inspired by this body of theorising, I wanted to unpack what was being taken for granted in the prevalent use of this supposedly “neutral” generic language within the “diversity discourse” that I describe. I confronted this by asking my participants to elaborate further on certain unclear comments or statements. I also encouraged responses by sharing my own personal experiences, like the described one above.

Emerging tensions

As mentioned, I will pay particular attention to the representations of gender, sexuality and race within the “diversity discourse”. I will do this in an attempt to narrow the focus of this research. This does not mean that I wish to reduce all experiences with EDMCs to these narrow categories (indeed I think research into the way that other social categories might interact with the “diversity discourse” here would be extremely fruitful), nor does it mean that I see them as disaggregated social experiences that are somehow mutually exclusive. Rather, I build on the important work of intersectional feminist theorists, who have worked hard to draw attention to the way that people can be multiply-burdened by intersecting power differentials. Intersectionality is a useful theoretical tool to help to unpack this discourse and to examine the inclusionary and exclusionary practices that might be taking place within
these EDM nightclubs (that is, answering the research question, “How can we understand the claim of EDM nightclubs to be inclusive of everyone?”), as it points our attention to the possibility that some voices and experiences are overlooked or silenced in dominant discourses. In ‘Intersectionality as Critical Methodology’ feminist scholar Kathy Davis discusses the way that intersectionality has enabled researchers to identify possible “blind spots” within their research (Davis 2014: 25). She discusses the way that our particular locations and political orientations have the effect of preventing us from being able to easily see experiences and perspectives that differ from our own. Through the consideration of possible “blind spots” we can critically interrogate what it is that we are not accustomed to seeing nor thinking about. I see this as a useful tool when looking at the powerful declarations of acceptance and diversity that the “diversity discourse” makes. Through the consideration of intersectionality and “blind spots” we can ask: What is being taken for granted here? What perspectives are being missed? How can we scrutinise unquestioned assumptions? The work of Maria Matsuda (1991) is also useful here, as she urges those who want to fight subordination to “ask the other question” in order to fully understand patterns of oppression and how they are mutually reinforcing. These intersectional feminist concepts will combine with a deconstructive approach that insists on “the existence of multiple truths and realities” (and therefore “rejects universal explanations”) (Olson 1997: 181). This is especially important for my research as, as we will see, the presentation of binary truths was a central theme throughout all of the interviews.

As already discussed, an important feature of this “diversity discourse” is the claim that Berlin’s nightclubs offer safe spaces for those who identify as being “gay” (seen, for example, in the fact that all of the nightclubs here advertise themselves as being either “gay” or “gay friendly”). In the chapter entitled “Clubs as Sites of Identity Building”, I detailed the way that many people experience these clubs as being important for their expression and performance of identity. I showed, for example, how critical Berghain/Panorama Bar has been for “B” in providing a safe space for him to express his identity and to seek refuge from homophobic aggression and violence. In light of this I was keen to look at what exactly “gay” was understood to mean in this context. I wanted to explore the extent to which this “gay/friendly” claim accounted for the inclusion of a variety of non-normative and queer sexualities.
A number of interviewees reinforced the claim that these nightclubs represented “diverse” social spaces by contending that they offered people the opportunity to socialise together, regardless of differing sexualities. For example, “E” explained that “gay [and] straight people [in Homopatik/About Blank, Gegen/KitKatClub and Berghain/Panorama Bar]… they all party together”.13 The idea that diversity meant the inclusion of “gay” and “straight” people was echoed by “B”, who, when describing Berghain/Panorama said, “It’s very diverse. There are lots of gays, a lot of heterosexuals. But I think they just party together and there’s no one judging about how the other one is”. Critically, despite my interviewees’ claims that their chosen nightclubs represent a space of acceptance for all sexualities, diversity is used restrictively here to describe homosexual and heterosexual sexualities. There was little recognition of sexualities that did not fit into the rigid binaries, pointing to the possibility that not all experiences are acknowledged in this discourse.

In the autoethnographic excerpt above, I describe an experience of feeling particularly vulnerable as a woman in Chantal’s House of Shame/Bassy Club nightclub (this negative experience, interestingly, contrasts sharply with the one described in “My Night Out in Berlin: Setting the Scene”, in which I describe clubbing as an incredibly positive experience – one that makes me feel safe and provides me with an opportunity to bond with close friends). In this extract my feelings of vulnerability can be seen clearly in my embodied descriptions of feeling “very small”, which adds to my desire to exit the club. During the interview with “B”, I shared these experiences of feeling the club was particularly dominated by males, with little representation from other genders. “B” agreed that the club was largely attended by males and offered an insightful perspective on the apparent gendered segregation of this club, explaining;

When you talk about gay parties it’s always about male gay. The women are… Not really represented… I think that at Chantal’s it’s mostly about sex. And I don’t think women really feel very comfortable there.

“B”’s comments here contrast enormously with those discussed in “Defining the Diversity Discourse”, in which he had described the many positive experiences he had had with his discovery of Berlin nightlife and the role it had played in allowing him to perform certain identities. In saying that he doesn’t think “women feel very comfortable” in Chantal’s House

13 It is interesting to note that this binary understanding of sexuality can be seen in the advertisement of some of these clubs as well, such as Chantal’s House of Shame claiming to host “a colourfully mixed crowd who party together amicably… which includes gays and heterosexuals” (Visit Berlin date unknown a).
of Shame/Bassy Club, “B” makes clear his perception that this opportunity is not made available to everyone and that some people may be being excluded from this liberating experience. What’s more, “B”’s description of this potential exclusion relies heavily on sexual stereotypes: He assumes that Chantal’s House of Shame/Bassy Club only attracts people who are interested in searching for a sexual partner and (by his definition) this is something that men are much more likely to be interested in than women are. Additionally, as with the discussion above about sexuality, “B” relies heavily on a rigid binary understanding of gender, in which only “male” and “female” identities are acknowledged as deserving of consideration in this discussion about diversity. There appears to be an explicit contradiction here between the claims we have seen being made within this discourse and the description here of gendered segregation.

Just like “B”, “A” also seemed to use the adjective “gay” to exclusively describe (cis-)male identities. “A” began our interview by describing a typical club night at Berghain/Panorama Bar. She said, “So of course you have straight and you have gay people”. As mentioned, I wanted to enquire as to what was meant by the genderless term “people” in this context. She explained to me; “[I am talking] [m]ore [about] gay men. You actually see not so many lesbians there”. Here we can see a certain amount of contradiction inherent in “A”’s previous claim that Berghain/Panorama Bar is “very mixed”. By looking closely at these statements we can see that for “A” a “very mixed” nightclub space is in fact one that is very much dominated by (homosexual) men and is rarely frequented by those who she describes as lesbian women. This idea that these EDM nightclubs might be dominated predominantly by men is something that García himself suggests, saying; “in most cities, men – especially as organisers and DJs – dominate queer dance music scenes” (García 2014). We can also see a certain tension between “A”’s previous claim that EDMCs were “neutral” in contrast to the inherently sexist nature of hip-hop (as a culture and as a style of music). Here we come a little closer to understanding the problematic nature of a discourse that makes to many bold claims, but has so many contradictions.

The idea that these club spaces might be socially segregated (which runs in contradiction to the picture that this “diversity discourse” paints) was seen especially during a conversation with “A” about the layout of Berghain/Panorama Bar. In this conversation she described the club as being comprised of two distinct spaces: the Berghain dance floor and the Panorama Bar dance floor. “A” describes these two dance floors as being significantly
different from one another (in terms of a number of different factors including music, lighting, layout, clientele and the inexplicable “vibe” that is created with the accumulation of all of these factors). This was something that I myself had noticed whilst attending on previous occasions and it certainly warrants further description.

The Berghain dance floor is the first dance floor that visitors come across as they enter the club, has 18m-high ceilings and a capacity of over 500 people (García 2011: 130). This floor tends to play hard techno (via the infamous FunktionOne speakers) (Funktion-One 2015) and the lighting tends to be limited to strobe, making it very dark. As visitors make their way up the steel staircase they will enter a separate dance space (the former control room of the electrical plant) (García 2010), which has floor-length windows running down one side of the room (the mechanised blinds for which are opened randomly “during moments of musical climax”) (García 2010). The lighting is warmer and it is more likely to hear more melodic house DJs playing here. The space also includes a bar, several cushioned alcove sitting areas and a few couches and a larger sitting area.\textsuperscript{14} As we can see, the atmosphere in both of these dance spaces are engineered to provide very different experiences for their guests.

For “A”, the distinctiveness of these two spaces was not just understood by looking at the lighting, music styles, architecture or space, but she also described a difference in the people who participated. She explained that she saw each dance floor as attracting a distinct “type” of person (with distinct identities and interests). When talking about Berghain, she said it was “more anonymous” and “aggressive” when compared to Panorama Bar. She added that it had “a different vibe” that “kind of drags you into a hole” and that people tend to “lose [themselves] much more [than in Panorama Bar]”.\textsuperscript{15} “A” also made the assumption that (just like “B”\textsuperscript{‘}s assumptions about Chantal\textsuperscript{’}s House of Shame/Bassy Club) those who spend more time on the Berghain dance floor are much more likely to be interested in sexual activity. In

\textsuperscript{14} For more descriptive detail of the club see García\textsuperscript{’}s blog entry, “Draft Profile: Berghain/Panorama Bar”, which includes a layout plan of the entire building (García 2010).

\textsuperscript{15} I believe “A” is making reference here to the distinct drugs that are taken in Berghain as compared to Panorama Bar. It is likely also that by describing participants being “dragged into a hole” she is referring to the drug GHB (known internationally as a “date-rape drug”), a narcotic that\textsuperscript{’}s recreational use has increased massively in recent years and is especially popular within male gay and bisexual communities (Palamar and Halkitis 2006: 23). GHB differs from other conventional nightclub substances (such as ecstasy, cocaine, MDMA and alcohol) in that it can cause “komaartigen Schlaf, Krampfanfälle oder sogar Atemdepressionen auslösen” [coma-like sleep, seizures or even respiratory depression] (my translation), especially when mixed with alcohol (Eve-rave 2008: 4). There are mixed attitudes towards the drug within EDM “scenes” (see Stübnier 2008).
contrast to this, she described Panorama Bar as “not as sexual”, “more cosy” and as having “a different vibe”. It seems relevant to note that “A” (a white, straight-identifying woman) admitted to spending most of her time in the latter Panorama Bar. “A”’s comments here tell us a lot about segregated spacing in the notoriously popular Berghain/Panorama Bar club, a segregation that contravenes somewhat the proclaimed “diversity discourse”.

“E” shared the opinion that “lesbian women” were disinterested in EDM clubbing in the city of Berlin. He explained this by saying, “I think lesbians even have their own parties going on, for instance Möbel Olfe... This is what I meant with [saying there were] different scenes within the party scene... everyone can find his [sic.] own little niche, you know”. If we place “E”’s statements with “A”’s above, we can deduce that not only is there segregation in terms of gender and sexuality inside EDM nightclub spaces, but there may also be segregation on a city-wide level, where people of different identifications in fact do not mix keenly together (as the “diversity discourse” claims) and have to organise their own separate and distinct parties on different days of the week and at different venues.

There also emerged a number of contradictions when it came to the representation of racial and ethnic diversity within these nightclubs. The autoethnographic excerpt above illustrates this issue. This excerpt clearly highlights how racial stereotypes can be used in order to justify social segregation in EDM nightclubs. Here a participant explains to me that he views “The Arabs” as inherently homophobic (“they” have a “serious problem with homophobia”) and sexist (because “they” are “really oppressive to women”), implying that their identities are entirely at odds with the gay club that I am in. His statement tells us two things: One, that the racialised identities that this participant conjures up cannot be welcome in a supposedly “diverse” and accepting space and two; that these spaces are in fact occupied predominantly by those who do not fit into the racial stereotype being described (the non-white, Arab Other). The former point I see as referring to the idea that there may be an unacknowledged racialised (as well as gendered) identity that is unwelcome in these nightclub spaces and is being concealed by the “diversity discourse”, which will be explored in more detail in the following section. I see this as critical in deepening an understanding of the role that ideas about “diversity” play in participants’ experiences of EDM spaces (in-keeping with my research questions). However, for now I see it as important to focus on the

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16 Möbel Olfe is a popular bar located in the district of Kreuzberg. It hosts weekly “lesbian nights” on a Tuesday, and nights specifically for “gay men” on a Thursday (Visit Berlin date unknown b).
latter point, which allows me to look critically at the types of people who are perceived by my participants as making up the crowd.

No better could I see cracks in the “diversity discourse” than in the discussion of exclusionary practices in these club’s selective door policies. Indeed, the screening of all participants upon entrance formed an integral part of conversations about club diversity both within the interviews as well as in the literature on EDM scenes and nightclubs. The importance of the role of bouncers in enforcing and policing the “diversity” that is created by participants in these nightclubs cannot be overstated. The bouncers are the first people that potential nightclub participants come into contact with and who evaluate whether certain members are deemed acceptable or not to enter. These decisions are made based on nightclub policy, as well as the discretion of the bouncers themselves. The specific methods that the bouncers of the clubs analysed in this thesis use to screen potential patrons for their acceptability is a topic that is somewhat shrouded in mystery and whilst interesting, it is however not the aim of this particular thesis. What I am interested in looking at is participant perceptions of these policies and whether talking about them could aid an analysis of diversity within the club itself.

The subject of nightclub door policy discrimination is a contentious issue in Germany at the moment and the topic has featured in a number of news articles lately (it should be noted that this is not exclusive to EDM nightclubs). Most recently there was an incident at a club called “Amadeus” in Ingolstadt (in Bavaria) that reportedly banned “refugees” from entering the establishment. After much outcry, the club responded by introducing a “nightlife mentors” scheme, which got other refugees to hand out fliers to educate about so-called “clubbing etiquette” and “how to behave towards women” (Burfeind 2015). Another story to hit the headlines was that of African American DJ and record producer Felix da Housecat, who in February of this year was denied entrance to Berghain/Panorama Bar, due to what he described as racism (Keeble 2015). In September 2013 the Spiegel Online reported that there had been a “wave of pending lawsuits” across Germany, dealing with accusations of racism in nightclub entrance policies (Hipp and Kistner 2013). A year prior to that, research was carried out by ‘Basis and Woge’ – an organisation that studies discrimination in Hamburg – that found high levels of racial discrimination (particularly against “black… and Turkish-looking men”) at nightclubs in the city (Deutsche Welle 2012). As we can see here, these accusations of nightclub door policy discrimination is not just an issue that is limited to
Berlin, nor can it be said to be limited to EDM clubs. García’s take on “selection” at EDM nightclubs is interesting to consider here. García claims that it is possible to see a link between these selective door policies and national discourses (looking specifically at Germany in his research) about multiculturalism and other models “that try to balance cohesion with diversity” (García 2011: 274). He explains that whilst the practices are “certainly not the same”, the practices from both a nation-state and a nightclub “both produce and practice a politics of belonging” (García 2011: 275). I agree with García’s comments and although a lengthy discussion about the quantifiable “truth” behind these claims is not possible nor the aim here, I see it as undeniable that dominant national discourses about race, identity and belonging (that incorporate, I believe, a significant element of racial stereotyping) will have an impact on how entrance to these Berlin EDM nightclubs is regulated. We can also see that the exclusionary door policies that exist in these clubs contravene the claims that “everyone” is welcome. If the latter were true, then these door policies would not exist.

I found that talking with my interviewees about nightclub door policy proved to be a fruitful way of opening up discussions about the complexities of these social spaces. It was interesting to note that it was in the broaching of this topic that I encountered the most amount of what I interpret as contradictory statements about diversity in these clubs. When I asked “D” about crowd makeup in Berghain/Panorama Bar I was initially met with an enthusiastic response as he tried to persuade me that the club was diverse, saying that it was possible to find “practically everything there. Like every race… Asians, blacks”. Importantly though, he did add a caveat to that when he asked;

[b]ut then there’s one question and that is… How much in relation is that to the people in the queue? Maybe the rates of people are… Maybe like 5% of the people queuing are black and in the club like 2% are black. That would be my guess.

“D” expresses an opinion that was not seen in any of the other interviews. Here he opines that although he sees Berghain/Panorama Bar as diverse (you can find “practically everything there”) he also acknowledges that, in his opinion, there is a considerably small percentage of people of colour who attend the club. Not only that, but he also alludes to the potentiality of discriminatory practices at the door of the club, as he perceives that the percentage of people of colour decreases even further once participants have passed the threshold of the club. “D”’s comment also begs the question; even if there is a “diverse” “mix” of people attending
these clubs (perhaps with a selection of “token” minority identities), does that automatically mean the numbers are representative of the population of the wider community?

With the exception of “D”’s comments, when it came to the discussion of racial and ethnic identity with my other participants, it was mostly “Arab” and “Turkish” identities that were called upon to describe “diversity” (or lack thereof) in these clubs. Putting aside for a moment an analysis of why it was (almost exclusively) only these two ethnic groups that were identified for discussion (something that will be revisited in the sub-section “Othering mechanisms”), there seemed to be a general consensus amongst my participants that “Turkish” and “Arab” people were not represented within nightclub crowds. “D”, for example, noted this inconsistency and affirmed; “in relation to society, Arabs and Turkish people are definitely not represented… [They] don’t go to Berghain”. Likewise “E” (who himself identifies as Turkish-German) contended, “there aren’t actually that many Turkish and Arab people [in Berghain/Panorama Bar], compared to how many there are in the city”. This is interesting, when we consider the fact that much of this “diversity discourse” relies heavily upon, as discussed previously, language that is supposedly “neutral” and race/gender/sexuality non-explicit. In contrast to that, here we have a description of these nightclubs that in fact is very segregated, here in terms of perceived ethnicity and race.

“E” explained why he believed there to be such little participation from Turkish citizens, saying;

they prefer hanging out amongst themselves, you know? And dancing to their own music, to Turkish music for example. I mean there’s lots of Turkish parties in Berlin which people – like you for example – might not know about… Like my mum for example, or my sister, they don’t know that there’s this place called Berghain, or what’s going on there…So there’s this parallel thing, you know?

As with the examples of gendered and sexuality-based segregation above, there seems to also exist segregation based on perceived ethnicity and the racialised associated interests and behaviours of those identities. This commentary describing totally separated and segregated “parallel” parties, that cater for different identities, comes in direct opposition to “E”’s previous statement in which he had claimed Berghain/Panorama Bar to be “very diverse”.

By looking closer at the representation of gender, sexuality race and ethnicity within this “diversity discourse” we can see a number of contradictions emerging. Not only are there contradictions, but this discourse seems to represent a rather normative account of inclusion, leaving only a privileged few accounted for in its definition. I have shown here that, despite
assumptions about social mixing inherent in the “diversity discourse”, according to my participants many of these nightclubs are in fact very much segregated according to conceived social categories. This is understood by a number of the interviewees via the use of gendered, sexual and racial stereotypes, which give this mode of socialisation meaning. Through these conflicting comments, we can see how problematic the use of supposedly “neutral” language is when describing these club spaces.

“Othering mechanisms

So far I have shown that by deconstructing this discourse using an intersectional lens, it is possible to see a certain amount of contradiction inherent in this “diversity discourse”. Although these EDM nightclubs may be important spaces of freedom, liberation and safety for some, according to my participants this does not hold true for everyone. There appear to be a number of attitudinal as well as physical barriers (the latter seen, for example, in the club’s restrictive door policies) in place for those whose identities (perceived or otherwise) do not fit an implicit norm. I will now take a closer look at the way that my participants made sense of these apparently socially segregated spaces. I will highlight the prevalent use of Othering practices by my participants, a tactic that was called upon, in my view, to allow people to give meaning to (and to an extent justify) their own descriptions of exclusion. I want to explore what the relationship between these Othering practices and the “diversity discourse” might be. To do this I will make use of queer and post-colonial theory, drawing principally from the works of Jasbir Puar (2007) and also of Edward Said (2013/1979) and Ania Loomba (2005).

I want to return again to the autoethnographic excerpt above, in which I describe a rather negative personal experience with “clubbing” at Chantal’s House of Shame/Bassy Club. By looking specifically at the interaction that I have in this extract with the stranger who comments on my “Free Palestine” badge, we can see what I interpret as an example of racial stereotyping. As I am dancing in Chantal’s House of Shame/Bassy Club, trying to have a carefree time, I am suddenly reminded that the space I am in is perhaps not accessible to or welcoming of everyone (it is noteworthy that although my badge causes me to stick out somewhat and to be on the receiving end of quite aggressive questioning, I am not perceived by this participant to fit into the “they” that he describes; a reality that might be explained by the privilege accorded to me as a white, European, English-speaking participant). The person
who engages in conversation with me reminds me that there is a certain identity; a certain fictional, stereotypical subject who is seen to be utterly incompatible with this nightclub and the people in it. He also reminds me of the way that contemporary narratives about the international plight for “gay rights” often interweave subtly with racist assumptions and neo-colonialist agendas. I find queer theorist Jasbir Puar (2007)’s work on “homonationalism” extremely useful in helping to understand and to unpack this interaction and to provide some context to the assumptions being made.

In her seminal book *Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times* (2007) (henceforth referred to as *Terrorist Assemblages*), Puar situates the increasing use of homosexuality by the U.S and Europe to portray themselves as “tolerant” and “civilised”, within a context of Western imperialism and colonisation. Since the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Centre in 2001 and the ensuing geopolitical transfigurations that were its result (transfigurations that were, of course, proceeded by the historical impact of colonialist projects that enforced a global system of hierarchical social categories, which are at the heart of Puar’s analysis), Puar notes that there has been “an uneasy yet urgent folding in of homosexuality into the ‘us’ of the ‘us-versus-them’ nationalistic rhetoric” (Puar 2007: 43). She uses “homonationalism” as an analytical category to understand how a nation’s status as “gay-friendly” has become so desirable. In the context of the Palestine/Israel conflict, homonationalism can be seen at work with the Israeli government’s unceasing use of “pinkwashing” as a PR strategy that promotes “LGBT bodies as representative of Israeli democracy” (Puar 2013: 338) and reframes “the occupation of Palestine in terms of civilisational narratives measured by (sexual) modernity” (Puar 2013: 337). In her work on homonationalism, Puar makes the powerful and critical point that the narrative of progress for gay rights in The West is built on the back of racialised Others (ibid.). It is within this historical and political context that we must place the interaction seen in the autoethnographic extract above and the assumptions behind the claim that “[t]he Arabs have a serious problem with homophobia… And they’re really oppressive to women, too!” I see this participants’ comments as directly mirroring the ubiquitous (homo)nationalistic discourses that Puar analyses in her work. What is interesting is that within this Berlin EDMC setting, this participant is able not only to invoke what I see as racist stereotypes about “The Arabs” but,

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17 With the term Western I refer to Edward Said’s work on orientalism (2013/1979), which described the historical construction of Europe (and later the United States) as inherently superior to “The East.”
given the pervasiveness of the “diversity discourse”, he is able to do so under the guise of participating in a space (or “scene”) that does not require critical reflection in terms of the diversity of its participants.

Indeed this type of homonationalistic rhetoric was found within a number of my interviews as well. When talking to “D” about why he thought so few Turkish and Arab people attended EDM club nights, he explained that he felt it was because they had differing musical interests; “I think it’s because they’re not into techno music, mostly”. Taking this further (and emulating“A”的 comments, seen in “Defining the Diversity Discourse”, in which she stated, “hip-hop is very sexual, I mean not in a positive way... So I would understand if lesbians wouldn’t want to go to hip-hop parties”), “D” compared EDMCs to hip-hop to show the differences in cultural norms within Berlin Turkish and Arab communities. He told me that there were few Turkish and Arab participants in Berghain/Panorama Bar because, “they listen to hip-hop… There’s still a gay scene, [Berghain/Panorama Bar] is still a gay club…” He made his point clearer by saying, “My entire youth was spent with Turkish kids and Arab kids, we were looking for trouble all the time. All of my friends were really homophobic, you know?” As with the scenario in the autoethnographic excerpt above, in which sexuality is called upon in order to reinforce a notion of “acceptable” and “unacceptable” participation in these nightclubs (something that can also be referred to as a type of “Othering practice”), “D” (and indeed “A”) justifies the social segregation that he describes. “D” seems to express the view that if one is Arab or Turkish, one is very likely to possess homophobic views and is therefore either not welcome or not interested (the distinction is not clear) in “gay friendly” Berghain/Panorama Bar. There is also no discussion of the existence of queer of colour identities in this conversation, leading to, as we have seen in the previous section the erasure of non-normative identities.

In ‘How gay stays white and what kind of white it stays’ historian and gay activist Allan Bérubé makes the convincing case for the need to view homosexuality as always being shaped by race and gender (and class) (Bérubé 2003: 254). Bérubé explores the way that the category “gay man” has become white within popular discourses in the United States and how unquestioned beliefs about white privilege are dominant within many activist circles (2003: 256). He explains that, “in this zero-sum racialised world... gay men are white; gay, lesbian, and bisexual people of colour, along with poor, working-class gay men, bisexuals and lesbians, simply do not exist” (2003: 257-258). This idea that gay equals white seems to
be what both “D” and “A” are expressing in their assertions here too. Their comments show a rather simplistic, binary understanding of identity, in which one is either gay or straight, white or non-white; acceptable or unacceptable (this, we will see, is of course amplified further with the addition of other binaries such as male/female). Puar neatly describes this as an “irreconcilable binary between queer and something else” (Puar 2007: 13). It is as though Arab or Turkish and gay (or even “not homophobic”) are mutually exclusive identity categories. Intersectionality reminds us that social categories and aspects of identity cannot be viewed as separate from one another. Rather, we must see them as intra-acting constantly with one another on multiple levels, creating divergent and unique experiences of discrimination and inequality (McCall 2005). My interviewees’ conceptualisations that aspects of a person’s identity (such as race, ethnicity, sexuality and gender) act independently of one another results in, as I have already discussed, the erasure of multiple experiences. For example, in “D” and “A”’s comments above there was no consideration for the existence of a queer female identity, or indeed of any other ethnic minority.

It is interesting to note that in both “D” and “A”’s explanations of social segregation, hip-hop is referenced as a defining antithesis of EDMCs. For “A”, this is because hip-hop is “very sexual… not in a positive way” causing “lesbians” to feel uncomfortable at hip-hop parties and refuse to attend. “D” seems to make the claim that hip-hop is associated with homophobic attitudes and behaviour and is oppositional to Berlin’s EDM nightclubs. For me, both of the claims being made here have quite clear racial implications. Hip-hop has a long history of being used as evidence of the inferiority of non-white culture, through accusations that it is an innately sexist or homophobic form of artistic expression (something that is, unfortunately, found in all genres of music and cultures). According to Africana Studies professor Tricia Rose, these incidences of sexism (and homophobia) have been used in order to “cement and consolidate the perception of black deviance and inferiority” (Rose 2008: 114) (Rose’s analyses focus on the African American experience and “black culture” in the US, but I would claim that her writing is very much relevant to the cultural construction of the “Turkish/Arab”, “non-white” Other in the German context too). Both “A” and “D” place these deviant cultures in direct opposition to the apparently “diverse” EDM crowds, within which sexism and homophobia apparently do not exist. I see Puar’s work on homonationalism as very much related to this creation of a deviant Other, via the supposed protection of traditionally minority figures (in this case, women and homosexuals). Puar
states, “historically speaking, settler colonialism has a long history of articulating its violence through the protection of serviceable figures such as women and children, and now the homosexual” (Puar 2013: 338). It see it as critical that the “diversity discourse” be looked at within the wider political context that I have described here. In my material, we see ways in which such a discourse is interlinked with and reinforces a colonial, patriarchal and normative agenda.

Much like “D”’s claims that racial or ethnic segregation within EDM nightclubs could be explained by differing cultural interests, “C” also expressed the view that this segregation was not based on discriminatory practices. “C” offered his own interpretation for this occurrence; interpretations that shifted responsibility onto specific groups. For example, he explained to me why he thought, “Turkish people don’t go to Berghain”, saying; “I think they’re not really into the music, I think they’ve got their own thing”. Interestingly, “C” ascribes responsibility to these individuals even further when he claims that,

At the moment, in the party... If there were a Turkish guy standing next to me, you know like raving, then I’d be like, ‘hey!’ You know what I mean? I would. But I think that’s the environment it creates. But they don’t go there... I think they’re just not interested in going to these places. And if they were they might have a really good time, or they might have a really bad time, but I don’t think the house/techno scene appeals to them.

It seems to me that with this quote “C” attempts to explain the segregation he sees within these nightclubs via the use of Othering practices. Here “C” talks of a monolithic “Turkish” identity (a unified identity with shared interests and tastes), which he juxtaposes with that of an EDM participant. This troubling delineation between an “us” and a “them” is at the very heart of post-colonialist, anti-imperialist, feminist scholarship and is deserving of further analysis.

The practice of “Othering” is a concept that has constituted the focus of a great deal of post-colonial scholarship (See Hall 1997; Said 1978; Spivak 1985). Put simply, Othering refers to “the social and/or psychological ways in which one group excludes or marginalises another group” (Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin 2000: 188). As I have discussed in the section ‘Epistemological and Theoretical Framework’, Othering is an ideological and discursive mechanism hailing from colonial domination. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (a critical post-colonial feminist theorist, who coined the term) defines the practice of Othering as;

a process by which the empire can define itself against those it colonises, excludes and marginalises... in order that the empire might define itself by its geographical and racial others (Spivak 1985, cited in Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin 2000: 190)
“C”’s comments seem to be very much informed by the types of Orientalist knowledges that I have discussed here. “C” calls upon these differentiation (or Othering) mechanisms when he presents his explanation of potential racial and ethnic segregation in EDM nightclubs in Berlin. Not only does “C” seem to present “Turkish guy[s]” as identical to one another, but he also makes an effort to establish a clear “us” and “them”, as he discusses what look like irreconcilable differences between two clashing identities. Importantly, these differences cannot be said to be the fault of the “diverse” EDM nightclub since, after all, it is an environment that encourages a participant like “C” to approach a “Turkish guy standing next to [him]” and say “hey!” Rather, he places responsibility on the non-conforming Other, who is at fault by not accepting this generosity. As “C” understands it, racial and ethnic segregation does exist within these “scenes”, but it is the “Turkish” racialised Other’s own self-exclusion that is to blame. “C” seems to describe the “irreconcilably stubborn natures of unassimilating and unasimilatable… Muslims” trope that Puar discusses in Terrorist Assemblages (Puar 2007: 21).

Considering that many of my participants felt that the safety of these nightclubs was an important aspect of their enjoyment of them (seen, for example, in the chapter “Clubs as Sites of Identity Building”), I was interested in examining the extent to which this desire for safety clashed with a desire for a “diverse” crowd (and whether these two desires were indeed compatible at all). “A”, who worked in Berghain/Panorama Bar (the club with the most notorious door policies out of all of the clubs presented here), explained to me that she thought generally the bouncers at the club made justified decisions about who can and cannot enter. She did add, however, that some bouncers had “prejudices about Turkish/Arab guys” and believed “they’re like criminals and have bad intentions and want to rob you”. She told me she felt that, “[bouncers] want[ed] to avoid any trouble in the club” because of this. As we have seen with the examples above, “A” utilises Othering mechanisms in order to give meaning to the exclusionary practices of the door staff. She does this via the use of racial stereotypes, a key component to the way that Othering functions. Cultural and literary historian Sander Gilman describes stereotyping as something that involves, “a reduction of… ideas to a simple and manageable form” (Gilman 1985, cited in Loomba 2005: 55). She says that the function of stereotypes is “to perpetuate an artificial sense of difference between ‘self’ and ‘Other’” (ibid). “A”’s use of racial stereotypes is very much in line with this. The reasoning she describes reflects a stereotype in which “Turkish/Arab” people have identical
behaviours and interests and have an intrinsic propensity for criminality and causing “trouble” in clubs. In the story that “A” paints here, the safety of those who could be victims of such criminality, “bad intentions” and danger is given priority and the desire for “diversity” within these EDM crowds is all of a sudden not as important as the discourse boasts. Critically, I have shown that this is a racialised process, with normative and privileged identities (in this case, white) being much more likely to be given priority in this situation.

I believe that “A”’s comments should be looked at in tandem with nationalistic German discourses generally and, just like with the news articles that I described in the sub-section “Emerging tensions”, her views need to be understood within this contemporary and historical political context. I would contend that within popular right-wing (as well as, it could be argued, mainstream) German media and politics, there exists a fictionalised “Turkish or Arab” Other; an imagined identity that can be best understood in the context that I have described here. The fact that “A” (just like many of my other participants) frequently conflated “Turkish” and “Arab” identities, as though they were either one in the same or not worthy of differentiation\(^\text{18}\), tells us a lot about the way that this Other is portrayed. I would also contend that this creation of an “Arab/Turkish” racialised Other is also informed by a contemporary, neocolonialist context of rising Islamophobia and the portrayal of “Arabs” and “Muslims” as the enemy of the “civilised” Western world. Leti Volpp (a law and humanities scholar who writes about citizenship, migration, culture and identity) contextualises this by explaining that, “September 11 facilitated the consolidation of a new identity category that groups together persons who appear ‘Middle Eastern, Arab or Muslim’”. This consolidation is what we can see with the discursive insistence here to group “Turkish” and “Arab” identities together.

With her references to “prejudices about Turkish/Arab guys” “A” didn’t necessarily condone the behaviour of the Berghain/Panorama Bar bouncers (she described these stereotypes as “prejudices”, after all). However, in an apparent attempt to acknowledge the problematic nature of such assumptions, she later explained to me in the interview that there did exist “Turkish and Arab guys” who did not behave in this particular manner and who

\(^{18}\) This is something that one can see politicians doing too. Take, for example, Bavarian Governor Horst Seehofer, who stated in October 2010; “Es ist doch klar, dass sich Zuwanderer aus anderen Kulturkreisen wie aus der Türkei und arabischen Ländern insgesamt schwerer tun. Daraus ziehe ich auf jeden Fall den Schluss, dass wir keine zusätzliche Zuwanderung aus anderen Kulturkreisen brauchen... Die Integrationsverweigerer müssen wir aber härter anpacken” [It’s clear that immigrants from other cultures such as Turkey and Arab countries have more difficulties. From that I draw we don’t need additional immigration from other cultures... We must get tougher on those who refuse to integrate] (my translation) (Zeit Online 2010).
were “basically Germans, who [were] not up for any trouble or anything”. I see these comments as being very much connected to wider contemporary discussions about race, ethnicity, culture, immigration and national identity in Germany. It is widely assumed in the media as well as amongst policy makers that *Mehrheitsgesellschaft* [a German majority society] exists in the country (Bloomfield 2003: 171), with shared “linguistic and lifestyle characteristics that imply a common way of life and values” (ibid.). This assumption presupposes the many assimilation policy strategies and plans that the government has rolled out for immigrants and this has a lot to do with Germany’s concern over the creation of *Parallelgesellschaften* [parallel societies] (Heitmeyer 1996, cited in García 2011: 278). *Parallelgesellschaften* could be described as the “problem” of immigrants refusing to “properly” integrate into German society and in doing so undermining notions of German nationhood. These neo-colonialist sentiments of “us” vs. “them” implicitly place Germany – or Europe in general – as the bearer of culture and resources and the racialised immigrant Other as the one who needs to assimilate and adapt. I see “A’s” comments – in which she very clearly describes the belief that an ethnic minority (in this case a “Turkish or Arab” “guy”) is required to assimilate to German culture and behaviour – as mirroring the colonialist, nationalistic discourses I have discussed here. There is a very clear binary distinction for “A”: on the one hand we have the image of the good, well-behaved (“diverse”?) German citizen and on the other we have the deviant, threatening Other.

The idea that there might be an imagined deviant Other that is closely linked to Arab and Turkish identities, rooted within dominant national German discourses, was something that was also brought up in “D”’s interview. “D” explained to me that he felt the fact that there were so many “marginalised youths” in Berlin who “listen to hip-hop and tend to be violent” creates a “kind of racist stereotype”. He continued,

> like a Turkish youth is *the* troublemaker in Germany, you know? For the broader masses. It’s seen as the most dangerous individual for he average German. That’s like an 18-20 year-old Turkish boy. It’s implanted in their heads. If they’d read in the newspapers that someone did wrong, they’d immediately have this picture of a Turkish boy who did it.

“D”’s quote gives us a very visual idea of what this deviant “Other” may look like. He also adds to the description another intersecting identity category and that is age: In “D”’s account, those who are aged between 18 and 20 are more likely to be perceived as dangerous or threatening within the German national imagination.
Intersecting privilege and disadvantage

As we can see, these EDM nightclubs represent complex spaces, within which manifold dimensions of acceptability and normativity are negotiated. Looking at them from a simplistic perspective – that is, one that does not acknowledge identities as always intersectional – can be very misleading, to say the least. As I have touched upon already, I see them as complex in terms of the way that identity is mediated. One important aspect that begs further analysis is the possibility of participants experiencing both disadvantage and privilege at the same time in these spaces.

The autoethnographic excerpt above again shows this complexity. It is clear from this extract that I do not face the same barriers that other potential EDM participants may face. Most strikingly this can be seen with the fact that I am granted access to this space. I am not read as a threat to the ethos of the nightclub and – for reasons that I want to explore – I am deemed (somewhat) acceptable by both the door staff and the other participants (the latter is seen, for example, in the fact that I personally wasn’t the target of racial stereotyping by the participant who engages in conversation with me; rather it is some distant Other who is conjured up in order to articulate there being an identity that is not welcome in this space). It is possible that I, as a straight, cis-gendered person who is probably read as such, add to an acceptable definition of diversity that includes – to take “E”’s words – the mingling of “gay [and] straight people” together. As a (white) British person in Germany I also contribute to “A”’s definition of crowd diversity as; “different nationalities… partying together” – but which is not necessarily prefaced on the inclusion of ethnic or racial minorities. I would speculate that this list could be expanded further to encompass a whole host of privileges that I might personally receive in this environment.

At the same time, my description of this clubbing experience is not an entirely positive one. Once I am inside the club, my overwhelming feeling is that I am not welcome. I feel uncomfortable by the hyper-aggressive, masculine environment and do not feel entirely safe. This is shown with the depiction of being “shoved and pushed… so hard that I almost fall to the floor”. If we were to contrast this extract with the one found in the chapter “My Night Out in Berlin: Setting the Scene”, we can see a stark difference in my embodied experience of the space. In the first extract I feel free to move my body, to take some clothes off and to dance. However in the latter situation I feel “very small”.
In this thesis I have shown the importance of intersectional analysis when looking at experiences of discrimination. Intersectionality has helped to highlight potential “blind spots” in this “diversity discourse” and to acknowledge that viewing identity categories as disconnected from one another has the affect of erasing experiences. Here I would like to advance the idea that if intersectionality, as a theory, is to acknowledge the complexities of social relations of power, it must include the recognition of nuance when it comes to social identity. It can do this partly, I think, by acknowledging the possibility that individuals might experience disadvantage or privilege in different moments, contexts and social settings and that they intersect with each other constantly. This is true when we consider that, after all, identity is unstable, unfixed and always changing.

In ‘Re-thinking Intersectionality’, anti-racist feminist theorist Jennifer Nash claims there to be “a number of paradoxes” embedded in the literature on intersectionality, that “remain uninterrogated by feminist and anti-racist scholarship” (Nash 2008: 3). She highlights what she calls “an unresolved theoretical dispute” within intersectional literature, which has yet to conclude whether intersectionality is a theory of marginalised subjectivity, or a general theory of identity (2008: 10). What I found most useful about Nash’s work specifically is her postulation that current scholarship is lacking an examination of identities that are “imagined as either wholly or even partially privileged” (ibid.). She calls on intersectional feminist theorists to develop “a conceptualisation of identity that captures the ways in which race, gender, sexuality and class, among other categories, are produced through each other, securing both privilege and oppression simultaneously” (ibid.). I see this as an exciting addition to the theorisation of these club spaces and they are very useful for understanding how the “diversity discourse” interlinks with people’s participation in these spaces. Looking at the club spaces in this way also allows us to, as was my aim, complicate these social settings and to challenge any binary understandings of them (that is, as either “good” or “bad” spaces) that is so prevalent within the “diversity discourse” that I have described.

These ideas about intersecting privilege and disadvantage seem particularly pertinent for my research when we consider the complexity of viewing these clubs as both a safe haven (free from harassment and homophobic attacks, for example) for certain attendees, whilst at the same time as being sites of exclusion for certain non-normative identities. As we have seen, “B” – someone who self-identifies as “gay” – saw “gay-friendly” Berghain/Panorama
Bar as a safe space for him to express parts of his personality, something that he said he had not been able to do either in “straight” clubs, or in the village that he grew up in. However, just like myself in the autoethnographic excerpt above, we know that he experiences a certain amount of privilege based on other aspects of his identity, such as his gender, his whiteness, or his nationality. Bérubé (2003) discusses the way that privilege works when it comes to gay white identities in the U.S. He examines what he calls, “gay whitening practices”, that prevent those “who move into the public spotlight as representative gay activists” (2003: 256) from noticing the way that their gay visibility has at times exploited and reinforced a racialised class divide (2003: 254). Bérubé discusses the way that “racially comfortable, racially familiar situations” (a description that perfectly matches the way that many of my participants reported their EDM nightclubs to look like) can have the effect of making people believe that “there are such things as gay issues, spaces, culture and relationships that are not ‘lived through’ race” (2003: 256). These assumptions, he says, can only be made with the possession of privilege and they “form a camouflage woven from a web of unquestioned beliefs” (ibid.). I like this metaphor of camouflage when it comes to an analysis of privilege present within the “diversity discourse”, as it elucidates an element of it that seems to be integral to its operation: That is, that the discourse serves to mask the significant role of privilege in upholding segregation within these spaces.

Feminist and anti-racist activist Peggy McIntosh’s description of (white) privilege as “an invisible, weightless knapsack of special provisions…” (McIntosh 2003: 148) is particularly helpful in understanding how privilege seems to be functioning in these social settings. This conception of privilege as something that some people (sometimes) have but that is not acknowledged could help to explain why many of my participants were reluctant to question this “diversity discourse”, even after having contradicted their own definitions of it on numerous occasions (take, for example, “B” telling me that “women are… not really represented”, or “E” saying that Turkish people “prefer hanging out amongst themselves”). Again, I see Puar’s work in Terrorist Assemblages (2007) as considerably connected to this discussion of privilege. Puar posits that it is possible for “queerness” to also narrate its own “sexual exceptionalism” (2007: 22). She explains that within the U.S. (again, I see these ideas as very relevant to discussions on neo-colonialist, Western narratives generally) there has been a tendency to recentre the normative queer subject as an exclusively transgressive one and she reveals that “queerness” can “paralle[l] and intersect[ ] with that of multiculturalism
[and] the ascendency of whiteness” (ibid.) (the concept of “the ascendency of whiteness will be explained further in the following discussion). If we know that access to these nightclub spaces is premised on the possession of (intersecting) privilege, and privilege is to be understood as that which we are taught not to see, then we have to question the role of this “diversity discourse” in reinforcing privilege and perhaps aiding the maintenance of social segregation in these spaces.

Another applicable example of privilege intersecting with disadvantage can be found in an intriguing conversation I had with “D” about door policies at Berghain/Panorama Bar. Adding again a critical perspective to the club’s door policies and the bouncer’s decisions to reject or accept certain patrons, “D” speculated that bouncers at the club had different expectations for non-white participants. He referenced the German racial nationalistic narratives that I have discussed in the sub-section “Emerging tensions” and opined,

[en] every club has a quoten schwartzter [a token black person], you know? Like you’ve always got one black person, to show you’re not racist… or a quotenTürke [a token Turkish person]… And if they want one, then they want them in a specific way… Every time I see an exotic person in there, they’re like peacocks.

He explained the latter point by saying,

I have never seen a black person in Berghain who is as uncool as the un-coolest German in Berghain. If there is a black person in there, then they’re like ‘fresh’, you know… If a black person looks ugly and scary, they wouldn’t want them there. Or if there’s too many Turks in the club…

This quote firstly points to troubling, racist double standards when it comes to (“D”’s perceptions of) door policies in the club (and, of course, further contradicts the claims of the “diversity discourse”). “D” also seems to be saying that he thinks the bouncers at Berghain/Panorama Bar hold different, tougher standards for people of colour who attempt to enter the club and, unlike their presumably white German counterparts, they are expected to act and dress in a particularly outstanding, “cool” way. “D” seems to be describing what Puar calls an “exceptional citizen”, or a “tolerable ethnic” (Puar 2007: 25). Puar uses Rey Chow’s work on “the ascendency of whiteness” to talk of the incorporation of “appropriate multicultural ethnic bodies” (that are complicit with the ascendency of whiteness) (ibid.) within nationalistic, Western discourses. She explains that this is crucially premised on the “careful management of difference” (ibid.); something we can see here with the way that
race-based exclusionary practices are refined in order to include non-normative identities, whose bodies still have to conform to a specific set of restrictive and discriminatory rules.

Notably “D”, a person of colour, admitted that he felt that he conformed to these expectations (perhaps this is unsurprising, considering that we have already seen that “D” was an avid fan of Berghain/Panorama Bar and would attend one to two times per month). He said,

> even I have a particular haircut... I mean I don’t want to show off, but I don’t look like a dork... As a black person, I could also get into any club, because I’m riding this wave of positive racism... Like a cool black guy with a girl, that’s what they want, they can show that they’re diverse

Unlike those many unfortunate people of colour who are rejected at the door of the club for not being “fresh” enough, “D” believes he is able to enter because he is able to manage the rigid (racist) expectations that are placed upon him, marking him a “tolerable ethnic” who does not threaten to disrupt the habitualised social practices taking place. Here we can ask; what is it that allows “D” to become the “exception” (looking past his “particular haircut” and being “with a girl”)? We have to wonder whether it would be possible for “D” to manage these expectations if he had been, for example, economically poor, working class, of a different nationality, non-German-speaking, someone with a disability, gender non-conforming, etc. On the one hand “D” obviously faces tougher standards whilst trying to gain access to Berghain/Panorama Bar than the white Germans he describes, but on the other he is able to manage this difference with the small amount of privilege that he has. This I believe shows the possibility of inequality and privilege working together to form intersecting experiences. The analysis here I believe complicates traditional conceptions of intersectionality and problematises any neat conceptualisations of identity as rigid and binding. When it comes to the “diversity discourse” that I am analysing in this thesis, a significant contradiction in its claims can be found particularly when we look at the fact that participants must grapple with and negotiate elements of privilege in order to gain access.

What’s more, I would like also to posit that these strict door policies serve an important purpose of making participants (those who can access these spaces) feel “special” and “chosen” and ultimately increase their enjoyment of these nightclubs. When García discussed EDMC door policies with his research participants, he found that the majority of them felt the atmosphere on the dance floor greatly benefitted from obstacles to entry (García 2011: 140), meaning that their experiences were improved if other people were not granted access. In my
autoethnographic excerpt “My Night Out in Berlin: Setting the Scene” we can also see this when I say; “[m]y feelings of anxiety about not being let in immediately turn to delight when I contemplate the fact that I am passable, I am acceptable. They let us in!” I would argue that this heightened enjoyment that comes from passing this “identity test” at the door of the nightclub can also be seen with “D”’s quote here. In saying, “I don’t want to show off, but I don’t look like a dork” I believe “D” – just like myself in the example above – takes comfort and enjoyment from the process of being granted access through these “gate-keeping” procedures. This supposition could also help to better understand the chapter entitled “Club Spaces as Sites of Identity Building”, in which I showed how important these clubs are to people and the emotional attachment that many have to them.
CONCLUSIONS

Effects of “Diversity”: Final Conclusions

I would now like to consider what kind of an impact this “diversity discourse” (complete with its contradictions) might have on nightclub participants’ experiences with EDM spaces. What role does it play in people’s lives? How does it affect people’s social interactions? How does its existence help us to better understand social segregation and inequality within EDM spaces?

If we take the above analysis of Othering practices, homonationalism and (intersecting) privilege and place it within the context of a dominating “diversity discourse” then we come a little closer to understanding the workings of this discourse, what its effects are and what it does. It is my contention that the former contravenes the latter. On the one hand we have the apparent pervasiveness of racist, sexist and homophobic stereotyping, based on perceived judgments about identity and associated behaviours and characteristics; yet on the other hand we have a discourse that claims diversity and acceptance and unification through difference.

For some, the clubs in this study are experienced as spaces of freedom and equality. In the chapter “Club Spaces as Sites of Identity Building”, I showed that for some interviewees, these EDM nightclubs afford collective acceptance for certain queer identities. They are seen as safe spaces that provide shelter from homophobic harassment and violence, as well as places where one is able to dress however they like without feeling judged. They can also provide comfort to those who have experienced distress and can act as a means of emotional release. However, those very people who describe this experience of freedom are the same people who describe them as sites of exclusion for a significant section of society. What I see here is a huge gap between the principle of this diversity discourse and its practice.

I believe this “diversity discourse” first of all functions to bond the acceptable/accepted participants together. It works to embolden a sense of unity and solidarity amongst the participants in these clubs as well as to give this social interaction meaning and purpose. The claim that these clubs have been able to carve out a space in Berlin society that is free from all forms of discrimination and intolerance, gives my participants something to feel proud of, something that justifies their participation. It also allows for the uncomplicated enjoyment of these social spaces. García also found this when looking at solidarity within EDM nightclub...
settings and he stated, “there appears to be a desire among interviewees for togetherness to be simple, uncomplicated, and unproblematic” (García 2011: 145).

Crucially I also think that this “diversity discourse” acts as a mask, to hide the dissonant, contradictory and inconsistent aspects of these nightclub spaces. The “diversity discourse” and its aspirations of freedom and inclusivity enables participants to avoid acknowledging the fact that these clubs are also spaces of inequity and exclusion. I have seen that my participants had such a strong desire to uphold the tenets of the “diversity discourse” that they were unwilling to enact a more nuanced understanding of these social spaces, which included a critical look at the exclusionary practices that take place there. A perfect example of this “mask-like” quality of the “diversity discourse” is in the discussions of these club’s strict door policies. Many of my interviewees opined that exclusive entrance policies served the purpose of keeping people safe from physical harm caused by aggressive or violent participants. Whilst this may be true to an extent (seen, for example, with “B”’s assertions that he finds safety an important factor when choosing which nightclub to attend), I propose that the idea that exclusionary door policies serve to keep certain minorities safe (“gay” people, women etc.) is in fact summoned in order to hide their role in heightening participants’ enjoyment of the club due to their feeling “chosen” and “accepted”.

I believe this discourse excuses participants “from a critique of [their] own power manipulations” (Puar 2007: 31) and results in reinforcing social segregation. On a practical level, I would suggest it also prevents the formation of political alliances amongst minority groups, leaving little hope for redress for the discrimination they might have faced. Through the “diversity discourse” participants are discouraged from discussing their own privilege and their own roles in upholding hegemonic norms. Instead there is a desire for “simple, smooth, and unproblematic” (García 2011: 134) social interactions with people who are, for the most part, just like them. You could say that this logic is counter-intuitive: It is fascinating to see the way that a discourse that boasts freedom and equality is able to do the very thing it claims not to do; reinforce social segregation. Its end result is to bond those who are included and further exclude those who are not.

**Summary of Findings**

The main aim of this thesis was to critically investigate the discursive claims that crowd participation in Berlin’s EDM nightclubs are unequivocally “diverse” and that “everyone” is
welcome. In this thesis I have shown there to be a number of contradictions in these claims, highlighting especially the barriers that numerous people of colour, women and sexual minorities (particularly those who are identified as being “lesbian”) face.

In answer to my research question, *What role do these nightclubs play in participants’ lives?* I analysed the role that these nightclubs played in aiding the exploration and performance of certain identities. I found that all of my interviewees had a very strong personal and emotional connection to these nightclubs and many sought refuge and comfort from the club’s ability to shield them from the “real world”. The second stage of my analysis consisted of describing, in detail, the discursive construction of EDM “scenes” and nightclubs, especially in Berlin, as being inherently “diverse”. I showed this to be a prevalent claim within the EDMC scholarship, from the advertisement of the nightclubs that were studied in this thesis, as well as within the interviews themselves. I believe that naming this discourse in the way that I did is an important and original contribution to the study of EDMCs. In an attempt to address the question, *How can we understand the claim of EDM nightclubs as inclusive of everyone?* I used an intersectional lens and highlighted the contradictions that I saw as appearing in this discourse, emphasising, for example, the way that supposedly “neutral” language is used and has the effect of engendering the projection of a very normative account of inclusion. These contradictions also point to the silencing and erasure of certain minority experiences and identities. In order to address the question *Which accounts of inclusion and exclusion can be traced in EDMC participants’ representations of these spaces?* I drew on a post-colonial theoretical framework and began by showing that many of my participants made sense of the segregation that they described via the use of Othering mechanisms. I also suggested that looking at these comments within a context of homonationalism helps to shed light on their purpose. Importantly, I advocated for the need for a nuanced understanding of intersecting identity categories as including an analysis of the way that people are able to experience both privilege and disadvantage in different spaces, times and contexts. Finally, in response to the question, *What role do ideas of “diversity” play in participants’ experiences of EDMC spaces?* I theorised that this “diversity discourse” functions to both reinforce solidarity and bonding amongst participants, whilst also working as a mask that hides an alternative reality of social segregation and discrimination. I see it as working to prevent people from critically analysing these EDM “scenes” and seeing the way that not everyone is deemed to be acceptable enough to participate.
Whilst I have shown quite a critical perspective of these EDM nightclubs and portrayed them as relying heavily upon discriminatory exclusionary practices, I also see it as important to resist the urge to label them as either “good” or “bad” spaces. Within EDMC scholarship there appears to be a stark dichotomy between viewing EDM “scenes” simplistically as either sites of unrestrained drug consumption and personal risk (Miller, Fur-Holden, Voas and Bright 2005; Parker, Williams and Aldridge 2002; Yacoubian and Wish 2006) or as spaces that exist for the purpose of aiding solidarity, increasing participants’ sense of “PLUR” — “sentiments of peace, love, unity and respect” (Kavanaugh and Anderson 2008: 1) and sites of unification. I believe this type of simplistic understanding of EDM clubs should be challenged and my thesis goes some way in doing this. This is especially true when we consider how much this thesis relies upon the destabilisation of such simplistic binaries. We have seen the complexity of these clubs being simultaneously important spaces of shelter from harassment for some, yet also possibly spaces of exclusion and discrimination for others. I would propose that these clubs be viewed rather as sites of ambivalence and contradiction.

I see that there is potential for EDM nightclubs in Berlin to be, to some extent, the emancipatory and liberating spaces that many seem to so desperately want them to be. I believe that what is required is a challenging of the idea that within these spaces political debate and discussion (which includes a critical reflection on the way that marginalised groups are excluded from participating) is irrelevant, inappropriate or not necessary (in fact I do not believe that there is any aspect of social life that does not require such critical, political self-reflection). This means that responsibility needs to be taken for the role that these clubs might play in upholding social segregation within society. The onus needs to be on the nightclubs, the club’s door managers, the bouncers, club organisers and owners, the DJs and of course the participants, in challenging this. Let us not forget that EDM was born out of marginalised communities (García 2014); its history is seeped in political struggle, so we must not see “politics” and “music” as mutually exclusive ideas.

I also hope that this thesis has highlighted the danger of appropriating issues relating to diversity, social inclusion, political activism and challenging the status quo. I agree with Dean Spade, who explains; “[t]he strategy of… borrowing the symbols and slogans of left social movements is one of today’s most popular strategies for producing and sustaining
racist and colonial violence” (Spade 2015). We need to find the time, the strength and the words to talk about this and given the passion that many people have for EDM, this could be one very important way of doing this.

**Further Research**

Writing this thesis has been a fascinating and eye-opening process, with many of my expectations about what my final analyses and conclusions would look like being constantly challenged along the way. My intention with this thesis has never been to develop some sort of all-encompassing, generalising grand narrative about EDMCs; rather, I have sought to create a very situated, subjective piece of research that details my own personal standpoint and perspectives. In order to achieve that (and indeed to avoid falling into the trap of assuming that creating an objectively “truthful” piece of research that can be applied to any social situation, is at all possible) I sought to narrow down my research focus, my research methods and the theories that I used. I believe this has allowed for more in-depth analysis. That being said, there were a number of methodological and theoretical strands that I would have liked to have explored further, but which I was not able to do due to the page and time limitations. I see there being a number of potentially exciting and fruitful research projects that this thesis could inspire.

One potential avenue of research emerging from my thesis is the role of affect and emotion in the construction of these social spaces. As we have seen in much of the material that I have used (be that in my own autoethnographic extracts or in the interview quotes), a discussion about *feeling* and *emotion* is never far away from the topic. Whether it be in the describing of these spaces as liberating and freeing, or in the descriptions of those Others who were deemed inappropriate for participation: Affect seems to play an important role in how these spaces are both experienced and understood. I believe an exploration of the role of affect in upholding and maintaining social segregation in these nightclubs could be extremely interesting. Combining this with Sara Ahmed’s work in *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* (2013) on the way that oppression is carried out on an affectual level could be extremely productive.

Conceptually linked to the theorising of affect, is the development of ‘new materialism’; a theoretical development within feminist and gender studies that has encouraged a focus on the role of matter, materiality and the body (Pedwell and Whitehead
2012: 117). These ideas could very much benefit a piece of research like mine. It is important to consider that the nightclub space is one that consists of a number of material elements (be they lighting, music, vibrations, décor, architecture, heat, humidity, cigarette smoke, darkness, the time of day or night, drugs or alcohol) that impact the way that participants conceive their surroundings and how they behave. I think these ideas would be especially interesting if linked with an aspiration to better understand their role in reinforcing social segregation. This discussion could also be linked to an analysis of escapism and a separation of “outside” and “in” (that is, “reality” and “fantasy”) when it comes to EDM nightclubs.

For ease of analysis, this research has focused specifically on the socially constructed identity categories of race, ethnicity, sexuality and gender. Further research might like to explore how other identity experiences might affect people’s experiences of these clubs. For example, there was quite a narrow focus on sexuality as though it were an uncomplicated category of identity (described mostly as either “gay” or “straight”). Further research could definitely benefit from complicating this and looking at perceptions of “queerness” within these clubs. Additionally I see looking at these clubs from the perspective of dis/ability and the role they play in maintaining social segregation from this perspective would be very important.

This thesis included the voices of people who attended EDM club nights regularly and has focused on their particular experiences and perspectives. What seems to be missing from this research is the voices of those who do not attend regularly: Be that those who have a desire to participate but cannot, or those who have no interest in involvement at all. I believe there is definitely a need to include those voices in research of this type. Doing so would provide a much-needed perspective on this topic.


Zeit Online (2010) Seehofer gegen Zuwanderung aus "fremden Kulturkreisen" [Seehofer against immigration from "foreign cultures"]. Available at:


APPENDIX 1

Interview Guide

Introductory questions:
1. How frequently do you go clubbing?
2. What kind of music do you like to listen to?
3. Who do you normally go with? Do you ever go alone?

What participants like about their most frequented/favourite clubs:
1. What is your favourite club? / Can you choose three of your favourite clubs? Lets talk about that one/those ones…
2. What is it that you like about that club/those clubs?
3. Can you describe the club space?
4. What is it that makes it enjoyable/fun?
5. What are you doing when you are enjoying yourself the most in that club?
6. What are you doing when you are enjoying yourself the least in that club?
7. How long do you normally stay out for?
8. What is it that usually decides you should head home?

Crowd make-up/ diversity:
1. What kinds of people go to that club?
2. How would you describe the make-up of the club?
3. Do you think there is a “diverse” crowd attending these clubs?
4. Is “diversity” at a party an important consideration when choosing which club to go to?
5. What does diversity mean to you?
6. Do you think there is a “type” of person who attends these clubs? If so, can you explain? What do you think you have in common with them?

How their chosen clubs differed from other clubs:
1. Do you think Berlin differs from other cities in terms of what it offers partygoers?
Door policies

1. What are your thoughts on the door policies at your chosen club/s?
2. Do you think they are fair?
3. What is the purpose of having someone at the door deciding who can and cannot enter?
4. Are they effective in achieving those goals?
5. What kinds of people are not allowed in?
6. Have you ever experienced discrimination in this context?
7. Are the decisions about who to let in and who not to, dependent on discriminatory judgments? Or are they based on rational perceptions?
APPENDIX 2
Description of the Nightclubs Analysed

KitKatClub - Gegen

Having changed location a number of times since its opening in 1994, KitKatClub is now located in Mitte. The club is well known for its sexually uninhibited parties and most club nights insist on a strict fetish dress code. The “Gegen” night, held monthly in the club, is generally a little tamer than the usual club nights. The club claims their crowds consist of, “queer music producers and artists, gendernauts, punks, bears, kinky ladies, cosmic travellers, intellectuals [and] assassins” (Gegen Berlin 2015). The music played ranges from trance to house, all falling under the umbrella of electronic dance music. This club was brought up for discussion by only one of the interviewees, so does not feature heavily in the analysis.

About Blank - Homopatik

About Blank is located in Friedrichshain and hosts a number of different nights, catering for different musical tastes, from hard techno to drum ‘n’ base. It is particularly well known for its “Homopatik” “gay” parties, held once monthly. The night is said to host “a diverse crowd across a variety of sub-cultures and social circles” (Tsirimokos 2015). Two of my participants chose to specifically discuss the Homopatik/About Blank club night and one wished to talk about the club About Blank in general (without explicitly referencing Homopatik).

Berghain/Panorama Bar

Berghain/Panorama Bar is one of Berlin’s most renowned EDM clubs and is located in a big old electrical power plant on the border of Kreuzberg and Friedrichshain. The building has two (distinct) main dance floors, “Berghain” (playing mostly techno) and “Panorama Bar” (playing more house music, although there is some crossover). The club also contains a men’s-only floor called Lab.Oratory and there is a separate smaller club next to the Berghain/Panorama Bar building called Berghain Kantine. The club is well known for its cult-followed resident DJs, its long set lengths (which range from three to more than eight hours), its industrial-themed décor and architecture, its “dark rooms” (spaces designated for
sexual activity) and its tough door policies. All of the participants in this study referred to Berghain/Panorama Bar in their interviews.

Chantal’s House of Shame/Bassy Club

Chantal’s House of Shame is a club night that is held every Thursday at Bassy Club in Prenzlauer-Berg. The night is named after drag artiste Chantal, who at 2am every week hosts a cabaret show (with frequent “Tel Aviv-themed” performances). The club hosts DJs who play a range of music within the EDM genre.

Other Clubs Mentioned

Sisyphos is a nightclub located in the district of Lichtenberg, in an old cookie factory. There is no evidence to suggest that the club – unlike the other clubs looked at in this thesis – advertises itself as being either “gay” or “gay friendly.

To give an idea about how Sisyphos differs from the other clubs looked at in this thesis, I shall use “D”’s own description from his interview:

Berlin has different types of clubs... I would distinguish them into three types. One is just really dirty, like Golden Gate. Like dirty and in your face. Then there’s like Berghain and that’s like neo-gothic, deep house, techno, you know, black clothes or whatever. And then there’s like Sisyphos. Which is more like flowers... They want to be like Bar 25 [an infamous techno club that closed in 2010], where everyone’s happy and they put glitter on their faces and take MDMA.
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**Abstract**
Berlin is heralded worldwide as being a city that is open, innovative and diverse: a true multicultural metropolis. Music plays a central role in the city’s claim to this title. Go to any one of Berlin’s many notorious alternative nightclubs and you will hear techno, house and electronic dance music blasting out to hoards of enthusiastic partygoers. Many of these clubs and their participants claim that these parties represent diversity, acceptance, equality and tolerance: Spaces within which social division are suspended, difference is overcome and people are united. This ubiquitous discursive assertion is referred to in this thesis as a “diversity discourse”. This “diversity discourse” will be deconstructed and situated within a wider political context, with a specific focus on perceptions of race, ethnicity, sexuality and gender. Engaging with theories of intersectionality, post-colonial theory (looking specifically at Jasbir Puar’s important work on homonationalism) and employing qualitative methods such as in-depth interviews and autoethnographic inquiry, it will be argued that the “diversity discourse” works as a mask to conceal a reality of social segregation. Far from being sites of equality and diversity, it will be suggested that access to these nightclubs is premised on the possession of societal privilege. That being said, it will also be argued that research into EDM nightclub participation refrain from viewing these clubs within a binary framework of “good” or “bad”; Rather, they should be seen as complex sites of ambivalence, within which multiple identities are acted out and explored. The project contributes to the current body of work within the (post-) discipline of intersectional gender studies, arguing for the need for theorisations in the field to encompass notions of intersecting privilege and disadvantage.

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