

SPILLING OUT AND MESSING WITH NORMAL: QUEER YOUTH SPACES IN
OUR COMMUNITY CENTRES

by

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Abstract

For the past decade, the leisure and recreation literature has sought to develop and support a discourse of queer youth at-risk in order to call attention to the need to help these youth function normally in society (Grossman, 1992; Grossman, 1995; Kivel, 1997). As a solution, creating safe spaces for queer youth has been advocated, without necessarily considering how the identity of practitioners might affect these spaces, or what types of norms these spaces might simultaneously reinforce. This research study drew on queer, feminist, and spatial analysis theories, to investigate how heteronormativity functioned in queer youth spaces within two different municipal recreation contexts. I focused specifically on the physical and discursive boundaries of the spaces, as well as the influence of the youth workers' identities and practices.

The research methods included observations, document analysis, and semi-structured interviews. The findings demonstrated that the youth workers' identities were highly influential in both spaces, as they affected the negotiation of spatial boundaries and systemic discourses in very different ways. The spilling over of queer bodies out of the spaces worked to expose the boundary between queer and normal space as discursive, rather than natural or real. Furthermore, the central focus of both spaces on a queer identity re-created certain norms around race (read as whiteness) and gender (read as binary categories); however, this occurred in different ways in each space. Finally, systemic discourses of risk, support, and safety worked to both disrupt and reinforce notions of heteronormativity. By calling attention to an existing silence about queer youth, they were simultaneously constructed as helpless and in need of saving.

Those who theorize about and work with queer youth might want to consider how certain discourses support notions of an idealized subject that can be further marginalizing. In addition, although queer youth spaces can be enabling for some

youth, they are constraining for others. Research and practice that advocates for queer youth spaces as the solution, might want to deliberate the ways in which this approach can fail to trouble normalcy, and potentially reinforce the value of certain ways of being queer.

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Chapter 1

Introduction and Review of the Literature

Rationale

Within municipal recreation, mandates generally contain a clause that resonates with the notion of providing leisure and recreation programs and services for *all* (Searle and Brayley, 1999). This mandate has pushed numerous municipalities to develop gender equity policies, leisure access programs for those living on low income, and diversity training for their employees. However, the issue that is so often silenced within this rhetoric is the need for a queering¹ of our practices, programs, services, and policies. We have not scrutinized the normalcy of heterosexuality within our community centres, nor have we addressed community recreation's very role in its maintenance. Certain initiatives have taken place, primarily through the creation of a few isolated programs for queer youth. This strategy is similar to the literature in leisure and recreation that advocates for the creation of safe spaces for queer youth (Grossman, 1992; Grossman, 1995; Kivel, 1994, Johnson, 1999; Johnson, 2003). The rationale for these spaces is based on over a decade of research that thrived on empirically demonstrating that queer youth were at-risk and consequently required a supportive space within our community centres where they could learn how to function 'normally' in society (Grossman, 1992; Grossman, 1995; Kivel, 1997).

My experiences as a volunteer in two queer youth spaces in community centres in Western Canada have pushed me to question the uncritical acceptance in both the literature and in practice, of the notion of offering queer youth a safe space in order to address what has seemingly been constructed as a 'problem'. I have consequently become quite wary of the use of the at-risk label as the basis for the need to even

¹ I am referring to an approach that is understood with queer theory – one that calls into question practices and

address queer issues in leisure and recreation in the first place.

There is a general consensus in the literature around the meaning of at-risk. In 1995, Grossman described the term as follows:

The resulting stigmatization and isolation puts many of these youth at risk for dropping out (or being run out) of school, becoming pregnant, losing their homes, abusing alcohol and drugs, getting AIDS, or attempting suicide. (p. 47)

The subsequent literature in leisure and recreation about queer youth essentially attempted to demonstrate many or all of these components. The use of this term resonates all too closely with what Adams (1997) unveiled as the construction of youth as "delinquent" or "troubled" and therefore requiring reparation in the form of (hetero)normalization. It is, in part, this revelation that sparked my interest in exploring the functioning of heteronormativity in these queer youth spaces. A problematization of the at-risk label has provided an ideal point of entry for my analysis. It is in a critique of discourses of risk that Fine (1990) argued:

...the cultural construction of a group defined through a discourse of "risk" represents a shaved and quite partial image. It is an image that typically strengthens those institutions and groups which have carved out, severed, denied connection to and then promised to "save" those who will undoubtedly remain at-risk. (p. 55)

I agree with Fine and further wonder what happens when these discourses are utilized to plea for the case of queer youth in community recreation. *Does it reinforce the notion that all queer youth are at-risk? Does it reinforce the assumption that all straight youth are not?* It was through the problematization of these discourses of risk that I began to think about what they might reinforce. Consequently, one of the assumptions that guides this research is that discourses of risk can result in the stigmatized inclusion of queer youth, with the potential to at times disrupt but also reinforce (hetero)norms that

systems of thought that privilege heterosexuality, thus equating it with the only normal or natural way of being.

promote and sustain the privilege of heterosexuality in our community centres. I say at times disrupt in order to emphasize that it is never an either/or dilemma wherein a strategy or a discourse can solely reinforce or disrupt.

This same body of literature that has uncritically offered practitioners a list of solutions to the problem of queer youth has failed to engage practitioners in the research process. This project will not only attempt to address this gap, but it will also examine the complex ways in which youth workers negotiate their own identities and the potential effects this negotiation might have on queer youth spaces. The leisure and recreation literature that has promoted the creation of spaces for queer youth (Grossman, 1992; Grossman, 1995; Kivel, 1994, Johnson, 1999; Johnson, 2003), has not yet considered the potential effects the practitioners' identities have on these spaces. This oversight assumes that all queer youth spaces will be the same, regardless of who creates and manages them. This subsequently infers that all queer youth are necessarily the same, and they will all fit into and have their needs met by the universal construction of a queer youth space. This is precisely what this study intends to problematize.

It is important to understand that through this research I am certainly not advocating that youth workers dissolve the few queer youth spaces they have worked so hard to obtain. Rather, I am advocating for a critical examination of what these spaces do and what the broader implications might be in terms of destabilizing binary thinking around issues of gender and sexuality. I am also calling for an investigation that considers for whom these very same spaces are not enabling but exclusionary. With regards to binary thinking, I am referring to the discursive construction of a hetero-homo binary that implies that every person should necessarily be assignable to either a hetero- or homo- sexuality (Sedgwick, 1990). In order to fully understand binary

systems of thought, we must also recognize that these terms are not constructed as symmetrical oppositions, but rather that the homo is subordinated to the hetero, and the hetero is continually valorized through the exclusion and subordination of the homo (Sedgwick, 1990).

My passion for this research also stems in part from my identity as a queer person. It is necessary to understand what I mean when I make a queer identity claim, as it extends beyond sexuality, or what some may equate with a gay or lesbian identity. For me, it is endorsed by a commitment to a queer politic as outlined by Warner (1993):

It means being able, more or less articulately, to challenge the common understanding of what gender difference means, or what the state is for, or what 'health' entails, or what would define fairness, or what a good relation to the planet's environment would be. Queers do a kind social reflection just in finding ways of being queer. (p. xiii)

This parallels why I have made a commitment to the terminology of "queer youth" and "queer youth spaces" for this research. In practice and in the literature there is extreme dissonance on the issue. Queer is often used as an umbrella term to identify gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgendered (GLBT) youth, but in the literature there is an overwhelming focus on "gay and lesbian youth" (read as a monolithic identity category). In my research and writing I am committed to utilizing queer (both theoretically and materially) to represent a queer politic, and this insistence on queer, "has the effect of pointing out a wide field of normalization, rather than simple intolerance as the site of violence..." (Warner, 1993, p. xxvi). I realize that this will be an ongoing dilemma throughout the course of this research, but I am committed to continually (re)visiting the issue, as this is inevitably part of the commitment to this queer research project.

Purpose

The purpose of this study is to investigate how heteronormativity functions in queer youth spaces within two different municipal recreation contexts, focusing specifically on the physical and discursive boundaries of the spaces, as well as the youth workers' identities and practices. The research questions designed to address this are:

1. How do the youth workers negotiate their identities, and how does this in turn affect these queer youth spaces?
2. How are heteronormative discourses both disrupted and reinforced in and through these queer youth spaces?
3. How are boundaries of inside/outside negotiated, called into question and reinforced in these queer youth spaces?

For the purpose of this study, discourses are understood as “an interrelated set of texts, and the practices of their production, dissemination, and reception, that bring an object into being” (Phillips & Hardy, 2002, p. 3). As a result, critical discourse analysis is employed to analyze the data, therefore notions of “what is being naturalized, and who benefits” are central to the analysis (Evans, 2002, p. 10). The attention is focused on how sociohistorical discourses are at play through the examination of power relations. The entire project is conceptualized through a queer-poststructural feminist theoretical framework that focuses specifically on heteronormative disruption and repetition, identity, subjectivity, the denaturalization of sex, gender and desire, as well as the intersections of queer theory with race.

Literature Review

Within this portion of my thesis I provide an overview of the two main bodies of literature that were examined for this research: (1) the leisure and recreation literature that focuses on queer youth; and (2) the body of literature on sexuality and space. Within these synopses I have included areas where my research can contribute to furthering knowledge production in these fields.

Before I introduce some of the main ideas put forth in these bodies of literature, I believe it will be helpful to briefly establish the historical role of leisure and recreation in the lives of youth, as this shapes some of the assumptions that I bring to the literature review. Adams (1997) traced the construction of heterosexuality in post-war youth in Canada, in order to demonstrate that heterosexuality and normality had been constructed as synonymous. Based on her historical analysis, heterosexuality is not the natural/normal way to be, it has been a discursively constructed identity category through which subjectivities are produced (Adams, 1997). She argued that what we take to be normal are, for the most part, representations of dominant interests, and thus, processes of normalization simply limit the choices available to us. She simultaneously mapped out the postwar construction of youth as delinquents, and hence the role of various institutions (including recreation) in normalizing (read as hetero-normalizing) youth. Adams (1997) stated:

Concepts of delinquency organized the work of the Juvenile Court. They informed the activities of the City Parks Department, and of the Toronto Recreation Council's Sub-committee on Recreation and Housing. (p. 73)

These municipal departments of recreation and social planning provided youth with "supervised activities where expressions of heterosexuality were not only permitted, they were expected and, indeed, hoped for" (Adams, 1997, p. 77). Adams' work shapes the foundation of my literature review and research questions, in terms of

problematizing how processes of normalization, particularly hetero-normalization, function in and through queer youth spaces in community recreation.

Leisure and Recreation Literature

In 1992 Arnold Grossman was the first researcher to initiate a discussion around the experiences of "gay, lesbian, and bisexual youth" in the context of leisure and recreation. His rationale for the need to include gay, lesbian and bisexual youth in recreation service delivery was based on what he termed a "dramatic fact" – "lesbian and gay youth are two to three times more likely to attempt suicide than their heterosexual counterparts" (Gibson, 1989 in Grossman, 1992, p. 45). He argued that this occurred due to the stigmatization and exclusion these youth experienced in society's mainstream institutions. Because of these dramatic facts, Grossman (1992) advocated that it be the responsibility of service providers to include gay, lesbian and bisexual youth in leisure and recreation, in order to counteract their experiences of exclusion. He (1992) suggested that:

Specific programs [were] needed to assist lesbian, gay, and bisexual youth in exploring their sexual identities within leisure settings and after school programs – such as art, music, and drama activities which include[d] the works of homosexually identified individuals. (p. 46)

It is not my intention to belittle the significance of this suicide statistic. However, I believe it could become problematic to use it as the basis for justifying the need to provide services to this segment of the population, because this tactic does not necessarily call into question pervading (hetero)norms. Therefore, what Grossman argued to be the cause of this problem (i.e. suicide) in the queer youth population remained unaddressed. Moreover, the notion of a hetero/homo binary was reinforced so as to consolidate the stability and normality of heterosexuality. In Grossman's work, gay, lesbian and bisexual youth were represented and constructed as helpless subjects

who required support in order to learn how to function “normally” in a society that had already decided who and what counted as normal. As a result of this, I believe my research can build upon this early work by critically examining the norms that are reinforced through heteronormative discourses, when strategies such as those suggested by Grossman are adopted.

Grossman expanded upon his own work in 1995, when he explored the effectiveness of a leisure/recreation centre in New York City for gay and lesbian youth. In this piece he made a strong case for the need for specialized spaces and services, “until there is acceptance of gay and lesbian youth by mainstream institutions” (Grossman, 1995, p. 23). He argued that these spaces were needed:

...to empower youth to successfully negotiate the turbulent period of adolescence, to overcome the shame and self-hatred society place[d] on them, and to enable them to hope for rich and satisfying lives.
(Grossman, 1995, p. 24)

Grossman (1995) prefaced his description of the centre by providing a representation of gay and lesbian youth as “rejected, ostracized, abused, condemned, and victimized” and therefore requiring a gay and lesbian program in order to learn how to “cope with society’s homophobia” (Grossman, 1995, p. 47). I believe my research could provide a valuable new perspective that would hopefully disrupt rather encourage “coping with homophobia”.

I do not doubt that programs for gay and lesbian youth do provide positive and enriching experiences for some youth. However, I am less certain that these approaches have the potential to promote the acceptance that Grossman demands. Moreover, I am skeptical as to whether acceptance should even be a goal. This is where the queer-feminist theoretical perspective utilized in my research has the potential to contribute to this body of literature, as this approach has not yet been

utilized in the leisure and recreation literature about queer youth.

Grossman's early work prompted the proliferation of an entire body of literature in leisure and recreation that built upon his analysis of the at-risk status of queer youth, and the need for queer youth spaces as a solution. Studies first contributed to reinforcing the severity of this at-risk status by documenting the risky behaviours carried out by queer youth. For example, Caldwell et al. (1998) conducted surveys on the leisure context of adolescents who were "lesbian, gay male, bisexual, and questioning their sexual identity" (p. 341), and found that they "were bored in their leisure time, used free time to rebel...and engaged in higher levels of binge drinking when compared to their non-gay peers" (p. 341).

Subsequent research focused on identity formation. Findings indicated that gay, lesbian, and bisexual youth were lacking in terms of social identity development (Kivel, 1997; Kivel & Kleiber, 2000), thus furthering their at-risk status. A lack of social identity development indicated that the youth did not develop identities as openly gay, lesbian, or bisexual athletes, students, or musicians. Kivel and Kleiber (2000) identified a number of coping mechanisms employed by the youth in order to deal with this lack of social identity development. Strategies included: the construction of multiple identities, concealment of their sexual identity, and/or refusal to participate in certain leisure activities.

I am admittedly troubled by certain aspects of Kivel and Kleiber's (2000) research on identity formation, mainly the fact that identity is conceptualized as a stable construction that one achieves during their formative years. However, I did find certain aspects of their research compelling, particularly when their findings lead them to question "the role of leisure in maintaining and reinforcing institutionalized heterosexuality" (Kivel & Kleiber, 2000, p. 227). It was in fact after reading their study

that I considered the thought of critically investigating the queer youth spaces with which I had been involved as a volunteer, so as to better understand how they functioned within the greater context of their community centres.

Similar research was conducted by Johnson (1999) who examined how “gay, and lesbian young adults” (p. 255) conceptualized the role of leisure in their identity development. Employing a symbolic interactionist perspective, Johnson (1999) delineated three main findings: (1) gay and lesbian youth experienced homophobia in their leisure experiences; (2) they preferred group enclosure (i.e. participation with other gay and lesbian youth); (3) they negotiated different levels of comfort in various leisure settings (i.e. avoidance of activities or “passing as heterosexual”) (Johnson, 1999, p. 269).

Although Johnson’s (1999) research findings were quite similar to Kivel’s (1997), and Kivel and Kleiber’s (2000), his conclusions pointed to some key directions for future research. He argued for the study of how race, gender, and class intersect with sexuality in leisure contexts, as well as the need for more succinct approaches to research and practice that actually “combat heterosexism”. Johnson (1999) essentially pointed to the need for both researchers and practitioners to move beyond tolerance and coping. “If we are to eliminate heterosexism, we must take down the structure that supports its dominance” (Johnson, 1999, p. 276). I am certain that my research has the potential to stimulate movement in this direction by endorsing a queer-feminist analysis of how heteronormative discourses function within queer youth spaces. Such a discourse analysis could move beyond simply questioning “structures” to understanding how discourses can at times function to simultaneously disrupt and reinforce these heteronormative ideals.

The most recent work involving queer youth in leisure and recreation was also

conducted by Johnson (2003). He was the first in our field to interrogate whether leisure service providers and researchers were questioning or reinforcing “compulsory heterosexuality” (p. 22) in and through their work. In a research note, Johnson (2003) provided an overview of the existing literature in our field and stated, “their suggestions do little to challenge the stability of compulsory heterosexuality in leisure” (p. 26). Although I agree with Johnson’s claim, I am troubled by his point of entry into the discussion because it is based on the notion that compulsory heterosexuality has essentially prevented leisure service providers from giving “attention or consideration to sexual minorities in our recreation and leisure studies research” (Johnson, 2003, p. 24). He drew on Foucault’s work to argue that the homosexual and the heterosexual were modern categorical constructions. However, he then employed this statement to argue why “sexual minorities” had been “under-served” rather than to question the naturalness or the normalization of the heterosexual category within the context of leisure and recreation. Although Johnson’s intentions may have been different at the outset, he ends up reinforcing a minority model for equity where a monolithic sexual minority subject is to be added and stirred into the existing leisure and recreation system. In addition, as Johnson (2003) pointed out, the focus of this body of literature on a monolithic sexual minority subject fails to account for differences among queer youth with regards to gender, race, class, and ability. Not only does this facilitate binary reinforcement (i.e. a universal Dominant versus a universal Other), it also normalizes whiteness, middle-class status, and able bodied-ness within studies that focus on queer youth. As a result, my research attempts to pay attention to how race intersects with gender and sexuality in queer youth spaces in order to begin to address this shortcoming.

Although the leisure and recreation literature advocates for queer youth spaces,

researchers have yet to engage in a critical analysis of these spaces. Consequently, this literature review now moves to critical studies of sexuality and space.

Sexuality and Space Literature

As outlined in the introduction, the literature I have examined that endorses poststructural approaches to spatial analysis reflects two main strategies: (1) those that look to transgress binary notions of space (i.e. deconstructing the notion of heterosexual versus homosexual spaces), and (2) those that strive to unpack assimilationist constructions of space (i.e. unveiling the multiplicity and intersectionality of identities within spaces that move to erase differences in the name of commonality).

Duncan's (1996) work is an example of this first strategy, as it strives to deconstruct the binary distinction between public and private spaces in order to discuss how 'normative heterosexual geographies' become exposed through transgressive acts (e.g. lesbians kissing at a hockey game). She argued that re-readings of these acts destabilized notions of what was considered public and private and contributed to the deconstruction of territorialized and binary geographies. Duncan (1996) called these "deconstructive spatial tactics" (p. 139) that "queered (vt.)" space. Such tactics included marches, public protests, performance art, street theatre, or daily overtly 'homosexual behaviour'. She explained:

When spatial tactics of queer politics become...crisis points in the normal functioning of everyday expectations for the mainstream heterosexual population – then normative heterosexual geographies become more clear. This is the first step towards destabilizing and eventually overturning such repressively striated geographies of gender and sexuality. (Duncan, 1996, p. 139)

Duncan (1996) concluded by arguing that "public space is regulated by keeping it relatively free of passion or expressions of sexuality that are not naturalized, normalized, or condoned" (p. 141). Consequently she believed that our goal should be

to attack these spatial and discursive boundaries, not to reinforce them. According to Duncan (1996) we could do this by questioning these boundaries and attempting to place them within public consciousness.

This transgression of binary notions of space is also what Valentine's (1996) work attempted to do, as she analyzed how lesbians (re)negotiated the street, a presumably heterosexual space, when they kissed. Her research stemmed from an article that appeared in the British gay press that described how a lesbian couple was thrown out of a supermarket in Nottingham for kissing in the store. Valentine (1996) drew on Butler's notion of gender performativity to explain that the "heterosexing of space is a performative act naturalized through repetition and regulation" (p. 146), but this repetition is interrupted by "visibly replacing heterosexual space with other performances" (p. 154). Through Butler's theory of gender performativity, Valentine (1996) managed to demonstrate that the heterosexuality of the street was also unstable, because "space teems with so many other possibilities" (p. 154). The heterosexual myth was thus maintained through regulatory regimes, such as harassment, violence, and stares. Therefore Valentine (1996) concluded that a kiss was not simply a kiss, as it contributed to disrupting and (re)producing space originally constructed and assumed to be heterosexual.

I believe my research can engage in a discussion with what Duncan and Valentine both suggest, since queer youth programs in mainstream community centres inevitably have the potential to disrupt "normative heterosexual geographies". In addition, my research also has the potential to further extend this binary deconstruction in its examination of how heteronormative discourses can also be reinforced in and through spaces that have been designated and constructed as queer.

The second approach I uncovered within the sexuality and space literature

focused on unpacking assimilationist constructions of space. Writings within this stream critically examined lesbian, queer, and gay male space claims. For example, in a study on the Australian-based 'Lesbian Space Project', Taylor (1998) mapped out the political struggles involved in a community-based project that was meant to secure a material space for lesbians, but failed to do so because of the emergence of complex identity politics issues. Rifts emerged within the space when lesbian-identified transsexuals requested access. Based on interviews with the women involved in the project Taylor (1998) concluded, "identity politics is not firm ground on which to build or maintain a permanent physical space. Space itself is far too mutable and volatile to guarantee any firming-up of boundaries around identity" (p. 140).

Similarly, Munt (1998) studied the demise of 'Lesbian Nation', a lesbian nationalist movement, by tracing "who was excluded, what were the limits of its historical roots and ideological liaisons, what were its inadvertently destructive effects" (p. 4). She paralleled 'Lesbian Nation' to the rise of 'Queer Nation' in New York in the nineties. "The public spectacle of queer sexualities being performed was intended to displace heterosexuality to the margins and centre the queer" (Munt, 1998, p. 15). She argued however that the project's assertiveness took on an incipient masculinity and it "refused and forgot the complex lessons of history, and broke apart over the same social divisions evident in Lesbian Nation and other single issue projects" (Munt, 1998, p. 15). Munt's analysis of Lesbian Nation and Queer Nation was grounded within a critique of identity-based space claims and identity politics. She stated "nationalisms reproduce a cyclical inclusion and expulsion based on a need to fix identity in place – literally and metaphorically" (Munt, 1998, p. 16).

My research draws from and builds upon Taylor (1998) and Munt's (1998) research on identity-based space claims. Although I did not directly study the youth, I

did study the interactions between the youth workers and the youth that allowed me to analyze the various discourses that functioned within the spaces. This provided me with an opportunity to explore how the youth workers conceptualized and dealt with the multiple intersecting identities that operated within (and were absent from) the spaces, as well as how they understood and played out their roles in constructing and/or deconstructing discourses of assimilation beneath a queer rubric. Through my investigation of spatial boundaries (i.e. whom was permitted and valued inside/outside of the spaces), I was also able to examine the relationships between assimilationist constructions of space and their role in reinforcing binary geographies and (hetero)norms.

Finally, within this stream of the literature that deconstructs assimilationist constructions of space, I also considered Skeggs' (1999) research on visibility and sexuality within leisure spaces. She explored how identity politics (or the politics of recognition) became spatialized, and how political claims were made and at times not made. She conducted her research in Manchester's Gay Village, examining the ways in which heterosexual working class women used this space for the purposes of dis-identification and invisibility, whereas lesbians fought for their identity and visibility within this very same space. Through her analysis, she pushed us to think about how identity spaces could be both enabling and constraining. She stated:

...this is precisely why a great deal more research is needed which focuses on the intersections, the constitution, categorizations and disruptions that occur in specific leisure (and other) spaces. (p. 229)

Skeggs (1999) essentially pointed to the need for more queer theoretical approaches to research in leisure and spatial analysis so as to unveil the ways in which visibility (or identity) politics also created invisibilities. She argued:

It is now time to make connections across categorical interests and think about how power nuances the take up of resources and space by bodies which do not inhabit only a single categorization, but those which contain multiple positions and multiple interests. It is only when this understanding is incorporated into research that researchers stop being responsible for the very power relations they are often at the outset setting out to challenge. (Skeggs, 1999, p. 229)

My research builds upon Skeggs' (1999), as I engaged in a critical examination of spaces similar to those she explored through her research, however they were much smaller, and locally affected by the greater contexts of the community centres within which they existed. Conceptually different from her project, I did not focus on all of the subjects that used and produced the space, but more specifically on the service providers and the discourses employed during their interactions with the youth, paying specific attention to discourses of gender, sexuality, and race. My research manages to contribute to this literature by offering a different point of entry, yet it is committed to similar theoretical ideals that are critical of identity-based spaces and their potential to silence differences and subsequently facilitate the reinforcement of (hetero)norms.

I have outlined some of the key concepts currently being debated within the literature on sexuality and space that endorses a poststructural theoretical perspective. My research project has the potential to complement strategies that look to both transgress binary notions of space and strive to unpack assimilationist constructions of space. I understand these concepts to be related, and thus linked to the disruption of 'normal' conceptualizations of bodies and space.

Chapter 2

Theoretical Framework

En Route To My Queer-Feminist Poststructural Framework

This theoretical framework began to take shape over two years ago, when I became exposed to the work of feminist political theorist, Fraser (1997), as well as the work of Bryson and de Castell (1997). It is through their research that I began to question certain taken for granted notions I had developed around social justice and how one might engage in this type of work. Fraser's (1997) transformative approach was characterized by binary deconstruction and a move away from identity (recognition-based) politics. She argued that gay identity politics viewed homosexuality as a cultural positivity that simply required additional recognition and therefore simply reinforced the proliferation of a hetero/homo binary (Fraser, 1997). In contrast, a transformative approach would look to deconstruct the very grounds upon which these identity claims were based. This parallels how Bryson and de Castell (1997) conceptualized the limitations of the concept of equity. They viewed equity as a term of concealment, one that "announces the right to be or to become like the idealized subject of human rights" (Bryson, and de Castell, 1997, p. 87). They argued that through equity, the notion of an ideal/idealized subject was not deconstructed or called into question. Rather, the marginalized subject would fight to prove how they were just like the norm, and should therefore be able to "hold the same jobs, go to the same places, [and] have the same desires as the normatively sanctioned bourgeois subject of human rights" (Bryson and de Castell, 1997, p. 87). Equity resonates with identity (recognition-based) approaches that stabilize binary thinking, including the construction of a hetero/homo binary. These theories pushed me to wonder how I might begin to trouble equity/recognition based approaches by looking beyond them, questioning them, and reworking them.

I was initially drawn to Fraser's (1997, p. 23) theorizing because of how she worked to differentiate affirmative and transformative approaches to social justice. Affirmative remedies for social injustice were described as those that "correct inequitable outcomes without disturbing the underlying framework that generates them", whereas transformative remedies aimed at "correcting inequitable outcomes precisely by reconstructing the underlying generative framework" (p. 23). To illustrate this idea Fraser (1997) drew on gay identity politics, an approach that supports group differentiation, as an example of an affirmative remedy. She then contrasted it with queer politics, a transformative remedy that aims at deconstructing binary systems of thought. She stated, "the transformative aim is not to solidify a gay identity but to deconstruct the homo-hetero dichotomy so as to...sustain a sexual field of multiple, debinarized, fluid, ever-shifting differences" (Fraser, 1997, p. 24).

Fraser (1997) described how affirmative approaches to social justice support group differentiation and are thus experienced through such strategies as "equity" or "mainstream multiculturalism" that "propose to redress disrespect by revaluing unjustly devalued group identities, while leaving intact both the contents of those identities and the group differentiations that underlie them" (p. 24). This resonates and overlaps with Bryson and de Castell's (1997) challenges to equity, which they argued could become "disabling, repressive, exclusionary, and silencing" (p. 85). Bryson described how she occupied somewhat of a space in between with regards to the binary discourses of gender that pervaded equity work. She stated:

I did not know who 'we' were; that is to say, it was already too apparent that I was not part of the 'we' who were there, in skirts, in jewelry, in salon-styled hair, in wedding rings, in nail polish, in smiling, lipsticked lips. Nor was I part of 'we' men...I was instead – and this was the primary source of trouble for 'us' from that day – one of the hitherto unthinkable, one 'differently gendered'. (Bryson & de Castell, 1997, p. 93)

Bryson was not like those around her, she was not *the same* as but rather she was *different from*. This managed to trouble the notion of doing equity work in the name of "we women" seeing as "we" were not all the same.

Although Fraser's theorizing, as well as Bryson and de Castell's is not necessarily poststructural, it does brush up against certain poststructural ideas by pointing to the limitations of the minority model of equity and recognition-based approaches to social justice. I describe this section as "en route to my theoretical framework" so as to emphasize the way in which their writing pushed me to look to certain queer and feminist poststructural theories for new ways of interrogating and analyzing the data uncovered in my research in order to question some of these silences, exclusions, and limitations.

Queer Theories

Queer theories make up of the foundation of my theoretical framework. I carefully pluralize theory so as to highlight the fact that numerous individuals do research in the name of queer theory, which means that there is certainly more than one queer theory, although I do not claim that my theoretical framework is informed by every possible approach. I also take this stance in order to emphasize the remarkable and ongoing development of research and writing from this perspective within the last decade.

Queer theories generally ground themselves in their aim to "destabilize identity as a grounds for politics in order to create alternatives...that...may involve a shift from the resisting gay subject to an analysis of the homo/hetero codes that structure Western thought" (Seidman, 1994, p. 173). In embracing this stance, research questions often shift away from the experiences of the queer subject, in order to avoid reproducing binaries that privilege heterosexuality and maintain the marginal status of the queer

(Seidman, 1994). It is precisely the construction of boundaries - inside/outside, center/margin, hetero/homo, man/woman, Dominant/Other - that are interrogated by this theoretical frame (Namaste, 1994). In *The History of Sexuality Volume 1*, Foucault (1978) exposed the historical construction of such modern binary identity categories. He did so by providing an account of the modern formation of homosexuality as a discursive identity category through juridico-medical discourses (Foucault, 1978). His work influenced how poststructuralism now understands identity as a discursive production, rather than as a stable sense of 'being'. It was in this groundbreaking account that Foucault (1978) moved theorizing beyond repressive hypotheses of sexuality and hierarchical conceptions of power. He argued that the very silence and prohibition around sexuality incited the proliferation of an explosion of discourses about sex (Foucault, 1978). His writing inevitably influenced a great deal of gay and lesbian, as well as queer and feminist studies, particularly around notions of discourse, power, subjectivity, and hegemonic disruption. There is general agreement that queer theorizing evolved out of discontentment with gay and lesbian studies and its focus on affirming a gay/lesbian identity in binary opposition to heterosexuality, leaving little space for a myriad of other sexualities (Jagose, 1996). As a result, many queer theories ground themselves in poststructural approaches to theorizing, which facilitates the coming together of queer and poststructural feminist theories in my research. Both of these theories inform this work because I firmly believe that they ought to engage in a conversation with each other. This conversation is necessary in order to trouble the notion that women need necessarily be the subjects of feminist research, and in turn to unveil poststructural feminist theory's shortcoming in turning the lens on its own centre, failing to question binary categories of gender as foundational premises.

Poststructural Feminist Theory

Weedon (1997) theorized extensively on the coming together of poststructural and feminist theory. She did so initially in 1986 and revisited the issue again in 1997 to elaborate on some of the more contemporary debates between and amongst feminism and poststructuralism. According to Weedon (1997), poststructuralisms generally share assumptions about language, meaning, and subjectivity. She argued:

Language is the place where actual and possible forms of social organization and their likely social and political consequences are defined and contested. Yet it is also the place where our sense of ourselves, our subjectivity, is constructed.... Subjectivity is produced in a whole range of discursive practices – economic, social and political – the meanings of which are a constant struggle over power. (Weedon, 1997, p. 21)

Therefore, unlike humanism where a stable and rational subject is assumed, poststructuralism presupposes a subjectivity that is not unified or fixed. Through this lens there is no essence underlying the subjectivity of an individual that dictates who they are. Rather it is seen as discursively produced, and a site of struggle with the potential for change (Weedon, 1997).

While I am partial to the proponents of feminist poststructural theory, Weedon only theorized on the levels of gender, race, and class, therefore creating a silence around sexuality. This silence assumes a heterosexual subject and by extension a binary system of gender comprised of heterosexual men and heterosexual women. She alluded to making space for multiple femininities and masculinities, yet these still clearly functioned within the confines of the existing binary. This is precisely where I see the vital importance of bringing queer theory into conversation with poststructural feminist theory – not only to address the silences around (hetero)sexuality, but also to trouble gender categories and the notion of a category of women as the subject of feminism. Butler's (1992) work informed the need for such re-evaluations when she stated, "to

deconstruct these terms means, rather, to continue to use them, to repeat them, to repeat them subversively, and to displace them from the contexts in which they have been deployed as instruments of oppressive power" (p. 17).

This reasoning echoes how I rationalized the coming together of queer and feminist theories in my work. Even though my project does not focus on women as the subjects of the research, it is still feminist research because of the way it works to open up categories of gender, unveiling their instability and oppressive power. "Within feminism, it seems as if there is some political necessity to speak as and for women" (Butler, 1992, p. 15). However, like Butler (1992) I maintain that "identity as a point of departure can never hold as the solidifying ground of a feminist political movement" (p.15). Just as I have outlined my commitment to deconstruct the use of "queer" in my research, I hope that my theorizing can illustrate the value of questioning the significance of binary gender categories of "men" and "women". I cannot articulate this thought more clearly than Butler (1992) has already done below:

...to authorize or safeguard the category of women as a site of possible resignifications is to expand the possibilities of what it means to be a woman and in this sense to condition and enable an enhanced sense of agency. (p. 16)

Heteronormativity and Normative Disruption

Queer approaches to theorizing often entail the study of heteronormativity, as well as the study of the disruption and reification of heteronormative discourses.

Warner (1993) defines heteronormativity as:

...the normalizing processes which support heterosexuality as the elemental form of human association, as the very model of inter-gender relations, as the indivisible basis of all community, and as the means of reproduction without which society wouldn't exist. (p. xxi)

Drawing on the example of the cartoon image of human society (depicted as a white heterosexual couple) on NASA's *Pioneer 10* spacecraft, Warner (1993) theorized the

extent to which heterosexual ideology is not only privileged, but naturalized and assumed within the Western world. He insisted that these NASA plates not only genericize humankind, but they also reassure us and all other life forms that humanity is synonymous with heterosexuality. The message conveyed: "earth is not, regardless of what anyone says, a queer planet" (Warner, 1993, p. xxiii). Quinlivan and Town (1999) argue similarly that heteronormativity is "like the air we breathe...with us from the day of our birth, and evidenced through the division of the world into male/female, boy/girl and the belief that normal sexuality is heterosexual" (p. 510). Similarly, Sumara and Davis (1999) introduced the concept of the "heterosexual bribe...that is the cultural rewards afforded those whose public performances of self are contained within that narrow band of behaviours considered proper to a heterosexual identity" (p. 192).

Warner (1993) argued for and offered queer theorizing as a disruption to these taken for granted conceptions. He insisted that in taking this stance we must remember queer theory is not just about having a theory for and about queers; "for both academics and activists, 'queer' gets a critical edge by defining itself against the normal rather than the heterosexual" (Warner, 1993, p. xxvi). He did just this in an essay with Berlant (2002) entitled *Sex in Public* where they disrupted normative notions of morality that have privatized sex. They argued that this privatization bestows a sense of "rightness" and "normalcy" on heterosexuality, thus creating what they term as heteronormativity:

Heteronormativity is more than ideology, or prejudice, or phobia against gays and lesbians; it is produced in almost every aspect of the forms and arrangements of social life: nationality, the state, and the law; commerce; medicine; education; plus the conventions and affects of narrativity, romance, and other protected spaces of culture. (Warner and Berlant, 2002, p. 194)

With this said, any notion of a world where heterosexual hegemony is challenged may

seem impossible, since heterosexuality represents itself and involves so many practices that are not sex (Warner and Berlant, 2002).

However, they argued that there is indeed potential for disruption and that it exists in the form of “queer counterpublics...an indefinitely accessible world conscious of its subordinate relation” (Warner and Berlant, 2002, p. 202). These counterpublics can include (but are not limited to) drag, youth culture, music, dance, parades, flaunting, and cruising. The challenge is that these are often difficult to recognize as “queer world making” because they become trivialized as “lifestyle” and are therefore considered fragile and at the mercy of legal restriction and economic regulation (i.e. through censorship, zoning of sex shops, or regulation of queer bars, etc.). They theorized, however, that these disruptions must continue because, “after a certain point, a quantitative change is a qualitative change” (Warner and Berlant, 2002, p. 204). Therefore, queering the heteronormative “is to support forms of affective, erotic and personal living that are public in the sense of being accessible, available to memory, and sustained through collective activity” (Warner and Berlant, p. 203). This means making sex public and messing with its normative regulation. This normative regulation is precisely what makes heterosexuality seem coherent and organized in often unconscious ways and in contexts that have very little relation to sex practice. Applied to an analysis of queer youth spaces this entails deliberating where, when, and how these spaces do provide disruptions, and when and how these disruptions are clearly limited.

What's in a name?

Another aspect of queer theory that this lens endeavours to explore is the notion of naming. What does it mean to name oneself? What does it mean to be named? What does naming do/not do? As Loutzenheiser and MacIntosh (2004) explain, naming can be both enabling or paralyzing. The examples they employed were those of a boy being called "faggot" by his heterosexual peers versus the same term being used by and towards a queer youth (Loutzenheiser & MacIntosh, 2004). As Butler (1997, p. 2) argued, "not all name-calling is injurious" (p. 2). She drew on Althusserian notions of interpellation to explain the process wherein being called a name simultaneously provides a certain possibility for social existence as it can provide a point of entry into discourse, and therefore into *being* (Butler, 1997).

When we move to spaces, groups, or communities we must also consider what this act of naming does. In its most essential form it can be argued, "to say who we are and what we are focusing on is simultaneously to say who we are not and what we are not focusing on" (Butler, 1997 in Kumashiro, 2001a, p. 5). Butler (1991) further explained how this notion of naming functions through "avowals" and "disavowals". For example, in stating "I am gay", one is necessarily stating that they are "not straight". The disavowal is implied through derivativeness because one derives its meaning from the other through speech. Therefore, if we assert that the Other is as normal or important as the norm (Dominant), this does not change the definition of normal, nor does it de-center the norm (Loutzenheiser, 2001; Kumashiro, 2001b).

In addition, to name a space as a "queer youth space" invokes that the space is "not normal" but it is also necessarily not about race, class, or ability. In terms of diversity and multicultural curriculum, Kumashiro (2001a) argued against the "adding on" of differences "as if adding women here and Latinas/os there solves the problem"

(p. 5). He argued that such attempts at inclusion cannot be conceptualized as *the* solution because they fail to de-center the norm. Therefore, the assimilation of differences tends to support the construction of monolithic subjects (i.e. the Dominant and the Other) and minority groups requiring compensation within an equity framework. A monolithic construction indeed facilitates the maintenance of binary oppositions that pit one identity against another, therefore reinforcing the validity of one, and the subordination of the other.

On What It Means To 'Be' ... Identity

My understanding of identity relies on discourses and in particular on Butler's (1990) notion of subjectivity, wherein identities are discursively produced and becoming one's "self" involves the process of "subjectivation" (asujetissement). What this means is that I understand discourse to turn us into ourselves with no pre-social self that exists outside of socio-historically imbued discourses. As Butler (1993) writes "there is no 'I' who stands behind discourse and executes its volition or will through discourse...the 'I' only comes into being through being called, named, interpellated" (p. 225). We essentially only have the option of "being" or "becoming" what is available to us through discourse. Yet, as Sedgwick (1990) noted:

A tiny number of inconceivably coarse axes of categorization have been painstakingly inscribed in current critical and political thought: gender, race, class, nationality, sexual orientation are pretty much the available distinctions.... [Yet] even people who share all or most of our own positionings along these crude axes may still be different enough from us, and from each other, to seem like all but different species. (p. 22)

Here Sedgwick (1990) not only points to the narrowness of discourses available to us that define identity, she also indicates how extremely assimilationist this process can be as it fails to account for countless differences that have been deemed discursively unimportant in defining who we *are* or who we can *be*.

Whereas mainstream understandings of identity conceptualize the self as having an unchanging core, one that transcends any social or historical constraints (Evans, 2002), my understanding involves an identity that is constantly negotiated in relation to space, time, and the people around us. These variables can be paralleled to contexts, and in each of these contexts we may forefront or focus upon different aspects of our complex selves. What this essentially means is that “conceptualizing identity is not a monolithic, stable thing but...a continually shifting sense of self made in relation” (Evans, 2002, p. 6).

Sex/Gender/Sexuality

The theorizing of sex, gender, and sexuality as interrelated concepts is central to queer theorizing and the understanding of any potential for heteronormative disruption. In *Gender Trouble* (1990), Butler revolutionized the study of gender by theorizing it as a discursive production. She exposed the instability of heterosexuality by introducing the concept of gender performativity wherein, “gender is the repeated stylization of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance, of a natural sort of being” (Butler, 1990, p. 43). She destabilized constructivist arguments around sex and gender by arguing that there is no real gender identity underlying expressions of gender, rather gender is simply an ongoing discursive practice that is constantly repeated to give the appearance of authenticity (Butler, 1990). She even called into question the truth of sex, exposing it as an equally problematic discursive construction (Butler, 1990). She asked: “is there a history of how the duality of sex was established...are the ostensibly natural facts of sex discursively produced by various scientific discourses in the service of other political and social interests?” (Butler, 1990, p. 10). Through performativity, Butler (1990) not only challenged the authenticity of sex and gender but also that of (hetero)sexuality

because it becomes naturalized through the performative repetition of normative expressions of gender. Echoing a Foucaultian conception of discourse and power, it is in this discursive repetition that Butler sees the potential for hegemonic disruption and resignification, because repetitions simply create an illusory sense of stability.

She explicated this mythical sense of stability further by theorizing notions of authenticity and originality. She explained that “compulsory heterosexuality...sets itself up as the original, the true, the authentic; the norm that determines the real...” (Butler, 1991, p. 20). Thus, it conveyed the illusion of a *proper* gender (one belonging to sex), but really the compulsory category of heterosexuality is only the effect of a convincing performative repetition of this entire regulatory system. It is this constant need for the repetition of an idealized but never quite achievable gender that inevitably leaves us with the potential for subversive expressions and alternative readings.

After having been criticized for what was interpreted as a voluntarist *performance* of gender, Butler (1993) responded by further explaining performativity as citationality, wherein performativity is not a singular act or a choice, but rather a reiteration of a norm or set of norms. A gender performative is not something that a subject playfully assumes, nor is it something a subject does or chooses. Rather it is a process through which that subject is constituted (Butler, 1993).

Through performativity Butler (1993) contended the limits of constructivism by calling into question “those boundaries of bodily life where abjected or delegitimated bodies fail to count as bodies” (p. 15). She questioned the materialization of norms that lead to the production of abjected bodies or bodies that failed to matter. In a sense, abjection functions whenever rigid identity-based discourses abound. This can occur when a monolithic heterosexual identity is constructed in opposition to a monolithic homosexual identity. As a result, bodies that fall in the spaces between (e.g.

intersexed, transgendered, or queer), or in the spaces that might intersect (e.g. queer-Asian), are rendered abject. This is central to what queer theorizing has to offer as an alternative to constructivism. It attempts not only to prevent the reproduction of these oppositional constructions, it also pushes us to question our assumptions and deconstruct how we read the bodies that surround us.

Where Queer Theory Falls Short: or E-Race(ing) the Queer

Within queer theories, there tends to be an overwhelming silence around race (Loutzenheiser, 2001). This inevitably creates an assumption around the privilege of whiteness within studies that endorse this theoretical frame. As Loutzenheiser (2001) wrote:

A universal 'queerness' serves to reify a white male normalcy because the binaries stay intact. When race troubles this conception of 'queer', the use of queerness as the Other (against which normalcy is defined) worries the binary and troubles normalcy. (p. 197)

Inevitably, there is resistance at the thought of studying the intersection of queerness and race. Until recently I resisted, or rather I was privileged enough to have been able to silence race in my study of queer spaces. Kumashiro (2001b) and Loutzenheiser (2001) argued for an examination of the ways in which queer studies, communities, and identities are not racially neutral. Just because we do not talk about race, does not mean that race is not there (Loutzenheiser, 2001; Kumashiro, 2001b). Yet it seems easier to separate the two, and this separation might be particularly alluring for those who fit within the Dominant frameworks (e.g. White Queers, or Black heterosexuals). Kumashiro (2001b) terms this "the impossibility of duality" wherein, "many cultural narratives of what it means to 'be' one thing contradict narratives of what it means to 'be' another, making the simultaneity of certain identities impossible" (p. 12). To explain this, he drew on examples of discourses that described traditional Asian values wherein

“real/authentic” Asians are straight; while being queer means having the “White disease” (Kumashiro, 2001b).

It is precisely these tensions, contradictions, and the silences around privilege that I want to begin to unpack by employing this theoretical framework to help me read the data in this project. Admittedly this is not an easy task, nor have I always acknowledged its presence in my work.

When put in crisis and uncertainty, we ‘read’ difference in ways that ‘fit’ the frameworks we have for understanding the world, even if those frameworks are hypocritical. The insistence upon repeating comforting frameworks is the way we often work through our crises. (Felman, 1995 in Kumashiro, 2001b, p. 16)

With that said, there was no point at which I analyzed these differences enough, nor did I work towards analyzing them all because each point of analysis inevitably created another gap. However to begin to acknowledge that race and sexuality intersect and to discuss the ways in which these intersections trouble norms is an entry point, a beginning, a place for this alternative lens to start to focus.

Spatial Theory

Thus far the theoretical lens has not focused on spatial elements, however this was not meant to lose sight of the spatial component of this study. My theoretical framework was also shaped by Henri Lefebvre’s (1991) spatial theory. His thoughts on spatial analysis evolved based on a critical analysis of spatial scholarship that he felt simply supplied inventories or generated discourses on space (Lefebvre, 1991). He argued that we should pay critical attention to the ways in which bodies created or produced space as inherently political and strategic (Lefebvre, 1991). Lefebvre (1991) developed a triad of social space which included: (1) spatial practices, (2) representations of space, and (3) spaces of representation (Lefebvre, 1991). The key to understanding this triad is to keep in mind that these three “moments” of social space

are inseparable from one another. They are intersecting and therefore simultaneously underpin and presuppose each other (Lefebvre, 1991). I was first drawn to this approach because of the ways that it attempts to move beyond materialist conceptions of space that segregate objects in space, from bodies and physical space. Such a conception understands them all to pre-exist one another and therefore to not necessarily influence each other. Contrarily, Lefebvre's (1991) notion of an intersecting conceptual triad influenced the examination of spatial discourses in a debinarized way, in a way that sought not to solidify the production of gay spaces and straight spaces, but rather that interrogated and troubled that very binary conception.

Within the sexuality and space literature presented in the former chapter, much of the theory employed reflected queer and poststructural analyses of spaces, yet no one endorsed Lefebvre's work. There may be a number of reasons for this, one of them being that Lefebvre has often been positioned as a Marxist theorist. This is not surprising considering the fact that most of his life's work was spent expounding Marxist theories of production. Yet his triad of social space is unique in that it moves away from some of his earlier work in its attempts to debinarize studies of space and examine discourses and counter discourses of space. The conceptualization of Lefebvre's third triad (spaces of representation) brushes up against poststructural theory as it analyzes discursive functioning and this is where I have found his theorizing helpful.

Researchers have begun to utilize his framework in this way, as evidenced through Van Ingen's (2003) work in the sociology of sport where she investigated relations of power and resistance in a running club in Toronto's gay village. Using Lefebvre's conceptual triad, she demonstrated how space is continually produced through gendered, sexualized, and racialized geographies. In the sections that follow, I outline the three intersections of social space, and although I describe them separately, they are always

intersecting and do not exist in isolation.

Spatial Practice

Spatial practices encompass the production and use of material space and are also understood as perceived spaces (Lefebvre, 1991). These include spaces that can be mapped, as well as routines and the ways in which bodies interact with material space. An example of an observed routine could be the act of attendance-taking at the beginning of a recreational program. Simplistically, this act could be understood as futile and simply driven by a desire to count the bodies in the space. However, within Lefebvre's framework this act would have a conceived meaning, and therefore affect the discourses of and about the queer youth spaces. In other words, the way an attendance sheet is configured and the way in which it categorizes bodies inevitably influences who counts and who is given a sense of social existence within the spaces.

Representations of Space

Representations of space are the aspects of social space that remain imagined. They are also constructed through discourse (Lefebvre, 1991). Representations of space include the codes that regulate and control bodies in certain ways. Examples of such codes could be as simple as unwritten values that govern bodies within a space, or could also include notions such as masculinity, heterosexuality, or whiteness and how they are read onto or serve to describe certain spaces. For example, what is considered a queer space could also be read as a white space, based on its central focus on one aspect of identity.

Spaces of Representation or Representational Spaces/Lived Space

Spaces of representation are described as the social places through which life is directly lived (Lefebvre, 1991). This final portion of the triad combines all of the “moments” in spatial analysis into “local forms of knowing” (Stewart, 1995, p. 611 in van Ingen, 2003, p. 204). It is the terrain of social struggle, counter discourses and resistance, that consequently includes the ways in which counterspaces or counterhegemonic social spaces come to be read (Lefebvre, 1991). Examples of these may range from the struggles experienced in establishing queer youth spaces, to some of the micro-political struggles experienced within them, and to the ways in which youth workers negotiate these.

Therefore, within this theoretical framework, queer and post-structural feminist theories come together to account for the various ways in which norms around sex, gender, sexuality and race are interrogated in this research. Spatial theory serves as a bridge to link these theories to bodies and spaces. Rather than reading the former theories onto bodies and spaces, Lefebvre’s spatial theory provides a medium for understanding how these affect and interplay with physical spaces, rendering them as equally unstable discursive productions. In the analysis, spatial theory is used to clarify how space can be both enabling and constraining. It also points to the ways in which bodies can be used to denaturalize certain taken for granted notions about space.

In the upcoming chapter I will be discussing the methodological approach utilized to answer the research questions posed in this study. I will introduce both of the spaces examined in this study, as well as the subjects who agreed to participate in the research. I will also outline the methods employed, including document analysis, observations, and interviews. Finally, the chapter will include a discussion of my social location as a researcher, how I engaged in the process of deliberate reflexivity, and

some of the ethical dilemmas I encountered.

Chapter 3

Methodology

Research Sites

I conducted this research within two queer youth spaces in community centres in Western Canada. One was a queer youth space within a GLBT² community centre in an urban area, which will be identified by the pseudonym Brave for this study; and the second was a queer youth program at a mainstream³ community centre in a suburban area, which will be identified as Loud and Proud. I was limited in selecting these research sites because community centres providing queer youth programs are indeed few and far between. I became interested in conducting research at both of these sites, as I believed they would provide exciting and contrasting findings considering the differing contexts within which they were located.

Brave

Brave has existed for almost 30 years within a community centre for “GLBT populations and their allies” (promotional literature). It is located in an urban area known as a gay village for primarily white, middle-class, men. Run by volunteer staff at the outset, it has had paid staff for approximately five years, initially in the form of a part-time youth worker. There are now two full-time paid positions as well as a number of volunteers who still serve as support staff for the program.

The entire community centre is housed on the second floor of a two-storey building, which can only be accessed via a long narrow staircase (i.e. there is no wheelchair access). This staircase was located behind a lone glass door that marked

² Referring to Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, and Transgendered as it is stated in the community centre's mandate.

³ I am using the word 'mainstream' as a descriptor to emphasize that the community centre's interest is in serving a diverse geographical population, rather than a specific group of people such as the GLBT population.

the entry to the community centre. Outside, above the door, an awning hung, revealing the community centre's name and mandate: "serving and supporting gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgendered people, and their allies". Once inside, the facility contained a number of offices, a health clinic, a library, a lounge, meeting rooms, a single gender-neutral washroom, and the Brave office. The entire community centre appeared to be quite run down with ragged carpets that curl up in the corner. The walls were also worn and in dire need of paint.

The Brave office was open to youth from Monday to Friday, generally from 10am to 6pm so they could access resources (i.e. literature, support, condoms, employment postings, etc.). Within the space, there were two weekly drop-ins, on late Wednesday afternoon and Friday evening. It was a physically small space, no more than 12' X 12' in size. It had two windows overlooking the main street below and one door. Within it were two desks (one for each employee) and a number of chairs for the youth to sit on when they came in. The walls were completely covered with posters that displayed numerous anti-homophobia slogans such as "this is a queer positive space" and "homophobia is not welcome here". There were also banners, as well as inspirational phrases and poetry written by the youth. The space conveyed a sense of disorder, almost chaos, because it stored all of the program's resources including games, sporting equipment, art and craft supplies, videos, educational resources, and any items the youth left behind or brought to the space in order to decorate it. This became accentuated when the youth were in the space, as the presence of more than ten bodies made the space feel extremely cramped. On Wednesday afternoons, the Brave office was where the youth gathered, unless there were more than ten youth in attendance. If there were, the gathering space was moved down the hall to a meeting room that was approximately twice the size of the Brave office. The walls in this

meeting room were almost bare, except for two twelve step posters on the wall for the Alcoholics Anonymous meetings that took place there on the weekends. Twenty-five to thirty chairs lined the periphery of this room and there was a small refrigerator in the corner. This room also had two windows, and one door for access. This was the room where Friday night drop-ins began, however when the number of bodies reached fifty to seventy, the youth tended to take over the entire community centre as well as the street below.

Loud and Proud

Loud and Proud had existed for only a few months and was located within a mainstream community centre. This means that it was governed by a regional municipality and claimed to serve a geographical area. It was in a suburban area and employed one youth worker for three hours per week, plus occasional preparation hours if required. As a result, Loud and Proud only existed as a queer youth space on Wednesday evenings. On every other day and night, Loud and Proud was a 'regular' or 'mainstream' youth lounge (read as not openly welcoming of queer and questioning youth).

The community centre where this space existed was located on a main road within this suburban area, and was therefore easily accessible via public transit. The community centre was immense, and housed a swimming pool, ice-rink, fitness facility, seniors' lounge, administrative offices, a track, a theatre, and a youth lounge (which was Loud and Proud's on Wednesdays).

There were a number of entrances to the community centre, but the main entrance was comprised of four glass doors, two of which opened automatically in order to facilitate wheelchair access. A number of signs led the way to the youth lounge, and the sign above the door read "youth lounge". On Wednesday evenings, one of these

doors generally remained wide open. On the bulletin board by the door, a small 8" X 11" poster was hung, promoting Loud and Proud and outlining its real name, which was an acronym of sexual identity markers. The acronym essentially described the space as being for youth who identified as gay, or as anything else, and welcomed them to come on Wednesday nights. Once inside, the space was quite large, at least 40' X 20', with two windows on the back wall. There was a pool table, foosball table, four couches, a number of chairs, a coffee table, a desk, storage lockers, a bulletin board, a television with a VCR, a Nintendo Play station, and a number of coffee and side tables. The walls were covered with murals that depicted area landmarks. They were painted in 1998 by the youth who used the lounge (before queer youth formally occupied the space as a group). Rules were posted on the wall, "no racism, no sexism, no swearing, no drugs, no alcohol". These were not necessarily the Loud and Proud rules, but rather the rules that were enforced in the space on 'every other day'. Loud and Proud endorsed similar rules, however there were obviously specific rules banning homophobia (which did not happen on every other day), as well as rules reinforcing respect of self-identifying labels (in particular with regards to gender-identification), and prohibiting the labeling or identifying of those who come in, unless they self-identified. This rule was in place to make the space more comfortable for youth who might have wanted to come in, but who were not yet ready to 'come out'.

The dimensions of the space were capable of housing the number of youth that attended, however the youth never remained solely within this space during their allotted time on Wednesday nights. The youth regularly hung out and ran around in the hallway. They also frequently went outside to smoke in front of the community centre.

The space and the community centre appear to be fairly new and well-maintained. The Loud and Proud space was well-furnished, with very new-looking

furniture. There were two washrooms near Loud and Proud, one male and one female, each located almost directly across the hall from the space. They were both single stall washrooms, identical in appearance, and therefore their gendered assignment seemed quite random.

Access and Recruiting

I gained access to both of these spaces by first setting up a meeting with the head coordinator of youth services in the urban area in question. During this meeting we discussed programs, services, and practices in area community centres for youth. He proceeded to invite me to a city-wide youth worker meeting, where I could meet and talk with the youth workers in order to gain information on various initiatives in surrounding areas for queer youth. Through this process of networking, I eventually became aware of two potential sites where I could become involved in a volunteer/support capacity in order to gain greater insights for future research purposes. I was honest from the very beginning about my intention to conduct research in the future, and the leaders within both programs were supportive of this endeavour. These volunteer experiences not only aided me in designing my research questions, but they also allowed me to begin building trusting relationships with the youth workers who lead these spaces. This allowed me to become somewhat of an insider in both of the spaces, however this insider/outsider status was constantly negotiated as will be addressed later on in this chapter.

As outlined in my ethics forms, I first invited the directors of both of the community centres to participate in my research project. I sent them an Agency Approval letter/consent form that would give me permission to conduct research within their institutions (i.e. their community centres). This letter invited them to respond within one week of having received it (via the self-addressed, stamped envelope provided) if

they agreed for their community centre to participate. This letter also included a clause that served as consent to observe the queer youth spaces, but not the youth. I quickly discovered that gaining access to the spaces would be much more difficult than I had initially imagined it would be. In the GLBT community centre, there were far fewer gatekeepers as the organization was quite small and the executive director was easily accessible. I managed to receive consent to do the research very quickly. This was a completely different story in the mainstream community centre. It initially took quite a while simply to figure out who to ask for agency approval. This confusion was due to the fact that the community centre that provided the space for Loud and Proud, did not actually run the program. Therefore, when I contacted the executive director of the community centre where the program took place, he responded by saying he did not feel he had the right to consent to the project because he knew nothing about the program as it was not run by his staff. When I finally figured out which executive director I had to contact, it took her a few weeks to respond to me, at which point she decided that she wanted to meet with me in order to discuss the project before making a decision. The only complication was that she could only meet with me two weeks later. I began to worry, as the data collection period seemed to be getting farther and farther away, and still I had no guarantees that this executive director would agree to the research. In preparation for this meeting, I put together a short presentation that clearly outlined the intentions of the research. At the end of the presentation, the executive director was satisfied and requested that I make a presentation to the Board of Directors once the data had been collected, as well as lead a session with all of the youth workers who were employed by their region. I agreed to both of these requests and she quickly consented to the research.

Having received this agency approval, I invited the youth worker from Loud and

Proud, as well as the youth worker from Brave and the program coordinator to participate in three to four observation sessions and three 45-minute interviews. I also invited their direct supervisors to participate in one 45-minute interview. At Brave this meant that I asked the executive director of the community centre, and at Loud and Proud, I asked the director of community services in their community centre. I was interested in interviewing the youth workers because the literature has focused on queer youth, rather than on the practitioners who are also clearly involved in these queer youth spaces. I was also interested in interviewing the youth workers' supervisors to gain a greater sense of the systemic discourses operating about the space at higher levels of the organization. The supervisors might have been considered "elite interviewees" as they involved "prominent, and well informed people in an organization or community and are selected for interviews on the basis of their expertise in areas relevant to the research" (Marshall & Rossman, 1999, p. 83). Marshall and Rossman (1999) argued for the value of these types of interviews in gaining information about a group or organization's past histories, policies, future plans, as well as its relationships to other organizations. However, I want to emphasize that I do not uncritically accept this notion of "elite interviews", as I did not believe that the supervisors had a *better* way of knowing about the spaces, but rather a *different* way of knowing. I did not interview the youth, because I understand that part of the uniqueness of this project was its focus on the service providers. In addition, attempting to interview youth, particularly those younger than 18 years of age, which would account for most of the youth in the spaces, could have entailed a number of ethical concerns related to issues of safety. For example, if the youth were not 'out' to their parents, or if their parents were unaware of the fact that they attended these queer youth spaces, attempting to receive parental consent would have been quite challenging and potentially dangerous for the youth.

I recruited the youth workers, the program coordinator, and their supervisors via a mailed letter that invited them to participate in the study. The invitation also included a self-addressed, stamped envelope, as well as two copies of a consent form (i.e. one to return to me, and the other for their records). They were asked to respond through the mail, within one week of having received the invitation. This method of recruitment was utilized to diminish any undue pressure potential participants might have felt in light of the relationship we had already established through my volunteer work. It was also emphasized that a refusal to participate in this study would not affect their employment positions in any way, nor would it affect my involvement as a volunteer with their programs. I believe the mailed letter approach was quite effective, as the program coordinator, whom I had been working with quite closely over the course of the past year, had no qualms about calling me once she had received the letter and expressing that she did not want to be involved in interviews, although she was comfortable with the observation process. She said that she did not have the energy to become more involved with the interviews at that time.

In the upcoming sections, I introduce the research participants who agreed to participate. Prior to our first interview I discussed the risks associated with being involved in the research with them and they were subsequently given the option to select a pseudonym. Following this process, some of the subjects chose to be identified by their real names stating that they were proud of the work they did, and wanted to be recognized for doing it. Others however, chose pseudonyms for their personal protection within the workplace.

Brave research participants

In Brave, three staff agreed to participate in the research, Romi, Donna, and Meg. I interviewed Romi, a youth worker, as well as Donna, the Executive Director of the community centre within which Brave was located. Meg, the youth coordinator of Brave, agreed to be involved in the observation process, but not interviews.

Romi was a 25 year old self-identified queer, Fijian male, who had been employed through Brave as a youth worker for five years. Prior to his position with Brave, he had done similar work in organizations for queer youth. He considered himself to be a social justice activist. Romi participated in three interviews averaging approximately one hour in length, and was observed working in Brave on four separate occasions.

Donna self-identified as a 51 year-old, white, lesbian, who came out over 34 years ago. Before becoming involved as the Executive Director of the community centre, she obtained a Master's degree in theology. She had worked for more than 25 years in community services and emphasized her commitment to equality, diversity, and social justice. Donna agreed to participate in one interview, which lasted approximately 45 minutes.

Meg self-identified as a white, middle-class, lesbian, and had been in the youth coordinator position for approximately two years. Meg chose not to participate in interviews, but did agree to be involved in the observation portion of the research. She was observed on three occasions, and during these observations, Romi was also present. Given that the primary focus of the observation sessions was to inform the interviews, I certainly at times focused more on Romi than on Meg.

Loud and Proud research participants

At Loud and Proud I interviewed Kristen, a youth worker, as well as Arleta, the director of Community Services at the community centre where Kristen works. Kristen was 27 years of age and identified as a white woman who refused to disclose or claim any sexual identity within the queer youth space or throughout the course of the research process. Prior to her position as an in-centre youth worker, Kristen worked for one year as a youth outreach worker. She also completed a bachelor's degree majoring in psychology and minoring in sociology. I conducted three 45 minute interviews with her and observed her at work in the space on three occasions.

Arleta preferred to be represented in terms of her professional title as Director of Community Services and supervisor of Kristen. Kristen did have one direct supervisor below Arleta in the hierarchical chain of command, however she was not in that position when the space was established or when the research began. Kristen was therefore working more closely with Arleta than anyone else in the community centre in the process of establishing the space. Arleta agreed to participate in an interview, which lasted approximately 20 minutes.

Data Collection

After receiving ethics approval from the UBC Ethics Review Board, I collected my data using three main qualitative methods: (1) observation, (2) document analysis and, (3) interviews.

Observations

I observed Brave four times over the course of the two-month data collection period. The first three observation sessions each lasted approximately two hours and took place during regular drop-in times, either on Wednesday afternoon or on Friday evening, with each session being approximately two weeks apart. My final observation

session took place at the year-end queer youth prom. Some of the Wednesday and Friday observation sessions were building up to this queer prom and included planning sessions for it. As a result, I felt it was important for me to observe the actual prom that the youth had been planning for several weeks. This made for an interesting progression to the observation sessions, culminating with the prom at the end.

I observed Loud and Proud three times over the course of six weeks. Each observation session lasted approximately three hours, which was the period of time during which the drop-in space was open to the youth on Wednesdays. Once again, the sessions were approximately two weeks apart. In both spaces the observation sessions preceded the interviews with the youth workers to help inform the questions I asked in follow-up interviews. Throughout the course of these sessions I focused on the youth workers, and in particular on interactions or situations that I felt influenced the space. I also paid careful attention to how the youth workers negotiated their own identities within the spaces. Observations generally entailed the systematic noting and recording of events, behaviors, and objects (Marshall & Rossman, 1999). With this in mind, I identified broad areas of interest before going into the spaces, however I did not have predetermined categories or strict observational checklists (Marshall & Rossman, 1999). An observation guide is provided in appendix A. As per my initial definitional use of discourses for this proposed study, I understood practices and norms to function through discourses. Consequently some of my observations focused on uncovering certain norms that operated in the queer youth spaces via the practices of the youth workers.

Because of my volunteer experiences with both queer youth programs, I did not have to completely re-negotiate entry into the spaces. At the outset of my data collection period, I hoped I might be able to clearly shift my role from volunteer to

researcher in the spaces. However, as the research progressed I realized that this was going to be virtually impossible for me. For one, the youth in the spaces knew me very well at this point, and therefore their dependence upon me to listen and talk with them, and their expectations of me did not change when I announced that the data collection had started. Moreover, considering the lack of staff, I felt it would be unfair to the youth and the youth workers if I simply sat in the space and observed. Therefore, the observation process certainly became an active participant observation. During larger group interactions, I participated as I normally would as a volunteer, paying special attention to what the youth workers were doing and how they were interacting with the youth. When larger group activities broke up, I spent my time circulating between smaller groups or talking with individual youth. At times I tried to stay close to one of the youth workers in order to observe what they were doing. However, I did not spend my time following them around, as this would have been quite unlike my usual behaviour, and it may have been quite disruptive for them. Consequently, at times I was not directly observing any one of the youth workers, but simply interacting with a separate group of youths or an individual youth. There is much methodological debate regarding the appropriate level of researcher participation throughout the course of observations. These vary from those who endorse complete immersion into the culture under study, to those who endorse complete non-interaction with those being observed (Lincoln & Denzin, 2000). I personally do not believe that any one approach is necessarily better or provides a more truthful account. With that said, I do believe it is critical to situate how the research is being done, as this does shape the analysis.

Initially, I thought I was going to take notes while I was in the spaces. Granted I knew these would be shorthand notes that I would later complete. However, taking notes while I was in the spaces became impossible for me to do. I found myself

constantly interacting with individuals, whether it was youth, youth workers, or other volunteers, and as a result during my first observation session my pen and notepad never even made it out of my back pocket. I quickly adjusted to the situation and decided to jot down quick notes immediately after the observation sessions. I would sit in my car as soon as I had left the building and note key interactions and events that had occurred throughout the course of the evening.

For the observation sessions at Loud and Proud, that took place in a more suburban area, I brought my tape recorder and turned it on for the drive home. During this time I described events or interactions and included my personal reflections on what and how I had observed that evening. Within twelve to twenty-four hours of each observation session, I typed up detailed descriptive field notes. Hammersley and Atkinson (1995) argued that it is ideal to make notes during the actual observation sessions, however I believe that my method of recording quick notes immediately after each session, as well as the tape recorder technique, allowed me to remember most of what was happening in the spaces. In addition, my field notes included numerous analytic reflections weaved in with the observations. Most interactions or events recorded were followed by an asterisk indicating the insertion of a personal reflection. At times these reflections were my thoughts on what was happening and at other times they were simply questions I was asking myself about how and why I was observing. As a feminist researcher, these reflections became a vital component of my field notes (Alvesson & Skoldberg, 2000) and they helped me to acknowledge the affects that my social location was having on the observation process. As Parr (1998) notes, "we all have prior frameworks into which we fit, examine and make sense of new information" (p. 92). My prior conceptual frameworks could have become a serious pitfall of my research design if they prevented me from seeing certain important events or

interactions occurring within the spaces. However it would have been even more problematic had I pretended that it was possible to observe everything, and to do so objectively. Therefore, the field notes served as an entry point to constantly check-in with myself and discuss why I might be observing things in a certain way.

It is important to note that prior to conducting these observation sessions I did not seek consent from the youth, as I was not observing them per se. They were at times involved in interactions with the youth workers, however the focus of these interactions was on the youth workers and the situations and not individual youth. Youth are referred to generally in the data, however only in the context of interaction or general space composition, as this is not a study of or about queer youth. I did, however, make a point to inform the youth that the research was occurring in their space by putting up a poster describing my presence as a researcher over the course of two months (see appendix B). I also let the youth know at the beginning of each observation session that I would be collecting data that day. At the outset I noted that if any of the youth felt uncomfortable with this process, they could ask me or any of the youth workers questions about the research. If they still felt uncomfortable with my presence I was prepared to leave and resume observation at another time, however this did not happen.

Document Analysis

Marshall and Rossman (1999) argued that public documents about each space can be an informative source of data. They argue that this source of information can be useful in supplementing or informing participant observation and interviews and is unobtrusive since it does not disrupt the spaces (Marshall & Rossman, 1999). Public documents are also key sources for uncovering some of the values of the group (Marshall & Rossman, 1999). In terms of these two queer youth spaces, the public

documents were not numerous but included a pamphlet, a few posters and a website. At Brave, I analyzed the program's promotional pamphlet, a poster that was promoting the year-end queer prom, as well as the program website. Because Loud and Proud had been in existence for a far shorter period of time, only one poster was available as a public document. In analyzing these documents I focused not only on the contents (i.e. to whom the program was advertised), but also on where the literature was located (i.e. front hall of the community centre, or hidden away in the youth worker's office). My analysis of these documents was in the form of field notes, which similarly to my observation field notes, included reflections on the document analysis process and my social location as a researcher.

Interviews

After having received informed consent from Romi and Donna at Brave, as well as Kristen and Arleta at Loud and Proud, I conducted semi-structured interviews with them. Lincoln and Denzin (2000) argued that structured interviewing takes place when the interviewer asks all respondents "the same series of pre-established questions with a limited set of response categories" (p. 649). Correspondingly, they described unstructured interviewing as more informal, consisting of more open-ended questions, thus providing a greater breadth of data than other types of interviewing (Lincoln & Denzin, 2000). Unstructured interviewing is, at times, also referred to as in-depth interviewing, which Marshall and Rossman (1999) defined as "much more like conversations than formal events with predetermined response categories" (p. 108). I am describing the interviews I conducted as semi-structured, since some questions I posed were of a more pre-established and structured nature; whereas others were more open-ended allowing for un-orchestrated follow-up questions for depth. Please see appendix C for sample interview questions. All of the interviewees agreed to the

interviews being tape-recorded, and they were subsequently transcribed verbatim.

As mentioned earlier, I conducted three interviews with both Romi and Kristen. Romi was very articulate and spoke at great length about his experiences as a youth worker at Brave, since he has been doing so for more than five years. Prior to our first interview he asked if he could see the questions ahead of time. I told him that I did not have perfectly scripted questions, since the interview was semi-structured, however I did send him a general outline of the ideas I wanted to explore with him. After his request, I realized that the other interviewees might appreciate this as well and therefore routinely sent an outline of the themes to each and every one of them prior to the interviews. We always met for our interviews at the Brave office during Romi's scheduled work time. He would close the office door with a note on it saying that he was in a meeting so that we would not be disturbed. Only during our last interview did we experience interruptions, however he had warned me beforehand that this might happen, as he was expecting to hear from a youth in crisis. Romi seemed very comfortable with the interview process, and as a result, most of our interviews evolved very much like conversations. I very rarely consulted the interview schedule during the interviews, yet we still managed to cover the areas I expected and more. I found myself being generally comfortable discussing different themes and ideas with Romi. In particular, I was very comfortable asking questions about queer identity, about different occurrences in the space, and the community centre in general. These topics were particularly easy for me to talk about, possibly because I had assumed that both of us *shared* these experiences, at least to some extent. I noticed, however, that I personally was a bit uncomfortable when it came to asking him questions about race.

I reflected back to the first interview I conducted over the course of my data collection period with Romi. I had just recently defended my thesis proposal and was

diving into the data collection feeling well prepared, as though I knew exactly what to expect, and had a pretty good idea of how my subjects were going to respond. I remember telling one of my committee members about this experience shortly after it happened. I told her: "Yeah you know I didn't talk about race in my proposal, and all of a sudden after this first interview with Romi, it was as though race came and smacked me in the face". She bluntly looked at me and said: "No it didn't, it was always there, it was there in your proposal, it had just been silenced". Race had all of a sudden become an issue in my research because a 'non-white' person had talked about negotiating his identity and his experiences in a way that was very different from mine. This exemplifies one of the ways in which I had read difference onto the other, rather than turning the lens onto myself. Who was I to be extracting his story? I noticed that he may have felt some similar anxieties with regards to our differences in gender. In one of his interview responses, he began talking about segregation in the queer community and describing some of the problematic issues he felt existed. He began listing numerous different groups within the queer community and when he got to women, he said: "or it's always a women...well I don't even wanna...a women event is fine". He hesitated in being critical of subgroups of women within the queer community. He was going to say something but then changed his mind mid-sentence. I wondered if this had anything to do with how he may have perceived my gender. He may have felt he could not say what he was thinking without offending me. These were just some of the interesting dynamics Romi and I experienced during our interviews, across our similarities and differences.

I also conducted three interviews with Kristen for which we always met at the same coffee shop. She chose not to do the interviews during work time, but rather on her own time during her day off. Every time we met, we both bought a cup of coffee

and sat down and chatted for over an hour before the interview. During these pre-interview conversations, I always wished the tape recorder was on, because we talked about so many relevant issues, and Kristen was very relaxed. The minute the formal interview began, Kristen seemed to become quite nervous. Her responses became much shorter and I found myself having to ask more questions and asking for clarifications to get more details. I could tell Kristen was very comfortable with me based on all of the conversations we had before the tape recorder was turned on. She seemed to become a little nervous at the thought of being recorded, however I asked her before every interview if she wanted to be tape recorded and every time she agreed without hesitation. When Kristen and I discussed her identity, she very clearly chose not to reveal her sexual identity. I found myself wanting to ask about her choice not to identify, however I hesitated because I did not want to make it seem like I was pressuring her to choose. Interestingly I did not feel the same anxieties around asking Kristen questions about her racial identity. I had perceived us as the 'same' (read as White) in that regard, and therefore felt comfortable asking her questions that would not in any way push me to call my own racial identity into question.

My initial rationale for three interviews with the youth workers was based on arguments for the complementary nature and potential for research methods to inform each other (Marshall & Rossman, 1999; Lincoln & Denzin, 2000). Therefore, the interviews were spread out over the course of the two-month observation period (i.e. one near the beginning, one near the middle, and one near the end), thus allowing the second and third interviews in particular to be informed by my observations.

I had initially allowed for flexibility in terms of the number of interviews I might require with Romi and Kristen's supervisors, Donna and Arleta. However, scheduling one interview with these extremely busy individuals was challenging enough and as a

result I decided against asking for any follow-ups. Marshall and Rossman (1999) have argued that at times it is only possible to have access to one interview with these individuals, because they operate under such demanding time constraints. My interview with Donna was approximately 45 minutes long and my interview Arleta was approximately 20 minutes. I did not have a pre-established relationship with either of them, as I had not met them prior to the day of the interview. As a result it was difficult for me to gauge their comfort level with the interview process. Although these interviews were still semi-structured in nature, I definitely followed the interview schedule much more closely, focusing on questions around the history of the space, the process of establishing it and its values. The interviews were much less about them and more about what they knew about the spaces. The data collected in the interview I had with Donna was quite prevalent in the reported results and is often times used to complement or inform some of Romi's thoughts and responses. However, it is quite apparent that Arleta's responses were not as prominent as Donna's in the results. I believe there are a number of reasons for this, the first being that Loud and Proud was so new as a part of the community centre's programming, that Arleta did not have that much to say about it. In addition, Arleta's awareness of the space and understanding of what went on in it was based primarily on what Kristen had reported to her, and I really wanted to focus on bringing out Kristen's voice as the youth worker rather than Arleta's. As the Director of Community Services, Arleta did provide financial support for the space and for Kristen's wages and she also made a presentation to the Board of Directors in order to get approval for the program. However, she did not really play a primary role in establishing the space.

Following each interview I recorded reflexive field notes that revealed my initial impressions and worked to acknowledge how I may have affected the interview process

(Alvesson & Skoldberg, 2000). Some of these reflections have been included in the above section that described the dynamics of the interviews with different subjects. My reflexive field notes also included some non-verbal features, often referred to as “kinesics” and “proxemics” (Lincoln & Denzin, 2000; Marshall & Rossman, 1999). Kinesics refers to non-verbal body behaviours (i.e. nods and gestures); whereas proxemics refers to the use of interpersonal space to communicate attitudes (i.e. whispering, leaning in, the placement of furniture) (Lincoln & Denzin, 2000; Marshall & Rossman, 1999). In these field notes I attempted to deconstruct how I affected the interviews, because I was not neutral, unbiased, or invisible in this process (Lincoln & Denzin, 2000). In the reporting of these results, I have included some of these reflections, however I tried to balance this reflexive approach with actual responses to avoid what Lincoln and Denzin (2000) referred to as the confessional style (i.e. the navel-gazing/soul cleansing of researchers). This distinguished my approach from traditional interviewing that has sought to “maintain neutrality, and achieve objectivity” (Lincoln & Denzin, 2000, p. 665).

Social Location

As I have stated from the outset, my perspective was partial and situated. Haraway (1991) explained: “the only way to find a larger vision is to be somewhere in particular” (p. 196). This was what Haraway (1991) described as strong objectivity. What this means is that my social location as a young, queer woman, intersected with my middle-class status, whiteness, and able-bodiedness, as well as my epistemological position, inevitably providing a partial view of these two queer youth spaces. This acknowledgment is crucial in inciting rich knowledge production by other researchers from different social locations and epistemological positions to engage in this type of situated knowledge production on a pressing and much neglected issue.

My stance on validity and truth claims with regards to the research participants was closely aligned with how I conceptualized knowledge production for myself. I believe that truth is always partial (Haraway, 1991), which means, for example, that the transcripts of an interview with one youth worker cannot reflect the reality of all youth workers. In addition, I am greatly influenced by Foucault's stance on truth, as described by Lotringer and Hochroth (1997):

...truth is not defined by a correspondence to reality but as a force inherent to principles and which has to be developed in a discourse...this truth is not something which is hidden behind or under the consciousness of the deepest and most obscure part of the soul. It is something which is in front the individual as a point of attraction, a kind of magnetic force which attracts them towards a goal...(p. 194).

In other words, I do not believe that there is a universal truth achievable by speaking to or with any number of individuals in order to describe any sort of shared social reality. Rather, I believe that truth is discursively produced, just like the subject. Kumashiro (2001a) illustrated this by arguing, "no text on, say, Native Americans can ever reflect all voices within Native American communities" (p. 5). In addition, if I were to treat the research participants' accounts as transparent and reflective of reality, then I would limit the potential for this research to read into and deconstruct the silences inherent in their accounts, because "the unsaid is [precisely] what gives the said meaning" (Kumashiro, 2001a, p. 7).

I negotiated somewhat of a certain insider/outsider status throughout the course of this entire research process and have alluded to it by describing the complex interactions that took place with some of my interview subjects. In certain respects I was an insider in the spaces because of my involvement as a volunteer. However there are different levels of "insiderness" and my status as a volunteer was, in fact, quite different than the experiences of the youth workers who occupied paid work positions.

In addition, although I am young, I was not a youth in the spaces. As much as I hate to say it, I was a little too old to be one of them and I was also there for very different reasons (i.e. as a volunteer/researcher). Hill-Collins' (1999) revolutionary work complicated notions of insider/outsider by arguing for the status of "outsider/within". She argued that this has been experienced by Afro-American women who have "long been privy to some of the most intimate secrets of white society" (Hill-Collins, 1991, p. 155). She noted that Black feminist thought has transformed our understanding of insider/outsider by unveiling "the interlocking nature of oppression" (Hill-Collins, 1999). This was significant as it shifted the focus of investigation from explicating specific forms of oppression to determining some of the links among these systems (Hill-Collins, 1999, p. 154). I endorse Hill-Collins' (1999) work not necessarily because I believed the outsider-within status offers a better way of knowing, but rather because of the way it has troubled traditional standpoint approaches to knowledge production. My queerness could have potentially made me an insider in the spaces, yet when I considered how this layer of me intersected with my gender, race/ethnicity, age, class, and ability, I was never fully an insider and never fully an outsider. There were simply too many differences between and among all of the people who occupied the spaces for me to be able to make such a claim. Whether or not any or all of the discursive axes of our identities lined-up, we were all too different from each other to be considered in any way the same. Sedgwick's (1990) first axiom in *Epistemology of the Closet* is based on this premise. We can appear to be the same in every way. We can even ascribe or fit into the same identity-based discourses, but we are all still distinct from each other with different needs, desires, pleasures, likes and dislikes, that make it impossible to make claims of sameness, group identity, or I argue, insider/outsider status.

I have engaged in this discussion not to argue for the need to be an insider or an

outsider as a researcher, but rather to illustrate the complexity of attempting to identify myself as either/or in terms of the insider/outsider binary. Like Wolf (1996), I argued that researchers can have *multiple* perspectives depending on the communities, individuals, and time periods within which they do their research. This status was also negotiated and changing during and throughout the research process (Evans, 2002). I do not believe that insider status offers a better way of knowing or understanding a certain, space, individual, or group of people. Rather, I have engaged in what Haraway (1991) terms "situated knowledge production" (p. 111), because not only did I acknowledge both my social location and epistemological position throughout the research process, this also became crucial to the analysis.

Reflexivity

This situated knowledge production is intrinsically linked to how I addressed reflexivity throughout the course of this research project. Alvesson and Skoldberg (2000) define reflexivity as:

...a question of recognizing fully the notoriously ambivalent relation of a researcher's text to the realities studied. Reflection means interpreting one's own interpretations, looking at one's own perspectives from other perspectives, and turning a self-critical eye onto one's own authority as interpreter and author. (p. vii)

Thus reflexivity is linked to social location and epistemology and involves a deliberate acknowledgement and deconstruction of how these influence the research process. Reflexivity has at times been referred to as "operating on at least two levels in research work" (Alvesson & Skoldberg, 2000, p. vi), therefore pointing to the process-oriented nature of engaging in this type of research. It involves moving beyond simply doing the research, to then thinking through and writing about how, when, and why we may have done it in a certain way. Speaking of reflexivity in their research, Mauthner and Doucet (1998, p. 138) stated that, "we need to document these reflexive processes, not just in

general terms such as our class, gender, and ethnic background; but in a more concrete and nitty-gritty way in terms of where, how and why particular decisions are being made...". Reflexivity has become somewhat of a "buzz word" in feminist research, one that is often addressed in a very superficial way. Mauthner and Doucet (1998) described it as a sort of "coming clean" in terms of gender, race and class, and once that is done, the reflexive process is complete. In light of this, I strongly emphasize a truly reflexive approach – one that does not end with an initial "coming clean", rather one that is incorporated and taken into account throughout the research process.

Data Analysis

I used Atlas.ti (a computer software coding program) to code my observation field notes, document analysis, and interview transcripts. Coffey and Atkinson (1996) define coding as the "generating of concepts from and with our data" (p. 26). I reflected upon this at length before engaging in the coding process, because I was wary of oversimplifying my data. Rather, as Coffey and Atkinson (1996) have argued, "it can be used to expand, transform, and reconceptualize data, opening up more diverse analytic possibilities" (p. 29). I felt that the coding process could be useful as they described it in poststructural research, since one could go beyond the data, serving to interrogate it even further (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996).

Once the data was coded, I wanted to interpret it and read it against the grain. Interpretation involves the transcendence of factual data and cautious analysis of what is to be made of them (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996). Therefore, I pushed beyond summary approaches to interpretation where data are reduced to a limited set of categories and themes (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996). Consequently, I drew on Kvale's (1996) ideas of interpretation analysis because it allowed for "understanding" and "overstanding"; whereby the "interpreter goes beyond what is directly said to work out the structures

and relations of meaning not immediately apparent in the text" (p. 201). I did this by critically analyzing the discourses that were operating in and through the data. Evans (2002) described critical discourse analysis as an approach that "pays attention to the usages of language and how those usages position the speakers in relation to others, both physically present others and larger categories of others (i.e. social groups)" (p. 9). Evans (2002) was careful to clarify that discourse is definitely not a synonym for language, rather it is "a way of conceptualizing how language, which is historically and socially saturated, works" (p. 9).

In my writing I also kept in mind Sykes' (1998) approach to deconstructive interpretation by including the 'active voices' of the youth workers and supervisors through verbatim quotes, followed by my queer-poststructural feminist reading to "disrupt the realist meanings of the...quotations" (p. 160). The use of deconstruction to analyze discourses should not be confused with a critique of the individual subjects and their practices. As Butler (1993) argued, "there is no 'I' who stands behind discourse" (p.225), meaning that no subject operates outside of discourse and no subject can simply execute their volition through it. Therefore my analysis of how the discourses operated should not and cannot be read as a critique of the subject, but rather an examination of how the discourses within which we all operate function to do and simultaneously not do certain things.

Deconstruction is a highly contested term that by its very nature defies definition. One of the main dilemmas expressed has been textual erasure or the disappearance of the subject. Many feminists have expressed concerns with this type of interpretive conflict, and in particular with the erasure of the woman as a subject (which was absent from discourse for such a long time) (Andersen & Jack, 1991; Borland, 1991). Andersen and Jack (1991) have expressed particular preoccupations with moving to

interpretation too quickly, rather than truly listening to our subjects and staying true to their thoughts and emotions. Borland's (1991) main concern has been with the ownership and narration of text and the way in which researchers construct meaning and whether these meanings were intended by the subjects. In order to address this dilemma of poststructural analysis, Kvale (1991) asked whether the purpose of textual interpretation was to "get at the author's intended meaning, or the meaning that text has for us [sic]?" (Kvale, 1996 in Sykes, 1998, p. 159). Therefore, I believe that through analyzing discourses and "overstanding", we can get beyond what is intended by the text, to what it takes for granted in its very composition. It was indeed a component of my research project to deconstruct the multiple meanings of the discourses within which these subjects operated. However, I still listened to what they were saying and reflexively analyzed my desire to hear certain things over others. I consciously made an effort to avoid moving into interpretation too hastily and violently imposing my initial frameworks.

Ethical Dilemmas

So as to protect the anonymity and confidentiality of the youth workers, their supervisors, and the community centres involved, the queer youth spaces in this research were identified as spaces in community centres in Western Canada. If or when results are reported within the community centres involved, I will not use any direct quotes, even when pseudonyms were assigned, so as to not unintentionally jeopardize the employment of the youth workers with regards to their supervisors and peers. The reasoning behind this is that there are so few youth workers involved in this type of work that they could be quite easily recognized by their co-workers and supervisors. This does seem contradictory in some ways with regards to some of the subjects' expressed desire to use their real names rather than pseudonyms in the

research. However, in an effort to protect those individuals who did have concerns, I believe it is preferable for me not to refer to any individual names when reporting in that context.

Chapter 4

Results

This chapter sets out to explore and analyze some of the results uncovered throughout the research process. As noted in the methodological chapter, this analysis does not simplistically organize the data into themes, rather it critically analyzes the discourses so as to not only understand but also “overstand” them (Kvale, 1996). In the process of doing this, four main themes were identified, including: (a) youth worker identities as influential, (b) the blurring of physical/spatial boundaries, (c) boundary negotiation, and (d) systemic discourses of risk, support, and safety. In addition, meta-themes, which can be conceptualized as strands of analysis that cut across each of the existing themes, were also evident. These included notions of naming as explained by Butler (1997), as well as notions of intersectionality, and in particular the intersection of queerness with gender, and race. The youth workers’ identity negotiation is explored at the outset since it frames much of the subsequent analysis. Not only did their identities appear to affect the spaces, but they were also linked to and interplayed with discourses of boundary negotiation, as well as larger systemic discourses of risk, support and safety. The blurring of physical/spatial boundaries explored heteronormativity and heteronormative disruption by revealing the meanings associated with bodies, how they functioned in the spaces, and what happened when the bodies do not fit, or refused to stay within the confines of the allotted spaces. Under boundary negotiation the discourses associated with who and what the spaces were for, and the ways in which issues of belonging were addressed by the youth workers were explored. The data revealed the various ways in which spatial boundaries were simultaneously called into question and safe guarded. Finally, the systemic discourses that shaped the queer youth spaces were analyzed in terms of how they both disrupted and reinforced

(hetero)norms as well as certain ways of 'being' queer.

A. Youth Worker Identity Negotiation Matters in Queer Youth Spaces

As the research progressed it became apparent that the youth workers' identities were not constructed and experienced as fixed, but were rather unstable and constantly negotiated (Evans, 2002). This process of negotiation influenced the spaces a great deal in terms of the discourses of identity that pervaded and also shaped them (Lefebvre, 1991). This was evidenced through the interactions between the youth workers and the youth who were present and by the norms and activities that did (or did not) take place. Who the youth workers were and how they negotiated this became paramount to this project and is intricately linked to how spatial boundaries were negotiated and how systemic discourses were experienced.

This idea of identity negotiation first occurred as a prevalent theme as a result of Kristen deliberately choosing to not disclose her sexual identity at Loud and Proud. In an interview I asked Kristen how she thought her identity influenced Loud and Proud, and she responded as follows:

I don't think that my sexual orientation or gender identity influences at all. I think my awareness of the issues definitely do. I think just being able to openly talk candidly about gender and sexuality issues, without feeling uncomfortable. I think the kids sense that and they're more likely to discuss that with me than with other youth workers who may not open the door. (Interview with Kristen, June 7, 2004)

Kristen argued that her identity did not affect the spaces at all. Interestingly, she responded solely on the basis of sexual orientation and gender. In her response, these were the discourses that seemed to prevail as potentially relevant within the context of a queer youth space (this will be discussed in more depth later). She continued by stating that her awareness of the issues and her comfort level were what made the kids comfortable and able to talk openly with her.

However, during the observation sessions, it was apparent that although Kristen's choice to not disclose her sexual identity did not necessarily make the youth unable to relate to her, it did indeed have an effect on the space, as I noted in my field notes:

We were all just sitting around talking, and then the youth moved to the topic of Kristen's sexual orientation, which seems to be somewhat of an obsession in the space. It manages to resurface every week. Kristen always consistently refuses to reveal her sexual orientation. She constantly speaks in gender-neutral terms, and is so extremely consistent about it that the youth have no idea, nor do I for that matter. They have spent hours speculating about it – that is for example, that she is straight, but does not want them to know so they can still relate to her, or that she is a closeted lesbian. The youths' theories are never ending. (Observation Field notes, Loud and Proud, June 9, 2004)

Even though Kristen did not name her sexual orientation, it was not absent from the space. Rather, it was one of the central topics of discussion. Kristen's non-disclosure brought to mind Foucault's (1978) theorizing around sexuality, where he argued that historically, the very silence around sex incited a proliferation of discourses about it. He wrote: "What is peculiar to modern societies, in fact, is not that they consigned sex to a shadow existence, but that they dedicated themselves to speaking of it *ad infinitum* while exploiting it as *the secret*" (Foucault, 1978, p. 35). Her refusal to identify set the stage for the youth to speculate about her sexual orientation incessantly. Therefore, one could argue that her identity was highly relevant, as this act of non-disclosure functioned in numerous ways. First of all, her choice to not disclose pointed precisely to the fact that she had a choice. She could 'pass' as heterosexual when she needed or wanted to. However, in choosing not to clearly answer "yes" or "no" to questions about her sexual orientation, she managed to shift the silent assumption around heterosexuality slightly. This functioned to distance her from normative practices that assumed heterosexuality, unless otherwise stated, by identifying her as a potentially

safe person for youth who may feel oppressed or Other(ed) by heteronormative practices. Regardless of what she *is*, Kristen is not *normal*, or at least she does not simply contribute to normative assumptions of heterosexuality when asked, which in some cases positioned her as *safe* or *allied* in relational opposition to heteronormative practices (Butler, 1991).

Within the queer youth space, Kristen's refusal to disclose opened up a space for youth who chose not to, or felt unable to solidify or name themselves under a static identity moniker (i.e. gay, or lesbian), which was one of the expectations the youth seemed to feel when they came into the space. As Kristen noted:

I think a lot of youth feel like they need to have a definition for themselves before they come. So I think it's hard for somebody who's questioning to come in. They feel like you have to walk and say my name is so and so and I'm a lesbian. (Interview with Kristen, June 13, 2004)

Therefore, Kristen's non-disclosure could also be seen to disrupt the norm of "naming oneself", opening up a space of "not naming", without necessarily passing as heterosexual either. Yet Kristen's choice to not name can simultaneously be interpreted by other youth as quite disabling should they desire to name themselves and experience that sense of affirmation. I suggest this based on Butler's (1997) analysis of naming as both an enabling and constraining process. For some youth, seeing the example of someone being able to name themselves could offer up the potential for some form of social existence that was not consciously available to them before. Yet for others, it might be precisely Kristen's not naming that draws them to the space.

On the contrary, at Brave, Romi was 'out' as queer, although this process of 'coming out' was continual. For example, my field notes read:

As we go around the circle, we finally land upon Romi. He pulls out three large pictures, and then starts describing his week. He says that it is his boyfriend's birthday on the weekend, and that he has had these photos enlarged to give to him. The photos are of Romi and his boyfriend in a

park, sipping champagne, laughing and dancing. The youth appear excited to see what Romi's boyfriend looks like, and some of the newer youth stare in awe at Romi probably because some of them have likely never been around such an openly queer youth worker. (Observation Field notes, Brave, May 14, 2004)

This constant 'coming out' occurred for Romi within the larger context of a GLBT community centre, where it was safe to be 'out' as queer. Actually, being employed by a GLBT community centre and being queer was likely the norm. This analysis is not meant to point to Romi's personal ability to disclose, in relation to Kristen's inability. Rather it points to just how complex identity negotiation can be, to how it shifts in different spaces, and to how the larger context of those spaces can indeed have an effect. This quote also exemplified how having a youth worker who names himself within the space might be experienced as enabling for some of the youth. This was evidenced through some of the youth's positive reactions to Romi re-affirming his queer self.

Identity was also negotiated across different spaces for both of the youth workers. With Kristen this was demonstrated when she described her behaviour in the 'mainstream'⁴ youth spaces within which she also worked:

I do that in all of my youth spaces...and it started off with heterosexual youth, when I would challenge them on queer issues. Their first reaction to me was - what are you a lesbian? And so my response was - what if I was? I'm not telling you if I am. And I think I started off doing that because I worked with a woman who identified as lesbian, and did not come out to the kids. She would whisper to me stories about her and her girlfriend when kids weren't around, and made no effort to challenge the authority on that at all. And I thought until queer youth workers could come out, I wasn't going to disclose my sexuality. And I think whenever I do put a label on it with youth, I'm going to alienate some kids. (Interview with Kristen, June 28, 2004)

⁴ Although the word 'mainstream' has been used to differentiate queer youth spaces from non queer youth spaces, this should not be read as to imply that queer youth do not exist in 'mainstream' youth spaces, nor should it imply that there are no 'straight' youth in queer youth spaces. This is not meant to reinforce the binary but rather it used to differentiate the spaces for clarity and purpose. The term also warrants deconstruction because the notion of a mainstream is itself a problematic discursive construction embedded with specific understandings of who and what can be considered mainstream.

This quote can first be read to illustrate how Kristen's co-worker experienced heteronormativity in the mainstream community centre, because she felt unable to 'come out' at work. This cannot necessarily be interpreted as the mainstream community centre being a universally heteronormative space. However, we can see that discourses of heteronormativity were at work. This was further evidenced when Kristen described what happened when she challenged homophobic comments and when her identity was called into question by the youth asking: "are you a lesbian?" Her response could potentially work to disrupt heteronormativity in the mainstream youth space when she refused to answer the question with a "yes" or a "no", because the assumption of heterosexuality was disrupted. It is nonetheless important to ask how else this refusal to name functioned. That is, it is important to ask who doesn't always have the privilege or choice of naming themselves? What about those who are injuriously named: "fucking faggot" by their heterosexual peers and cannot reply with: "what if I am I'm not telling you" (Loutzenheiser & MacIntosh, 2004)?

It could also be argued that Kristen's response of: "I'm not telling you" reinforced public/private binaries around non-heteronormative expressions of sexual identity that are maintained in the realm of the private through liberal discourses of "I don't care what queers do in the privacy of their own homes, as long as I don't have to see it or hear about it" (Warner & Berlant, 2002; Duncan, 1996). I say this because Kristen's refusal to identify made me call into question my own practice of self-identifying as queer in Loud and Proud. I began to wonder whether or not it was appropriate for me to be 'out' to the youth. I wondered whether it was professional for me to express what would have normally been considered my private life. As Warner and Berlant (2002) have argued, heteronormative discourses have privatized sex, yet heterosexuality "with the

love plot of intimacy and familialism...signifies belonging to society in a deep and normal way" (p. 194). Therefore, just as Kristen's refusal to identify had the potential to open up space for non-heteronormative discourses in certain local contexts, it simultaneously carried a silence with it in other contexts that implied a "don't ask don't tell" discourse that resonated with the privatization of queer sexualities in public and mainstream spaces.

However, Kristen saw and used her non-disclosure as a political move against processes that normalized heterosexuality, even though the discursive practice of non-disclosure worked to both disrupt and at times reinforce it. She nailed this in her final sentence when she said: "I think whenever I do put a label on it, with youth, I'm going to alienate some kids". This brings us back to the complex effects of Butler's (1997) notion of naming that inevitably functioned in both enabling and constraining ways. Therefore, through this example, it worked to both open up a space for some youth while constraining others. Kristen argued that if she were to identify as straight she may risk alienating or excluding queer youth or gay youth, and if she were to identify as lesbian, queer, or bi, she might alienate those who do not share her sexual identity. Therefore, as a strategy to side step this process of alienation, although it is fraught with complexities, Kristen chose not to name herself as anything at all.

Romi also spoke of how he negotiated his queer self across different spaces, identifying as queer in the queer youth space, but sometimes as gay in others. He stated:

Queer means not being, or not wanting, yeah not wanting and needing to label yourself...I started identifying with that word when I was in grade eleven. And I think it was because it was just really a positive word, and very rarely had I heard it in the straight community used in a negative way. And so, it was one of those sort of mutual words, if there is such a thing, but fag was one word that I hated with a passion, cuz that's what was used against me, queer not so much.

When I asked: Do you identify as queer rather than as gay, he responded:

Yeah I do. When I do workshops though I say I'm gay just for lack of a better word. And to explain to them about queer sometimes can be...I don't want to give them the permission to use that word negatively. So, it's really important to tell them how it is. And sometimes I am afraid that that message might not get across. So I kinda at times leave it and at times use it. (Interview with Romi, May 21, 2004)

As Romi explained his queer self-understanding, my follow-up question was filled with my own desire to solidify a queer self-identity for him. Yet, his response pointed to how this self-identification was certainly not fixed. Within the space of an anti-homophobia workshop, which he did as a part of his job within Brave, he at times shifted his self-identification to gay, rather than queer. In moving from the queer youth space to a classroom, Romi weighed the consequences of offering the youth the term queer as a discourse to use injuriously just as "that's so gay" currently circulates in schools as the insult of choice. However as Butler (1997) wrote: "keeping such terms unsaid and unsayable can also work to lock them in place, preserving their power to injure, and arresting the possibility of a reworking that might shift their context and purpose" (p. 38). Therefore, just as Romi described how a queer self-identification gave him the opportunity to identify in a way that felt less constraining or fixed; offering up the term "queer" as an identity in the context of a classroom would not necessarily simply give youth permission to use the word negatively, nor would this use necessarily be completely negative. A queer identity in that context could also offer up an alternative or provide the possibility for an identity that the youth had not yet imagined, as Butler, (1997) noted when she commented that "the possibilities for linguistic life are both inaugurated and foreclosed through the name" (p. 39).

As noted earlier, when questions of identity were initially explored with Kristen, she answered solely on the basis of gender and sexuality. This remained unscrutinized

after the first round of interviewing possibly, in part, because of my own desire to see myself in her, particularly with regards to race. Therefore, there was a silence between us about race, as we had both perceived each other as the same (read as white) and therefore members of the Dominant group, which implied that race did not have to be named or discussed. During a follow-up interview Kristen commented on how her racial identity might have influenced the space:

I think it probably does. I haven't thought a lot about that. Um, but again I think being aware of the issues can compensate for that and help as well. I'm not sure how we could make it a safer place for queer kids or questioning kids who are of another ethnic identity. I know language would definitely be an issue, which is probably why most of the kids that come are white. Um, but I haven't actually dealt with that directly yet. (Interview with Kristen, June 7, 2004)

She acknowledged that she had not thought about race a lot, but argued that an awareness of issues of race could compensate. What does an awareness of issues of race mean? What can an awareness compensate for – for not being “of color”? These discourses around “an awareness of issues of race” indicated that it was only necessary to consider race an issue when it came to “non-white” youth (Kumashiro, 2001a; Kumashiro, 2001b; Loutzenheiser, 2001). This was further reinforced by desiring to make “queer and questioning youth of another ethnic identity feel safe”, as Kristen stated. Such a discourse reinforced binary conceptions of the Dominant (white) and the Other (other ethnic identities), and upheld the privilege of whiteness. This did not displace the centrality of whiteness or call into question how and why white queer youth have become the priority or the group that should first and foremost be kept safe. Rather, this discourse sought to ‘add-on’ a way that made the Other feel safer in *our* (read as white) space. How can we give them the permission to feel just like *us* (Ellsworth (1997), cited in Loutzenheiser, 2001)? Kristen’s response did signal she was aware that most of the youth in the space were white and after the data collection period

she did open up this discussion with some of the youth at Loud and Proud. As a result, they brainstormed strategies about how they could create space for queer youth of various racial and ethnic backgrounds, as well as find ways to de-center the whiteness of their group. Consequently the youth decided to organize a bi-weekly film series that discussed the intersection of queerness with race, ethnicity, and religion in order for them to begin unpacking some of their own assumptions.

Romi had been a youth worker at Brave for over five years, and therefore he not only negotiated his identity in space but also in time. He noted:

*When I first started this work five years ago, it was a bit different from what it is now, in the philosophy of it. At that point I saw myself as a mainstream youth. And so I was a queer guy, period – nothing really taken into account about my privilege as a queer guy, my color as a queer person, and being an immigrant - not being able to speak English. And it's not until about a year and a half ago when I was able to self-reflect on my own self, about identifying my own culture, about my own identity, about my own religion and what that represents for me. And through the self-reflection of that, I became more aware of what was happening here too. I was hired on and I think that shifted because now there was a representation from a person of color. And so slowly, youth weren't going to Asian Brave anymore, because they had this resource as well.
(Interview with Romi, May 21, 2004)*

When Romi first started working at Brave, he saw himself as a mainstream (read as fitting into white notions of queerness) presence. He described himself as being unaware of other aspects of himself besides his queerness until recently. Yet, even when he was not completely aware of his difference, it appears that others might have been. This became apparent in his description of the dissolution of the Asian satellite of Brave following his appointment. The presence of a non-Dominant (non-white) leader may have opened up a space for some youth of color to come into Brave. However this cannot and should not be read as Romi seeing himself as being the all-encompassing representation of all youth of color. Nor should it be read as a catalyst for all youth of color feeling good in the space, because a (singular) person of color was represented

there. Rather, his presence was fraught with numerous tensions as he described:

...I also wonder if I push certain people of color back in the closet at times. I wonder that just because I've been in this space for five years and I still haven't seen an increase of [brown people]. So I question, I question that. Maybe I'm a bit too much for Brown culture. Maybe my nose piercing is a bit too much for them, because culturally that indicates a sign of inferiority, because women are supposed to get their nose pierced right? So, and that's really huge in my culture. All Brown culture people usually know that. So I wonder if that's a put off. I wonder if too many of my piercings are...and I'm too mainstream, enough to be not Brown enough. So all of that goes through my mind. (Interview with Romi, June 17, 2004)

Therefore, although his presence may have opened up a space for some queer-Asian youth, it may have simultaneously closed space off for queer-Brown youth. This suggested that Romi was simultaneously *too close to Brown culture* and *too much for Brown culture*. His gender expression disrupted norms of what it meant to be a man within Brown cultures and associated him with the inferior status of women. Although Butler (1990) did not discuss how race intersected with gender through gender performativity, it could be argued that Romi offered up a disruption, a moment of difference that troubled the repetition of normalized gender that occurred within certain Brown cultures. Hence, his reference to being “too much” could potentially push queer-Brown youth away. Yet, his Brownness also disrupted white normativity at Brave, which may have in part influenced the influx of queer-Asian youth. The reasoning for this might lie precisely in the fact that Romi is not Asian but he is also not white. This negotiation supported what Kumashiro (2001b) described as the impossibility of duality where “cultural narratives of what it means to be one thing contradict narratives of what it means to be another, making the simultaneity of certain identities impossible” (p. 2). When discourses of Brownness (that describe *being* a Brown man as not having a nose piercing (i.e. not being feminine) and as being ‘straight’), brushed up against Western discourses of queerness, (which understand ‘queer’ to mean white and male), they

made it virtually impossible for queer-Brown youth to come into the space. It was precisely this tension created by Romi's presence that posed a challenge to Brown youth who might have considered coming into Brave. As a Fijian, Romi described himself as 'Brown', representing a space in between binary notions of black and white. Yet, there are likely many Brown cultures, but I did not ask him to explain what he meant by Brown. I felt unable to question the category he had chosen to identify himself, even though it inevitably carried its own exclusions and its own problematic discursive constructions. The singular "Brown" created a sense of universal Brownness, yet within this discourse there are numerous differences and power relations at play.

This tension was further complicated when Romi differentiated himself from youth who had recently come to Canada, in comparison to himself who had been here for a long time when he noted:

I'm also kind of aware of my privilege as being able to fit into the mainstream society. My thoughts and my ideas are fairly Western, whereas a youth who came here five, six, seven, ten years ago, their ideas are not necessarily as mainstream as mine. I don't have an accent, that's also another mainstream concept of me. If I were to be, if you were to change the color of my skin to white, I'd fit into the mainstream society. But because of my skin, only thing that's kinda different about me is my appearance. My traditions, all those aspects are very Western now. (Interview with Romi, June 17, 2004)

In describing himself as fairly Western, Romi brought to mind Homi Bhabba's (1994) notion of "white but not quite" (p. 86) because his thoughts appeared to be aligned with what it meant to be white, yet he was not quite white (he was Brown). Romi not only occupied this space in between with regards to race, but also with regards to queerness, as he did not fit into Dominant (read as white) frameworks of what it meant to be queer. Despite negotiating this in between space, he simultaneously could not represent all queer-Brown youth, because he had been here (the West) and not there

(the East) for too long. Romi's identity negotiation troubled binaries of queer/normal, Black/White, East/West, man/woman, and this troubling could serve to open up a space for some, but not all queer youth.

In discussing how Romi and Kristen negotiated their identities within the queer youth spaces, it became apparent that who they are and how they negotiated this was paramount to how the spaces were constructed, interpreted, and likely experienced by the youth who did (and did not) attend. Notions of naming (and not naming) as they are practiced and experienced by both of them created circumstances that might appear to be enabling for some youth, but equally as constraining for others. It is never purely an either/or situation. In addition, race was unmistakably at play in the youth workers' identity negotiation. For Kristen this meant experiencing race as a non-white issue that needed to be addressed within the primarily white context of Loud and Proud. For Romi this meant working within some of the tensions and complexities of being Brown and queer at Brave where a number of youth of color gathered, but none of whom were Brown. The identity negotiations outlined here are critical to further understanding how the youth workers subsequently negotiated the boundaries of Brave and Loud and Proud, and to how they navigated the systemic discourses that often justified the existence of these spaces. This analysis of who they are provided insights into the complex positions from which these individuals simultaneously did their work.

B. Spillage = Blurring

Brave and Loud and Proud were both characterized by a delineated physical space, which meant they each had (for at least a period of time during the week) a room surrounded by four walls, that was representative of their queer youth space. When I discussed the notion of queer youth spaces with both the youth workers and their supervisors, physical space continually came up as an issue of great concern. As Donna said:

Yeah, yeah, when I first started here, the average Friday night was sixty to seventy youth. And so you know they would kinda be crammed in from that room down the hall all the way through the hall, and spill over into the whole space...Yeah it's great that the youth feel comfortable here, but wouldn't it be a whole lot better if we had a bit more space. So those are some of the things that I think...and I'm sure there's lots more that youth would like to see happening, that's if we had greater capacity, so that would be important. (Interview with Donna, June 17, 2004)

There was certainly a discourse around the lack of space for Brave as described by Donna. She spoke of there being too many bodies within the space so they literally "spilled over" into the entire community centre. Similarly, Romi noted:

Yeah, space is a huge one. It just recently has been coming up more and more. You know...trying to have a youth dance for one, and special events, let alone drop-in, and being able to fit all the youth into [the community centre] here. And just you know all of our resources are going to spending money for the, you know, building supervisor, and if we're lucky we get the space donated. So, I mean with all of these added costs, it really takes away from our programming. All that money saved, we would be spending it on food right? And so, subsidizing costs and doing even more events, games. Playing games. We don't do that a lot here, and that's because we don't have a space. We only have our words to play with in this space. (Interview with Romi, June 3, 2004)

An initial reading of both of these quotations indicated that the youth workers at Brave and their supervisor were constrained by a lack of space. They both expressed the desire for more space to accommodate the number of youth who attended; yet, this was not being achieved due to a lack of resources. Donna said:

I just turned in a proposal to [the local community credit union] for their million-dollar award, and we did get selected. The letter of intent was selected, so then the full proposal, so that just went in on Monday, and it's for the community centre. (Interview with Donna, June 17, 2004)

Therefore, in order to address this lack of space, Donna applied for funding to construct a new and larger GLBT community centre. She went on to describe the space they had designed and hoped to build if they were to receive funding. She explained:

It would be four floors, twenty thousand square feet, and so on... It's got to be something that really captures the support of the community. (Interview with Donna, June 17, 2004)

She quickly outlined the dimensions of the new space that were almost four times the size of the current community centre. I followed up by asking her whether this new space would be her ideal space. She responded:

No, it's probably what's more do-able and achievable. I think our communities could easily use more than twenty thousand square feet...I think it's more likely to be do-able. But we could always use more, and I think that twenty thousand square feet would be a really good start to having a sense of this is the place where our community celebrates, and our community gathers, and I think it would be a wonderful statement to the wider communities that we are a cultural presence within [this city] and [this province], and in this country and then our aim would be finding space elsewhere to serve the full diversity of our communities. (Interview with Donna, June 17, 2004)

Donna's response indicated that a larger space would not be able to accommodate or house the entire community. Rather, it was a step closer to being able to better serve the needs of what she described as the "full diversity of our community". I believe that the notion of lack of space is noteworthy and efforts are being made to accommodate the number of bodies that use Brave and the GLBT community centre; however, it will never be possible to have a space that contains all the queers or to have a space that all queers can access. It is impossible to do so as this would imply that there were a definitive number of queers to contain, and that there were a stable and identifiable number of queer identities and queer needs that could be met through that space.

Sedgwick's (1990) first axiom might be helpful in understanding this idea, as she argued "people are different from each other" (p. 22) and therefore regardless of the crude axes of categorization available to describe us, we are all too different from one another to claim any sort of definitive group identity. What this implies within the context of Brave and the GLBT community centre is that the assumption that it is possible to serve the "full diversity of our community" implies that there is a point at which the effort to do so can stop. Sedgwick (1990) reminds us that having more space to accommodate more diversity might not necessarily be possible and cannot be heralded as the solution. Another approach to consider might not only ask *who has yet to be included*, but also *why are certain voices and individuals silenced or absent from the space to begin with* (Scott (1993) in Kumashiro (2001b)?

Nonetheless, having larger queer spaces is important and valuable, and as Donna noted it was an important political move and statement. Not only did these spaces bring queer identities into public consciousness, but as they increase in size it might be argued that they provide a quantitative change. Berlant and Warner (2002) argued for the value of such political moves because "after a certain point, a quantitative change is a qualitative change" (p. 204). At the same time however, having an infinitely large queer space cannot be or become the end goal, because it can also function to re-binarize spaces, reinforcing the dominance and normalcy of spaces outside of the queer space (Taylor, 1998). Increases in identity-based space can never simply function in one way. The moment heteronormativity appears to be disrupted by an increase in queer space, it is simultaneously reinforced through the implication of what it is not (i.e. normal). This draws on what Butler (1991) described as derivativeness, wherein queer derives its meaning from prevailing discourses of normal. In terms of space, derivativeness implies that normal spaces inevitably are the original and natural

available spaces, from which queer spaces appear to be a kind of bad copy or a deviation from the original.

In addition, the data indicated that notions of lack of space, or constraint were not operating alone. As Donna noted, the bodies at Brave “spilled over” into the entire community centre and into the street, meaning that the youth did not remain within the confines of the space allotted to them. This metaphor of spillage spoke to the inability to contain bodies and this became evident during the observation process:

The office was jam-packed and it was 10pm, and no one seemed like they were going anywhere. As I left the community centre and got outside, there were almost twenty youth hanging out there - youth which I had not seen over the course of the evening inside. (Observation Field notes, Brave, June 11, 2004)

The bodies expanded from being in one room, to filling the community centre and finally the street below. Theoretically, this brings to mind the disruption and transgression of binary notions of space (i.e. gay space versus straight space). The binary became troubled because queer bodies were *spilling over* and *into* what was commonly read as the straight street (Duncan, 1996). The spillage was significant because it denaturalized the physical boundary of the space exposing it as a discursive construction, rather than as a natural and normal physical entity. Where there appeared to be a wall, a long hallway, a stairwell, and numerous doors separating queer and normative spaces; queer bodies permeated these boundaries by filling the hall, the stairwell and stepping outside of those doors onto the street below, thus queering it.

Lefebvre's (1991) triad of social space is helpful in further understanding how the notion of “spillage” occurred and why it is significant. To begin with, the spatial practice for youth who came to Brave consisted of going up the community centre stairs, down a long hallway and into the Brave space. This practice was experienced within a representation of space about how it was described and understood to be queer and

therefore, not normal. However, as the bodies increased in number and spilled out, the lived space then became quite different from the representation of that space. I would suggest that the lived space was actually experienced on the boundary in between the inside and the outside of Brave. Therefore Lefebvre's (1991) triad is useful in mapping out how the bodies blurred the boundary between what is generally read as a queer space (i.e. Brave) and what is read as a normative space (i.e. the street). By occupying the space in between either end of the binary, the bodies that spilled over exposed it as a discursive construction rather than as something natural or real.

It was also argued that additional space might offer up the opportunity to program different types of activities that required more space. Donna expressed the desire for a larger space where there would be more possibilities for recreational activities when she stated:

Um, but to have a larger space that offers more possibility for recreational activities, and active activities, cause I mean you've probably been at quite a few of the drop-ins where I mean the energy is incredible, and it's really wonderful, and wouldn't it be a whole lot better if we had a whole lot bigger space for youth to be able to be as expansive as the personalities are, to really...have the opportunity to do some recreational activities that are physical. (Interview with Donna, June 17, 2004)

As noted in the description of Brave, there were no gymnasiums or large spaces within the community centre that would accommodate physical activities. On Friday evenings, the Brave space expanded and the youth generally took over the entire community centre, but even at that, the community centre was very small and did not have enough large rooms to accommodate physical activities. However, further analysis signaled that although the dimensions of Brave were not meant to accommodate physical activities, such activities still took place:

I was chatting with some of the youth, and then we started tossing around a small sponge football. The office seemed to be getting a little too small, and so we moved our game into the hallway. Again, the game was crowded and we kept hitting things or having to stop when people wanted to get by, so we moved it even further down the hall, but we still played. (Observation Field notes, Brave, June 11, 2004)

It could be argued that the youth and I did not really have enough room to play football in the office or in the hallway. Yet, when we experienced that sense of constraint we expanded our game, moving outward – spilling out of Brave into the GLBT community centre and eventually spilling out onto the street below. I would suggest that there are advantages to the spilling experienced through this expansive play. Rather than playing in isolation in a larger accommodating space, our play could be read as potentially disruptive by expanding outside of the space and thereby blurring the discursive boundary of what belonged inside and out. The desire to be able to formally plan this type of physical play in order to contain it within a larger queer space could be paralleled with what Butler (1991) described as “psychic excess”. The spilling over of heterosexual identity is: “that which erupts within the intervals of those repeated gestures and acts that construct the apparent uniformity of heterosexuality” (p. 24). This psychic excess was what propelled the compulsive desire to re-binarize identities and consequently, identity-based spaces so as to expand them in the hopes of absorbing the excess. However, it is precisely this excess that disrupted the repetition of heterosexuality and the illusion of its uniformity. This offered a way to understand the significance of expansive play, since it could at first appear to be desirable to expand the queer youth space and contain the activity. However, it is exactly this type of play that troubled the binary and exposed the impossibility of heterosexual space as stable and dominant in opposition to marginal queer spaces.

At Loud and Proud, this notion of physical space was a clear concern from the

outset, because within the mainstream community centre there were no spaces for queer youth. Spaces for youth did exist but Kristen described them as heteronormative and at times even homophobic when she said:

...at one of our other drop-ins, that wasn't a queer drop-in, a girl came in with her girlfriend and they were cuddling on the couch. And [another youth worker] called me up immediately and said that is not allowed. She said, you know, that kind of affection is not allowed in the youth centre. (Interview with Kristen, June 13, 2004)

Therefore, if queer youth attended mainstream drop-ins they were asked not to engage in any overtly queer behaviours. The regulation of queer acts exemplified another one of the ways in which heteronormativity functioned in the larger context of the mainstream community centre. However, the regulation of these queer acts did not make them disappear, nor did it imply that queer youth were non-existent. On the contrary, as Foucault (1978) might have argued, it was this type of regulation that led to counter-discourses of sexuality. It can be argued that one such counter-discourse erupted when a group of youth approached Kristen and asked her to help them establish a queer youth space within their community centre.

Establishing such a space did not occur without its challenges. In fact, the major challenge lied in securing an actual physical space. For a number of months after the youth had asked Kristen to help them, the group remained without a space. Kristen described the delay as follows:

Like nine months. Nine months of jumping through hoops, and trying to find out who was gonna help us, who our support was. I jumped through a lot of hoops. I talked to a lot of different people. We wanted to do a central location where everyone [in the suburban area] could get to. So, we asked a lot of different organizations, executive directors, until finally we found a place. (Interview with Kristen, June 7, 2004)

Subsequently, when a space was finally established, it did not actually belong to the queer youth group. Rather, it was a space they borrowed once a week for three hours.

As Kristen explained:

The youth lounge, the [local] Neighbourhood House borrows the youth lounge from the [local] community centre. And now we're borrowing the borrowed space. (Interview with Kristen, June 7, 2004)

Therefore Loud and Proud opened up on Wednesday evenings as a kind of alternative to what was available in the youth lounge on every other night of the week. This alternative acted almost as a double edged sword because where there was a sense of heteronormative disruption since there was now a space where queer youth could act queer and not have it be regulated; there was simultaneously a sense of heteronormative reinforcement because the queer space was precisely an alternative to the normal youth space. According to Butler (1991) this type of reinforcement occurred through discursive derivativeness, because the normal youth space acted as a reference point or a norm (i.e. the original), from which Loud and Proud acted as a kind of bad copy. Therefore the norms within the mainstream youth space were considered to be common sense and the acts that were considered acceptable within that space did not necessarily get called into question.

However, Loud and Proud did not exist in isolation within the mainstream community centre. It was not as though Kristen and the youth secretly occupied it without having the rest of the community centre be aware of their presence. As I noted in my field notes on two separate occasions:

The youth started playing with water guns, and raced out of the room, and up and down the hallways around the community centre chasing each other...(Observation Field notes, Loud and Proud, June 30, 2004)

The youth were constantly coming in and out, some going outside to smoke, others to the corner store to buy snacks. (Observation Field notes, Loud and Proud, June 23, 2004)

Each entry revealed that the youth did not simply stay within the confines of Loud and Proud when they came to the community centre. They occupied the hallways, as well

as the space outside. These queer bodies expanded into and intermingled with what was normatively considered to be straight space (i.e. everything other than the Loud and Proud space). Although the intention of the bodies moving in and out of the space may not have been motivated by a greater heteronormative disruption; their very existence, and circulation into and out of the space was still significant. Similarly to the spillage that occurred at Brave, the circulation of queer bodies in and around Loud and Proud spoke to the impossibility of containing queer bodies within binary notions of space. Even though it might appear simple to offer queer youth four walls within which they can 'hang out' once a week, it is often a lot messier and more complicated than that. This paralleled the way in which identities repeatedly fail to fit within prescriptive discursive categories (Sedgwick, 1990). Queer youth did not simply show up and quietly sit within the confines of a small space. As suggested at Brave, the movement of queer bodies at Loud and Proud worked to blur the boundary between what should be queer and what should not. However, this potential for disruption cannot be theorized outside of the existing regulatory sexual norms that pervaded the rest of the community centre (and that very space on any given night other than Wednesday). The movement of these queer bodies was always framed by what they were not (normal), and when they were not circulating (most other nights of the week). Yet, the possibility for change that Loud and Proud and the movement of queer bodies around it offered, lay precisely in what this process of rupture and reinforcement suggested: the mainstream community centre was not a stable normal space. It is the repetition of (hetero)norms within it that provided that illusion (Butler, 1990). Therefore, space is insecure because it "teems with many other possibilities" (Valentine, 1996, p. 154).

C. Negotiating Boundaries: Almost Being in the Club

i) Whose Space?

Another prevalent theme in the data was based on the negotiation of who belonged inside (and outside) of the spaces. This process was negotiated since there were moments when it seemed as though the boundary was erased or temporarily expanded; however, there were other moments when this boundary was clearly safeguarded. Numerous tensions plagued how the youth workers addressed this issue. These tensions were most apparent as the youth workers vacillated between formal discourses about who the spaces were for, and the day-to-day dilemmas of putting this into practice.

Both Loud and Proud and Brave had public documents available to promote their programs. For Brave, this consisted of a pamphlet that was created and distributed by both Romi and Meg. It could be found on a daily basis at the Brave office and in the front entrance of the GLBT community centre; however it was also distributed at numerous local conferences, at the queer prom, and basically any community event that either one of them attended. At Loud and Proud, the promotional literature consisted of a poster that was created by Kristen and some of the queer youth who had approached her requesting the queer youth space. Kristen distributed and put up this poster in local schools, community centres, and on the bulletin board directly outside of Loud and Proud. The predominant piece of information on both the poster and the pamphlet dealt with whom the spaces were for. To illustrate, the documents read:

This is a place for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and two-spirit youth to find support, make friends, get information, and participate in activities. If you have questions about sexual orientation or gender identity, this is a place for you too. (Brave promotional pamphlet)

*Are you gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgendered, or queer?
Straight, intersexed, or just a human who's sick of living in fear?
This is a safe place, so come on in and pull up a chair,
Drink some coffee and talk to your friends without a care.
(Loud and Proud promotional poster)*

Both Loud and Proud and Brave described themselves as being similarly for some version of the GLBTTIQQ (gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgendered, two-spirit, intersexed, queer, and questioning) list of potential sexual minority identities. Loud and Proud included straight youth; however, within the context of this assertion it was implied that these youth were either allied, or comfortable and aware of the queer identities that would likely dominate the space. This meant that straight youth were welcome, but the space was first and foremost about being queer. The disavowal is always present when the avowal (the declaration of the primary focus) is uttered (Butler, 1991). Therefore, in delineating whom these spaces were primarily for on the basis of sexual identity, they both managed to create an imaginary boundary around who did and did not belong. I refer to this boundary as imaginary, because firming up a boundary around sexual identity is virtually impossible to do. Since there is no quintessential queer body upon which to base that determination, youth workers found themselves constantly policing the boundary and the bodies that traversed it, in order to maintain a space free of homophobic violence and heterosexist assumptions. This boundary was negotiated, however, not only in terms of sexual identity, but also in terms of race, class and ability. As Kumashiro (2001b) argued, silences around these aspects necessarily privileged the Dominant, rather than all of the Others, and therefore contributed to reinforcing and perpetuating the whiteness, middle-class status, and able-bodiedness of queer spaces.

ii) Policing and Expanding Boundaries

During my first observation session at Brave, the very first interaction I was faced with set the tone for a predominant theme of this research, as demonstrated in my field notes:

When I return to the office, a group of three or four youth have arrived. They introduce one of their friends, whom they identify as not really belonging there because she is a breeder (meaning straight or possibly bisexual). There is an awkward silence in the room, until Meg pipes in: "We welcome all", but no discussion ensues. (Observation Field notes, Brave, May 14, 2004)

This quote exemplified one of the ways in which boundaries were policed by the youth and subsequently negotiated by the youth worker. Meg's response to them: "we welcome all" potentially opened up a space for difference, but found itself immediately in tension with the formal description and understanding of the space as being for GLBTQ youth. Was it possible or desirable to welcome everyone? Meg's response could almost be read as boundary expansion if contrasted with the discourses of a space specifically for GLBTQ youth. However, his notion of welcoming everyone was made uncomfortable because it resonated with mandates in most mainstream community centres and community-serving organizations where everyone does not feel welcome. This then raises several questions: Who is everyone? Which queer youth? What differences are erased in an attempt at expanding boundaries?

Similarly, at Loud and Proud, Kristen often found herself having to negotiate this boundary when youth she did not know came into the space. For example, at the beginning of the data collection, a group of three youth who had not yet been to the space came in on a Wednesday night and started playing foosball. All of the youth appeared to be white males, wearing sports clothing and carrying basketballs. They looked tough and athletic and walked into the space as if they owned it and felt entitled

to it. Before they walked in, the group of youth already in the space had been talking about BDSM (B&D: bondage and discipline; D&S: dominance and submission; and S&M: sadomasochism) practice, and when the three boys walked in everyone fell silent, including Kristen and myself. We all remained silent and stared at each other for almost five minutes until they left. I asked Kristen about it in the next interview we had together and she replied:

...I was surprised by my reaction. Just because they walked in and I made a lot of assumptions. I assumed that they were straight and that they were probably homophobic. And my immediate reaction was to ask them to leave. I was going to say, this isn't a regular drop-in, you shouldn't be here. So I surprised myself with that assumption. And then I realized...the name of our drop-in...and that everyone was welcome...that I didn't know their gender and sexuality at all, but it was interesting to see how everyone reacted some way or another. I don't know what everyone's reactions were, but there was definitely a change in the room. (Interview with Kristen, June 7, 2004)

Kristen's initial desire to firm up the boundaries around who should and should not belong was significant because it spoke to a desire to read bodies in certain ways (i.e. as straight or homophobic, as boy or girl, or as gay, lesbian or transgender). However, the hesitation or moment of silence indicated that this reading was troubled. Kristen was unable to determine whether or not these bodies belonged. Therefore, this inability to read the incoming bodies worked to denaturalize sex, gender, and sexuality as stable and natural markers of identity (Butler, 1990). This was significant because it called into question the underlying assumptions that shaped youth spaces in mainstream community centres (i.e. a natural biological order of male and female from which genders of boy and girl appear to be naturally conferred and from which logically stem heterosexual desires), exposing them as discursive repetitions rather than truths. Subsequently, this also troubled assumptions that automatically position the queer youth space as Other (read as not natural), a space where bodies that do not fit this

natural order should go.

This process of reading bodies became further negotiated when it was met with a desire to have everyone be welcome. This desire created a tension because similarly to Brave, Loud and Proud was created for a specific reason: to counter discourses of exclusion, silence and at times even violence against GLBTQs in mainstream spaces. Should the space not be welcoming to all? This is precisely where the tension felt unresolvable, because naming and creating a space for GLBTQs simultaneously reinforced the validity and normalcy of the dominant heteronormative spaces. Once again this occurred through derivativeness, whereby gaining meaning for how it differentiated itself from normal spaces, the queer space inevitably positioned itself as Other (read as subordinate) (Butler, 1991). Since these spaces were created to counter the sense of exclusion queer youth have felt, it is possible that youth workers experienced the boundaries of identity around the spaces in complex and contradictory ways. On one hand there was likely a sense of wanting to affirm GLBT and queer identities to gain recognition within a discourses of silence. However, it seemed quite problematic and contradictory to enforce boundaries that could lead to different types of exclusions and further enforce the binary between queer and normal. This might inform, at least in part, the use of discourses that welcome all.

Similarly to how non-normative sexual identities have been silenced within community recreation and mainstream youth spaces, at Brave and Loud and Proud there was often an inherent silence around most other aspects that contributed to shaping identities. This was evidenced through a discourse of whiteness that pervaded due to a re-centering of queerness.

iii) When Queer Meets Race

At Loud and Proud, the focus on queerness operated in and through the overshadowing whiteness of the youth, youth workers, and volunteers. The bodies in the space were all white and the activities and discussions were based on white, Western assumptions of what it meant to be a queer youth. Queer television programs such as *Queer as Folk* and *The L-word*, that feature primarily white queer characters were discussed uncritically. Coming out to parents and friends was discussed within dominant cultural narratives of liberal white families. Snacks that complied with white, Western, middle-class norms, such as chips, cupcakes, and candies were eaten, and games like foosball, and pool were played. There was a pervasive silence around the whiteness of the discourses and practices in the space because they appeared to be common sense, normal, and unquestionable. It would be easier to dismiss race as an issue at Loud and Proud, because it is often easier to read difference onto bodies and spaces that are different from the norm (and different from mine for that matter) (Kumashiro, 2001b). What did these assumptions of whiteness communicate when they intersected with discourses of “everyone welcome”? They communicated that everyone is welcome, as long as they are just like us. This inevitably tied into how Kristen perceived her identity as a white youth worker within the space and how she described “issues of race” as being relevant to the inclusion of youth of “other ethnic identities” (see p. 77). It is likely that if Kristen did not understand whiteness as a norm that could be displaced, the programming and the discussion in the spaces would reflect that understanding.

Assumptions of whiteness also functioned at Brave even though a number of youth of color were present. This was exemplified throughout the process of planning different activities. For example, my field notes describing the organization of a bake

sale read:

Meg asked if anyone knew what they were bringing to the bake sale. A few youth mentioned that they had particular desserts in mind. One of the Chinese youth asked if she could make traditional Chinese stuff for the bakesale, and Romi said "of course, we want you to". (Observation Field notes, Brave, May 26, 2004)

Romi's response indicated an openness to having Chinese baking at the queer youth bake sale. In this interaction Romi did not dismiss or belittle the youth's request. Rather, Romi invited difference by saying "we want you to". However, the very posing of the question suggested that there was an underlying assumption indicating it might not be acceptable to bring Chinese baking. In other words there was a separation between 'queer stuff', and 'Chinese stuff' and a questioning of whether or not it was possible to bring them together. It also pointed to an understanding of 'queer stuff' as inherently white (Loutzenheiser & MacIntosh, 2004; Kumashiro, 2001b; Loutzenheiser, 2001). Consequently, even though there were a number of youth of color in Brave, there was still an assumption of whiteness that managed to shape the discourses and activities in the space.

Almost immediately following this interaction between Romi and the Chinese girl, one of the white youth began making fun of what he described as "*Asian tourists that walk around downtown*". The youth described his hatred toward them as "*they stop to take pictures and block the whole street*". My field notes described Romi's reaction to the situation as follows:

Romi became wide eyed and looked directly at him and said "what?" The youth became embarrassed, but tried to cover it up by saying "you know it's true", and Romi said "listen to what you're saying, and you said hate". (Observation Field notes, Brave, May 26, 2004)

Romi offered up the opportunity for the youth to take back what he had said, but when he chose not to, Romi's strategy focused on trying to reprimand the hateful speech (i.e.

"listen to what you're saying"). However, discourses that reprimand hateful speech cannot necessarily address the assumption of whiteness that shaped such a comment. Butler (1997) would argue that although it seems incontestably true that we must counter such acts of hateful speech, we must also ask "from where speech derives its power to wound" (p. 50). Butler (1997) troubled the notion that hateful speech stems from an individual subject committing a singular act. Rather, she argued that a racist comment is also a performative and such an act "accumulates the force of authority through the repetition or citation of a prior and authoritative set of practices" (Butler, 1997, p. 51). Therefore, the very fact that this incident occurred in the first place, and that it occurred only moments after Romi welcomed the inclusion of Chinese baking at the queer youth bake sale, brings us back to the historicity and conventions of whiteness that shaped Brave. These incidents also pointed to an assimilation of differences at Brave through a separation between being Asian and being queer (Kumashiro, 2002; Loutzenheiser, 2001). Once one entered Brave they were queer first and a silence around the privilege of whiteness took shape. This assimilation can potentially work in multiple ways: (1) to reinforce notions that a queer space is and should be white; (2) to reinforce that queerness is a "White disease" and therefore Asian people aren't queer; and (3) to reinforce Western stereotypes of Asian folks as asexual, and therefore certainly not belonging in a queer space (Kumashiro, 2002).

Conventions of whiteness at times appeared to be so normalized that they were actually embedded in the programming for the space. As Romi stated:

Whenever we do workshops, guest speakers are coming in, they have to make sure the content is first and foremost queer based, queer focused, because these youth can go anywhere to find any other information, not coming from a queer perspective. And so that's how I see my role when I'm in the group, is to bring in that cultural context to it. (Interview with Romi, June 17, 2004)

Therefore, even though the reasoning for the central focus was based on countering the heterosexually-based information available in most other spaces, it simultaneously reinforced heteronormativity by assuming that what was available in those other spaces was normal, and did not or should not have to change. Furthermore, the assumption that workshops should focus only on queerness implied that it was possible to separate queerness from culture. This assumption reified the notion that queerness was a white thing and that white was read as raceless/cultureless. Romi further described how he understood his role in “bringing in that cultural context” when he explained:

We did a flirting workshop, well how does that look like when certain Asian cultures won't give you the eye contact, because it's culturally not okay? Right? So it was a matter of saying let's not change that but respect that. So it's more about these discussions that come up and asking questions. Like from my perspective in doing that, cause a lot of youth of color also don't have the courage to ask all those kinds of questions in a mainstream group, because you know, not that they're gonna be laughed at, but you know, it might seem that their issues are not as important. (Interview with Romi, June 17, 2004)

Romi referred to the queer youth space as a “mainstream group”, which can be read as meaning “mainstream queer”, thus referring to the normalization of white Western culture within the group. This spoke to his awareness of the complexities of how race intersected with sexuality and to his desire to bring this up within the group. This desire was exemplified when he explained how he saw it as his responsibility to ask questions that might disrupt normative thinking within the group. He argued doing so because youth of color “don’t have the courage” because “it might seem that their issues are not as important”. This implied that Romi was aware of how a central focus around queer identity inevitably reinforced dominant, white ways of being queer. In order to trouble this norm, Romi took it on as his role to ask strategic questions that called this into question. He explained this by saying “because youth of color might not feel like they are able to”. It appeared as though race should only matter when it had to do with, or it

should only be brought up by the people of color in the space. By standing in that intersection and asking the questions that queer youth of color might not be able to ask, Romi rendered race as a non-issue for white youth, implying that the intersection of queerness with whiteness need not be troubled.

iv) Queering Gender When Spaces Do Not

There are likely a number of ways to think about and analyze gender within the context of Brave and Loud and Proud. I initially expected the spaces to be dominated by white queer males, since much of the sexuality and space literature posits this as its major criticism (Taylor, 1998; Munt, 1998). However, within both of these spaces, notions of gender extended well beyond binary conceptions of boys and girls. Contrary to what the literature suggested, the spaces did not “take on an incipient masculinity” (Munt, 1998, p. 15). Rather, at Loud and Proud there were almost no boys. The distribution was almost perfectly split between self-identified females, and transgendered youth (F to M – female to male); and as noted earlier almost all white, middle-class, and seemingly able-bodied. At Brave, there were almost as many self-identified females as there were males, along with a few self-identified transgendered youth (primarily M to F - male to female). In addition, at Brave there were youth of many ethnicities, some white, some of various Asian cultures, some African-Canadian, and some First Nations. Similarly to Loud and Proud, almost all of the youth appeared to be able-bodied, at least to the extent that they were able to make it up the stairs into the space. However, there were certainly quite a few homeless youth and youth living in poverty, as well as youth who came from middle-class backgrounds. Discourses of gender within both of the spaces were often quite complex and at times contradictory, since the bodies failed to neatly fit within the existing dominant categories. Youth workers navigated this messy terrain by attempting to contend with these complexities,

the constraints of the spaces, and the demands of those who funded them.

For example, the ritual of attendance taking at the beginning of each drop-in was one such normative practice that could no longer be easily accomplished. Traditionally, attendance is taken within leisure and recreational programs to track how many boys and girls are utilizing the services. This practice developed out of gender-equity frameworks that sought to ensure that girls had equal access (Adams, 1997). At Loud and Proud, Kristen changed how she normally took attendance. She noted:

And that provides another whole issue because in the regular drop-ins we count how many girls and how many boys. So here I haven't been doing that, I've just been counting the amount of people because of the transgendered youth. And I've thought about that like, do I wanna do whatever they define themselves as? Or do I wanna go there and ask that question. Because the whole point of this is not to enforce labels or to get people to decide what their label is. (Interview with Kristen, June 7, 2004)

Rather than trying to read the bodies, Kristen chose to get rid of the category of gender altogether by counting the number of people. She argued having to do this "because of the transgendered youth". However, the transgendered youth themselves (i.e. the bodies she felt unable to read) may not have necessarily been the issue, but rather, it was the problematic construction of categories to which she was expected to assign these bodies. In an attempt to avoid reinforcing notions of having to be something by not counting boys and girls, binary discourses of gender remained unproblematic. Butler (1997) might have argued that by not allowing the youth to name their gender, they were being denied a form of social existence, at least discursively in terms of who counts in the space. Within this context it might have been meaningful for the youth to be able to name themselves, thereby challenging assumptions within the governing body. From a Lefebvrian (1991) perspective, the act of attendance taking might be considered a spatial practice that at first appears to only map bodies onto or count the number of bodies within Loud and Proud. However, when this act is scrutinized in close

relation to representations of space and lived space, it also articulates who actually counts and who fails to count within the space. It points to how the failure to be counted reinforces binary discourses of gender therefore reproducing representational spaces where the silence about transgendered youth and youth with non-conforming gender identities, implies that they do not exist.

At Brave however, the attendance sheet contained a column that asked the youth to indicate how they self-identified in terms of gender. As I noted in my field notes, this sheet was ritualistically circulated at the beginning of each session and was utilized to alert the funding agencies of the number of youth accessing their services:

A sheet was circulating around the room. On the sheet the youth were asked to write their names, the geographical region they were coming from in order to attend the program, and their gender identification. The gender identification column gives an example of selection (male, female, trans) but the space is blank and youth are able to write what they want. (Observation Field notes, Brave, May 14, 2004)

This approach gave the youth the opportunity to name themselves rather than have someone else read their bodies in search of an assignable category of gender (i.e. boy or girl). In this context, naming can be experienced as an enabling process, one that not only “opens up the possibility for agency” (Butler, 1997, p. 15), but also provides the opportunity to disrupt the repetition of normalized categories of sex and gender (Butler, 1997; Loutzenheiser & MacIntosh, 2004). This is described as the opportunity for disruption to highlight that this naming cannot occur outside of existing discourses of gender, however it can point to some of the ruptures in that repetition.

Gender also played out in a number of interactions between the youth workers and the youth, affecting not only who could be inside (or outside) of the spaces but also how they could exist while they were there. At Loud and Proud for example, the issue of gendered washrooms was quickly brought to Kristen’s attention. I captured this issue

in my field notes when I observed the following interaction:

... a F to M trans youth asked Kristen where the bathroom was. Kristen responded that it was across the hall from the lounge. The youth opened the door and came back in and yelled out – “no that’s the girls washroom”. Kristen said that it was a single stall and that the guys used it all the time because it was so close to the lounge. The youth insisted that he had to go to the men’s washroom. (Observation Field notes, Loud and Proud, June 9, 2004)

A similar incident occurred at Brave, when the youth workers decided to hold their annual queer prom off-site at a mainstream community centre, in order to have a larger space to accommodate the number of youth that would be attending. My field notes illustrated the nuances associated with this incident:

Two youth came to talk to me, to ask me if the space had any safe washrooms (meaning gender-neutral). I realized at that moment that there weren’t any, there were only male-female washrooms as there always are in mainstream community centre spaces. I told them that I would make a sign and go hang it on the doors of both washrooms, designating them both gender-neutral spaces for the night. As I walked in to the kitchen to grab a marker, I ran into Meg and told her what I was doing. Meg responded by saying that that probably wouldn’t fly here (would not be allowed), but that she would check with the [community centre name] youth worker. A few minutes later that youth worker came in and Meg asked permission. The youth worker said that it certainly wouldn’t be okay, at least until 10 pm, when the rest of the community centre activities would be done. (Observation Field notes, Brave prom, June 25, 2004)

These scenarios are exemplary of the binary discourses at work within the spatial design of washrooms within mainstream community centres. This design assumed that all of those entitled to use the space should necessarily be assignable to either/or category of gender. This spatial tactic functioned by gendering transgendered youth in a binary way, when this is not necessarily the case for them. It exemplified how Butler’s (1990) gender performativity functioned to constantly repeat a rigid set of norms that gave the illusion of something stable and natural (i.e. men’s and women’s washrooms). Yet, a number of bodies (i.e. transgendered youth) fail to fit within this framework.

Kristen's nonchalant response for the youth to simply use the single women's washroom stall may be somewhat linked to her own identity, which was not that of a transgendered person. This may similarly explain both Meg's and the other youth worker's responses to placing signs over the washroom doors. It was likely that they were not highly invested in the symbolic importance of using a washroom that is either gender neutral or respectful of their self-identifications, because their identities fit within the norms of dominant frameworks.

Gender was also very much at play at Loud and Proud in terms of interpellation (Butler, 1997), and in particular when addressing ambiguously gendered and transgendered youth. The binary nature of discourses of gender repeatedly provided only one of two choices from which to identify individuals (i.e. he or she). These are discursively constructed as normative categories that must be used in order to write gender onto bodies that should already have a pre-determined and true biological sex (Butler, 1990). This became highly problematic in a space where most bodies did not clearly fit within the confines of these binarized readings. Kristen noted:

Um, I know a lot of kids who are constantly called "it", they don't know, what "it" is, what are you? Um, I mean from harmless little children that don't know, but some of it's quite malicious, and regardless it hurts them. (Interview with Kristen, June 13, 2004)

Being called an "it" was hurtful for the youth because it did not enable them to become a subject (Butler, 1997). Rather, being called an "it" through discourses of interpellation referred to an object and therefore the sensation of being called an "it" could be injurious. Yet, because the "it" did not fit into existing frameworks of subjectivity, common sense assumptions about gender were troubled. In this case, gender did not appear to, or did not necessarily follow from sex, and sex was even called into question (Butler, 1990). Therefore, when this occurred, binary discourses of gender were

simultaneously being disrupted and reinforced because the interpellator's gendered frameworks were challenged, and in response they pushed ambiguously gendered and transgendered youth out by referring to them as objects.

Youth workers also had to negotiate issues of interpellation when youth refused to use each other's self-identificatory labels. At Loud and Proud Kristen had to address this issue when there was conflict between youth. For example, in my field notes on one such occurrence describe:

It seems almost like calling youth by the self-identifying terms has become a way to show, and to not show respect in the spaces. Today when two youth were experiencing a conflict, one of them refused to call the other by his self-identifying term of choice. That is, they were calling him a "she" rather than a "he". Kristen jumped in and corrected the youth, saying "it's he". The youth responded by saying that she only used "he" when she respected him, and right not she did not respect him, so she was calling him a "she", because that's what he really was. Kristen said that it would not be acceptable, because in this space we did respect each other, and in particular we respected the name by which each individual wanted to be called. (Observation Field notes, Loud and Proud, June 23, 2004)

Enforcing a discourse of respect was valuable, but it also warrants problematization since it did not necessarily disrupt the idea that people really *are* something. That is, it did not disrupt the normalization of sex as natural and essential, from which gender also naturally follows (Butler, 1990). In fact, the very notion of disrespecting someone by naming them by what "they really are" accumulates its authoritative force over time based on the ritualized discursive repetition of norms that imply it as an essential truth (Butler, 1997). In addition, by advocating for respect "in this space" it was also implied that there was a truth or a real gender outside of this space. However, in here we will entertain the imaginary and let the youth choose their own identifying terms even though they may not have been real.

This exploration of the negotiation of gender revealed that being inside/outside the spaces was actually very complex and often fraught with numerous tensions. Even

though the spaces were said to be for transgendered youth, once they were inside, youth workers were constantly negotiating the messy territory of binary discourses of gender that constantly pushed them out.

D. Systemic Discourses: Breaking Some Silences

In addition to examining for whom the spaces were designed, it became apparent that a few key discourses were repeatedly employed to describe why queer youth spaces were necessary in the first place. These discourses were systemic because they were not only employed locally by youth workers to justify their work, but they were also utilized by their supervisors to advocate within higher organizational levels. These discourses formed the foundation of the spaces and influenced how people were organized within and worked around them. In what follows, the three most prevalent discourses are considered (i.e. discourses of risk, support, and safety) and their effect on heteronormativity is investigated.

i) Reframing Risk

Kristen provided an example of a discourse of risk when she stated:

*...all the research that we've done tells us that queer youth are at higher risk of suicide, homelessness, drug and alcohol abuse, and that all of that is tied into queer youth feeling isolated. So the purpose of the space is to get them out into a safe area where they can be themselves, access resources. If a queer youth isn't feeling comfortable coming to a regular drop-in, they're not going to come and ask the youth worker for services. So, our mandate is to eliminate the isolation and connect them with drug and alcohol counseling, suicide prevention, and finding them friends.
(Interview with Kristen, June 7, 2004)*

Discourses of risk were positioned as the reason why Loud and Proud should exist.

When Kristen referred to research on these risks, her rationale resonated with the leisure and recreation literature on queer youth that endorsed this stance and subsequently argued for strategies to help these youth learn how to function normally in society (Grossman, 1992; Grossman, 1995; Kivel, 1997). When asked whether or not she utilized these discourses in her practice, she responded:

Kristen: That's definitely. I throw that around all the time. That's because it...

Tammy: Because it gets attention?

K: Because it gets attention, and people aren't really aware of the risks, and also at the end of the day that's what our mandate is in the regular drop-in, it's preventing suicide, drug and alcohol abuse, homelessness. Those are the three big ones that we work with. I can kind of say well I'm working with our mandate but I'm doing it through this venue. (Interview with Kristen, June 7, 2004)

As outlined in the literature review, discourses of risk are rarely problematized but their potential effects are numerous and diverse. For example, it could be argued that in employing this discourse, Kristen drew attention to an issue that had otherwise been completely silenced within mainstream community recreation. This discourse is precisely what allowed her to work within the realm of her mandate, while creating a space for queer youth. However, when this discourse was positioned as the reason for the space and it was constantly repeated as such, a norm became solidified around the at-risk status of queer youth. However, this norm implied and reinforced that queer youth were the problem and therefore they needed help or saving (Fine, 1990).

At Brave, Donna spoke about having to justify the need for the space to government officials:

Fortunately with the NDP government in place at that time there was some openness, but even with the allies within the government, it took a lot of education. A lot of dedicated energy to, I think to have them understand that queer, questioning youth are youth at-risk in some cases, not in all cases, and there was a need, whether youth were at-risk, there was a need for queer and questioning youth to have safe spaces to gather, and to connect with one another, be themselves, and explore themselves. And to feel part of, when more often than not their experiences would be not feeling part of. (Interview with Donna, June 17, 2004)

In this case, it was implied that the government required more education about how queer and questioning youth were at-risk. It appeared as though the status of risk need be positioned as a truth or fact, in order for the government to listen and provide resources.

Furthermore, it was implied that the solution to the problem of risk was to create a separate space where queer youth could experience a sense of belonging. Once again, in moving to disrupt (hetero)norms by bringing an end to the silence about queer youth, these norms became simultaneously reinforced when queer youth were represented as helpless. It implied that their difference from the norm was the problem, therefore leaving the norm unproblematicized (Fine, 1990). In addition, this discourse also implied that queer youth were a monolithic group and that the entire group would fit into and have their needs met by this universal queer youth space. Differences in terms of race, gender, sexual orientation, and ability become erased through this silence.

Rather than utilizing discourses of risk, Romi described queer youth as somewhat vulnerable. He said:

...queer youth are just sort of vulnerable. And I'm not saying it in a protective way, like they're vulnerable and we need to take care of them, but in the sense that they're at a pretty high risk for a lot of things. In addition looking for love from our community puts them at a great vulnerability for HIV/AIDS, or you know, whatever else. Relationships that aren't good, you're thinking it's good because this is what you've got. You know, and not having an example of that. But I also think they're incredibly courageous. Just in the, not just in the like, you know, coming here, but just in the way that they interact with each other. And not courageous because they're queer, but courageous because of the way they're able to recognize some of the things that they're saying or doing...so that courageousness for them to speak to each other really openly is really amazing. (Interview with Romi, May 21, 2004)

Rather than representing queer youth as completely helpless, Romi described them as "incredibly courageous". In emphasizing that they are courageous because of the way they interacted with each other despite normalizing social pressures that at times led them to engage in risky behaviours, Romi reminded us that queer youth are not helpless. Romi's response in this case may be tied to his own identity as a queer person and a former queer youth who used to attend Brave. As Butler wrote (in Evans, 2002) "one should not underestimate how exhausting it is to be expected to be an 'out'

homosexual all the time" (p. 19). Therefore, Romi may be, to some extent, speaking from his own experience of negotiating the emotional work of being 'out' in a society where the very discourses that pushed him to have to do so, simultaneously and repeatedly positioned him as inferior to the heterosexual in that process (Butler, 1991). In describing queer youth as courageous "for being able to speak to each other really openly", Romi seemed to speak from a recent and personal understanding of what it is like to be a queer youth.

When I asked Romi whether discourses of risk were something he at times had to resort to within the context of his work he replied:

No, I haven't. And I think it's because I am falsely thinking that our community should know better, or that they know, because they were once there. But I think we're just like any other community, so we forget. (Interview with Romi, May 21, 2004)

This response pointed to how deeply embedded discourses of risk have become in relation to queer youth. When a discourse does become common sense, or something people should "know better", it can potentially become quite dangerous as it implies that all queer youth are at-risk, and that they always have been, and forever will be (Fine, 1990). This is how the binary becomes reinforced, because if we assume that queer youth are at-risk then we infer that normal youth are not, through derivativeness (Butler, 1991). Consequently, straight youth remain the Dominant against which queer will always be measured, and to which they will always appear inferior.

ii) Shifting Frameworks of Support

Discourses of support were often referred to by the youth workers and the supervisors as additional reasons why the spaces were necessary. Support was often intricately linked to discourses of risk, based on the notion that youth at-risk inevitably require support. With regards to Brave, Arleta said:

I just feel it's so hard being a kid, cause, and if you're a kid who thinks that they're different it's even harder. Um, and not everybody's ready to come out, but for those that are, they need just as much as support as any other kid does, but they need it in a way that's respectful of where they're at. (Interview with Arleta, July 13, 2004)

The emphasis in this quote is on difference - "if you're a kid who thinks that they're different it's even harder" and therefore the difference becomes the problem, the reason why queer youth need support (Loutzenheiser, 2001). In addition, the emphasis on "if you're a kid who thinks they're different" implies that the difference is imaginary and that in truth kids are all the same. Discourses of support were extremely dangerous because they were often used within the context of compassion (i.e. "it's hard for queer kids"), yet they are constantly framed within heteronormative discourses, and discourses of sameness (Loutzenheiser, 2001; Kumashiro, 2001b). Notions that spoke to how hard it was for all youth, but particularly for queer youth made them the central focus of problem-solving. It unproblematically implied that non-queer youth do not have problems, and that all queer youth do, therefore erasing differences between queer youth in terms of gender, race, and class (Loutzenheiser, 2001).

At Brave, when I asked Romi about support his response was immediately framed within discourses of success. He noted:

I think that, well one of the ways I measure success in Brave is when a youth has been coming here for a really long time, stops coming. To me, they've found the support that they are looking for. And they've decided, they've grown up, so they might say, which is a great way of looking at - I don't need you anymore. I needed you, but not anymore. Thanks for being there. (Interview with Romi, May 21, 2004)

When the measure of success was exemplified through a youth who stopped coming, it implied that there was a problem with that individual queer youth and they stopped coming because that problem was addressed. The notion of "they've decided, they've grown up" indicated that the solution to the problem of queer youth was that they had to

grow up and make decisions about how to be in this world. This reasoning resonated with Grossman's (1995) studies about the potential for queer youth spaces to help youth "cope with society's homophobia...and learn to function normally in society" (p. 147). Unfortunately, these discourses often have the potential to reinforce rather than disrupt heteronormativity, wherein an expectation is created around queer youth having to learn how to be within existing norms. Rather than troubling normalcy, when support is articulated in this way, the status quo is left in place and queer youth are assumed to have gained the skills to exist as the Other.

In a follow-up interview, Romi discussed the discourse of support at a greater length to emphasize why he felt it was so important:

I think it's time to pull back a bit, and take care of our community, because I mean it's also about educating the outside community about homophobia, but it's also about healing the hurt in our community, about what's going on. Because that needs to be addressed, it really does. And we need to address that, and it's really hard work to do both. Really hard. (Interview with Romi, June 3, 2004)

This response spoke to the challenge of working to both "heal our community" and "educate the outside community"; yet it implied that these types of work could be separated. It assumed a distinct binary between inside and outside and it ignored that the normalizing processes work both sides, perpetuating norms that repeat the hurt, over and over again. It also assumed that it is necessary to educate the rest of the world about the Other, and implied that this education should necessarily come from the Other. In assuming that it is the responsibility of the Other to educate everyone else about them, the Dominant group never actually has to question their understandings of themselves (Felman, 1995 in Kumashiro, 2002). Without experiencing discomfort or pain, it is questionable whether any learning actually takes place, even in its most minimal form as an additive approach (Felman, 1995 in Kumashiro, 2002). In other

words, these discourses about the Other, and about the Other's need for support functioned in a binary way to reinforce heteronormativity. The process of healing was framed as the sole responsibility of the Other (queer), and the Dominant (normal) was said to have to learn about that pain.

Kristen described discourses of support in direct relation to discourses of risk. This connection became evident when she was asked to clarify whether or not all queer youth were at-risk and she replied:

No. Definitely not. Um, I think if they do have good social supports, the whole process of coming out can be a very positive experience for them, but if they don't have that, if their parents aren't open, or if they don't have any kind of adult figure who they know who'll love them anyway, that's when the problems start. So it's not the queerness itself that causes the risk, it's their interpretation of their environment. (Interview with Kristen, June 28, 2004)

Within this response, support was positioned as a method that could potentially prevent risky behaviours. Assumptions about all queer youth automatically being at-risk were somewhat demystified; yet, they were simultaneously reinforced when support was articulated as "loving them anyway". The postulation was that queer youth are not normal, but parents should love them despite their abnormality. In this case, the youth's, the parent's and the rest of the world's ideas of what is normal can remain unaltered. Not unlike the discourses at work in what Arleta described as "kids who think they're different", the risk was described as being caused by the queer youth's "interpretation of their environment". The solution seemed to lie in altering the queer youth's perception, because within this discourse they were positioned as the problem.

iii) Safe for Whom?

Intricately linked to notions of risk and support, discourses of safety also justified the necessity of having queer youth spaces. The understanding appeared to be that if queer youth were in a safe space, then they would not be engaging in behaviours that

placed them at risk, and they were being supported in the process. The discourse of safety was apparent at Brave and was expressed as one of the driving forces behind the space and the programs offered. However, there was also an awareness of its limitations, in particular with regards to who might not feel safe. This was apparent when Romi stated:

Examples of you know, for a dance, you know, this is an opportunity for people who are gay or lesbian to come, gay, lesbian, bi, trans, queer, to come and dance with their partners because they might feel unsafe in their own school environment. (Interview with Romi, June 3, 2004)

This description resonated with all of the leisure and recreation literature that articulated the need for safe spaces for queer youth to counter the homophobia they experienced (Grossman, 1992; Grossman, 1995; Kivel, 1994, Johnson, 1999; Johnson, 2003). Such an approach can be helpful in providing an immediate solution by responding to the direct lack of safety many queer youth experience in other environments (i.e. their schools). However, if utilized on its own this approach could be quite additive, as it does not necessarily directly speak to the heteronormativity, or even the homophobia that reigns in the spaces that have been deemed unsafe.

When discourses of safety are articulated, the question that must follow is: for whom are these spaces not safe? When a space is named as "safe", this is never necessarily so. By advocating for the safety of queer youth as a monolithic group, there are inevitably numerous silences within that blanket identity statement. It implies that queer youth are all the same (in terms of sexuality, gender, race, class, and ability) and that they all need the same kind of space in order to feel safe. Donna and Romi addressed this in the following statements:

I think [Brave] is really important for youth to have a safe place to gather, a safe place that's welcoming and celebrates their unique identities...provides a social environment for queer and questioning youth to meet others so that the sense of isolation, or the sense of being on the margins of other communities, within their schools, within their families, with other friends, is not there if you are a part of this, and of their own communities when they participate, that's the ideal. I'm not saying everybody feels that way, or experiences it that way, but that's part of the ideal of having this sort of space. (Interview with Donna, June 17, 2004)

Romi added:

I also want to address that the space is safe, but it's not safe for all people, as well, and that includes street youth, and youth who are living in poverty, youth who have mental health issues. It's devastating to see youth who have mental illness coming in here to find support only to find no support whatsoever, even feeling even more rejected that what they came with. (Interview with Romi, June 3, 2004)

They both acknowledged the margins that became re-created when the space was named as a safe space for queer youth. In describing queer youth as being on the margins of other communities and having that sense of marginalization disappear when "you are part of this", Donna emphasized the ideal she had envisioned in terms of what the space could provide. Discourses of an all-inclusive space where all queer youth felt safe, and "a part of" implied that this was necessarily possible, desirable, and a viable solution. This inevitably ran the risk of normalizing the safe space and reinforcing the idea that certain ways of being queer were more valuable and worth keeping safe than others (Butler, 1993; Loutzenheiser, 2001; Kumashiro, 2001b).

Romi more specifically addressed who the space was not safe for by pointing to "street youth, youth living in poverty, and youth who have mental health issues"; therefore calling attention to certain intersections of queer youth and indicating that there are differences among queer youth. By continually asking "for whom is this space not safe?", the opportunity for multiple local strategies that might push for a de-centering of queerness become available (even if this is only for a short time). There is no

equation that will result in the ideal space that will be safe for everyone, because if this is what youth workers are working towards, their efforts will always and forever be additive.

This chapter illustrated that who the youth workers are and how they negotiate this does matter. It also investigated how bodies often managed to blur the physical boundaries of spaces, while the youth workers and supervisors at times expressed a desire to reinforce them. In addition, notions of belonging were scrutinized through an examination of the formal discourses about the spaces in conjunction with a commitment to having “everyone welcome”. Particular attention was paid to the intersection of queerness with race as well as with gender in this process, and it became evident that these discourses worked to simultaneously pull and push individuals in and out. Furthermore, systemic discourses of risk, support, and safety were considered, revealing their role in both disrupting and reinforcing notions of heteronormativity. Theoretical strands of naming (Butler, 1997) and derivativeness (Butler, 1991) underlay much of the analysis, therefore highlighting why the spaces were simultaneously experienced as enabling and constraining, and both disruptive and reinforcing of boundaries and heteronormativity. These findings have pointed to numerous tensions, complexities and at times unresolvable issues; yet, they have also identified certain ruptures and contradictory possibilities for youth workers, researchers, and community centres. Without providing a new list of generalizable solutions, the final chapter will outline certain conclusions and the implications they might have in contributing to a further queering of our community centres.

Chapter 5

Conclusions and Recommendations

Conclusions

Below, the research questions are listed and conclusions are provided for each of them. There certainly was overlap between the questions, since for example, boundary reinforcement could at times be linked to the reinforcement of heteronormativity and vice versa. In addition, this chapter also outlined the limitations of the current research project and expanded upon potential implications for practitioners, community centres, and those who theorize about queer youth. The research questions were posed as follows:

1. How do the youth workers negotiate their identities, and how does this in turn affect these queer youth spaces?

The identity negotiation undertaken by the youth workers affected how the spaces were represented, how the boundaries of the spaces were negotiated, and how systemic discourses were experienced and utilized. At Loud and Proud, Kristen chose not to name her sexual identity and this became an obsessive topic of conversation among the youth. This exemplified one of the ways in which an explosion of discourses can erupt from a single silence (Foucault, 1978). This not naming appeared to open up a space for youth who may not have felt comfortable identifying as anything. However, it also worked the public/private binary of queer sexualities by reinforcing the notion that queer identities should not be public. In addition, the meanings associated with discourses of not naming shifted for Kristen in different spaces. For instance, in mainstream youth spaces she was assumed to be heterosexual until she spoke out against homophobic statements by some of the youth who subsequently thought she was a lesbian. Therefore, discourses of not naming only took effect when they were named as such, and allowed her to “come into being” as someone who chose not to

identify (Butler, 1997).

At Brave, Romi spoke of how he negotiated his sexual identity within different spaces, making choices about when to identify as queer and when to identify as gay. He argued that queer might be more difficult to understand within the space of a classroom and it might simply give kids another word to use negatively. However, Butler (1997) might have argued that offering up another discourse of identity, which Romi himself found quite enabling, could have provided a positive experience for some youth by imparting new and different possibilities for social existence. In addition, Romi described how he negotiated his awareness of his own racial identity over time. In particular, at the beginning of his employment with Brave he viewed himself as a mainstream queer youth (read as just like white), having only recently become aware of his culture and racial difference within the space, and its potential effect on spatial make-up. Romi described some of the ways in which he now used his identity as a person of color to ask questions within the space that disrupted assumptions of whiteness. However, standing in the intersection of queerness and race (as a queer-Fijian) and asking the questions that queer youth of color might not be able to ask, also worked to reinforce the idea that the intersection of queerness with whiteness need not be troubled.

Both of the youth workers' experiences with negotiating their identities pointed to the ways in which identity is not fixed, but rather something that is negotiated through space and time, and is relational to the people around them (Evans, 2002). This also informed the discursive nature of identities. In mainstream youth spaces Kristen was assumed to be heterosexual, until she spoke out against homophobia, which subjectivated her as one who refused to name herself (Butler, 1993). Their identity negotiations also pointed to the multiplicity and intersectionality of identity and in

particular to how queerness intersected with race. For Kristen, this was evidenced through discourses of silence about race and discourses of race that focused on the Other. Whereas for Romi, this was evidenced through discourses that described the complexities of being Brown and queer, and not quite fitting into normalized discourses of either one. In negotiating the inside/outside of their own identities, Romi and Kristen inevitably set the tone for how the boundaries of sexuality, gender, and race were negotiated within the spaces.

2. How is heteronormativity both disrupted and/or reinforced in and through these queer youth spaces?

The process of naming was at work at both Brave and Loud and Proud, through an outlining of who the spaces were for, and through derivation for whom they were not (Butler, 1991; Butler, 1997). This worked to at times reinforce binary notions of gay and straight space, seemingly leaving (hetero)norms untouched. However, heteronormativity was simultaneously disrupted through the spaces by the queer bodies that “spilled over” and out of them. At Brave this consisted of bodies that literally did not fit (i.e. sixty to seventy bodies within a space that could barely house ten), and therefore spilled out into the entire community centre, and into the street below. Even though Romi and Donna expressed a desire for a larger space, it became clear that even a larger space would never manage to contain all of the bodies that it would hope to fit. This was less obvious at Loud and Proud considering Kristen’s struggle to obtain a queer youth space within a mainstream community centre for a very short time each week. Yet, this notion of spillage was observed in a different way, particularly with the bodies’ refusal or inability to stay within the four walls they had been assigned. There seemed to be a constant flow of queer bodies running and playing in the hallway around the space and outside in front of the mainstream community centre, blurring the

boundary between what was considered queer and what was considered normal.

Discourses of risk, support, and safety also gave way to numerous tensions surrounding heteronormativity. At Brave in particular, discourses of risk and support seemed to offer Kristen an entry point, a justifiable reason why she should be focusing her efforts on queer youth in community recreation. Consequently, this opened up a space in their mainstream community centre that had been previously absent, thereby disrupting the silence around queer youth that had existed for years. This silence had assumed that queer youth were non-existent, or at least not worth considering. However, this same entry point was equally as dangerous, because the at-risk status became the reason why queer youth should even be considered and it implied that they needed to be saved because they were or had the problem. Therefore, this simultaneously reinforced heteronormativity, because through these discourses heterosexuality remained the *normal* and desirable way to *be*.

At Brave these discourses functioned slightly differently, and this may in part be attributed to the larger context of a GLBT community centre and to Romi's identity negotiation. Here, silent assumptions of heterosexuality did not necessarily abound, and Romi was out as queer. However, the analysis also unveiled that discourses of risk and support were still systemically embedded in justifying the purpose of the space. However, they were accompanied by discourses of courageousness that displaced the notion of helplessness often associated with discourses of risk. In terms of safety, Romi and Donna both seemed aware that Brave was not and could not be safe for all queer youth. This attention to differences disrupted the binaries and troubled heteronormativity, even if only in that moment of reflexivity where norms were acknowledged and questioned.

3. How are boundaries of inside/outside negotiated, called into question and/or

reinforced in and through these queer youth spaces?

The metaphor of spillage exemplified a physical blurring of inside/outside, and pointed to the impossibility of constraining queer bodies inside a concession space. These boundaries were physically called into question when, for example, at Brave the bodies did not all fit inside, and spilled into the community centre and outside onto the street. Boundaries of inside/outside were also constantly negotiated within both of the queer youth spaces in terms of sexuality, gender, and race. These boundaries were often times unconsciously policed by the youth workers who were inevitably reading the bodies that came into the spaces to determine whether or not they belonged. This policing was often followed by a conscious return to discourses of “everyone welcome” to counter initial desires and readings. For me, this tension remained unresolvable during the research process, as I was never fully able to reconcile whether or not such a boundary was actually possible or desirable. Just as it seemed impossible to firm up any sort of boundary space around queer and GLBTQ identities, these identities were positioned as foundational to the spaces’ existence. Yet, the central focus on non-normative sexualities reinforced norms around whiteness and binary categories of gender within the spaces. If the boundaries were not named did it imply that we were all the same? If the boundaries were named did it automatically imply a central focus on queerness that reinscribed whiteness, binary categories of gender, able-bodiedness, and middle-class status?

At Loud and Proud the bodies inside the space were primarily white and the practices reflected a normalized whiteness. Linkages were made as to how Kristen perceived her identity as a white youth worker, and to how she perceived issues of race as non-white. Therefore, although there was not necessarily a deliberate firming up of boundaries around whiteness, its centrality was undoubtedly implied. Similarly, at

Brave, even though there was a presence of queer youth of color, the discourses that circulated within the space implied that whiteness was nonetheless central. Therefore when queerness and race intersected, it was first and foremost about being queer and white; therefore, a boundary took shape to imply that it was not, for example, about being queer and Asian. In an attempt to counter this, Romi articulated using his identity to ask questions that could potentially serve to disrupt norms of whiteness within the space. Yet, this managed to reinforce discourses around the responsibility of the Other to teach the Dominant about themselves (Kumashiro, 2002). Consequently, even though Loud and Proud and Brave did not deliberately articulate any boundaries around race, these were still present in both spaces; inevitably, this process of negotiation was intricately linked to how the youth workers negotiated the boundaries of their own identities.

This also occurred with regards to gender, and in particular with regards to how binary discourses of gender functioned to regulate certain bodies within the spaces. Wherein transgendered youth were permitted inside; once they came in, they did not experience the same privileges as youth who ascribed to more binary gender identifications. This was evidenced through issues around gender-neutral washrooms, and through issues of interpellation. This indicated that even when the boundary permitted transgendered bodies inside, binary discourses of gender did not account for how they might be allowed to be or exist once they were there. This was also likely influenced by the fact that the youth workers did not self-identify as transgendered themselves, and may not have necessarily had a symbolic investment in some of the restrictions these bodies experienced. All of the above boundary negotiations exemplified the paradoxical nature of queer youth spaces where the focus on queerness can at times work to erase certain differences with regards to non-normative

sexualities and genders as well as race. As such, a monolithic queer identity can be seen to reinforce binaries between normal and Other and work to reinforce the very notion of heteronormativity it set out to disrupt.

Points to Take Home

To begin with, who the youth workers were and how they negotiated their identities was paramount to both *Brave and Loud and Proud*. This is not to say that practitioners need be queer (or not queer), or of color (or white), should they plan on creating a queer youth space. Nor does this imply that youth workers ought to negotiate their identities in a universal way (e.g. by coming out, or not). Simply, it implied that different youth worker identities, and different identity negotiation strategies made for very different queer youth spaces. This involved differences in terms of which queer youth might or might not attend at different points in time, and in terms of how spatial boundaries might be negotiated in terms of sexuality, gender, and race. It also entailed differences in how systemic discourses about the spaces might be utilized, disrupted, and addressed.

In addition, the metaphor of spilling bodies blurred the boundary between what was considered queer and what was considered normal, therefore disrupting the repetition of heteronormativity. The boundary was rendered not real, but discursively constructed. It was simply the repetition of this boundary that gave it the illusion of stability and realness (Butler, 1991).

Moreover, the notion of naming (Butler, 1993) the space for GLBT and queer youth found itself in direct tension with discourses of "everyone welcome". In other words, a constant process of boundary policing and boundary expansion was evidenced as the youth workers vacillated between who the spaces were for and who was permitted inside, as this was not necessarily always the same. This remained

unresolved in the research, however this may be precisely what pointed to the instability of such a boundary. If space, in general, is not necessarily heterosexual even though (hetero)norms are consistently repeated to portray this illusion, then queer space itself cannot necessarily firm up a stable boundary. Identity may indeed be a far too unstable construct upon which to claim any sort of permanent categorization.

Furthermore, the central focus of both spaces on GLBT and at times queer identities re-created certain norms around race (read as whiteness) and gender (read as binary categories). An assumption of whiteness shaped both Loud and Proud and Brave; however within the former this was exemplified through silences about race, and understandings of race as being *about* the Other. Within the latter, this was slightly different since Romi positioned himself as a person of color in the intersection of queerness and race. He took it on as his responsibility to disrupt norms about race within the space; yet, in doing so this reinforced the common assumption that it was the responsibility of the Other to enlighten the norm. With regards to gender, this was negotiated through the fact that both spaces were said to be for transgendered youth; yet, once these youth were inside the spaces, binary discourses of gender simultaneously worked to push them out.

Finally, systemic discourses of risk, support, and safety worked to both disrupt and reinforce notions of heteronormativity. Within the mainstream community centre, these discourses disrupted a previous silence about queer youth, but in doing so constructed queer youth as helpless and in need of saving. In contrast, within the GLBT community centre when these discourses were articulated they were often accompanied by discourses of courageousness and difference that simultaneously worked to counter notions of helplessness.

Although these findings seem to harshly point to the paradoxical nature of

discourse wherein every time heteronormativity appeared to be disrupted, or boundaries appeared to be expanded, they were simultaneously reinforced. The contradictory possibilities this research has to offer lay precisely in these moments of rupture that at first glance simply appeared paralyzing. In other words, these oppressive binaries and categories that are at work are not natural, nor are they real, they are simply discursive. Since this is the case, then every slippage even though it is brief and momentary, confirms this discursive production and as such reveals the potential to queer the norm.

Limitations

An obvious limitation of this project lay in the short period of time during which the data collection took place. Observing the spaces over the period of one month on 3 or 4 occasions, provided only a snapshot of what went on, not a complete and timeless representation. Moreover, the research was not only limited by the length of the data collection period, but also by the time at which it took place. For example, it took place during the months of May and June, which could mean a variety of different things for youth workers programming activities. At Brave this meant that much of the data was collected in relation to the queer prom; at Loud and Proud this meant that the programming reflected the fact that the space had existed for less than six months.

Another limitation of this project rested with who was not involved in the process: mainly, the youth. Although the youth may have been involved in some of the interactions that took place, they were not involved in the research process. Therefore, they were not directly observed and their insights were not included. This is a limitation as the youth clearly made up most of the queer bodies at Loud and Proud and Brave, and their identities, actions, politics, and beliefs were central to how the spaces were constructed and experienced. This is not to say that their involvement would have painted a more complete picture of the spaces, since every perspective is partial and

situated (Haraway, 1991). However, their participation might have provided different and multiple stories that would inform the research in different ways.

Furthermore, this research did not deliberately examine the intersections of sexuality with ability and class, inevitably reinforcing and maintaining certain silences around these issues. By choosing not to talk about them, norms of able-bodiedness and middle-class status within the spaces and in queer research in general, were reinforced. This could, for example, perpetuate assumptions around disability and asexuality as normal and common sense. Discussing these limitations should not imply that it is acceptable to focus on certain issues rather than others. Rather, this was meant to denote the responsibility we, as critical researchers, have in making ourselves aware of the numerous silences and norms we perpetuate on our quest to disrupt only a few. Any project that would claim to address everything or even imagine it to be possible would also set itself up for failure, because this would imply that there were a limited number of issues to address in the first place and that the truth existed and was knowable (Kumashiro, 2002).

Implications for Practitioners and Community Centres

Initially, the thought of offering recommendations to practitioners felt quite paralyzing, because I wanted to be able to offer 'solutions'. I wanted to provide easy ways to work through challenges, even though my theoretical frame is based on critically analyzing this very idea. First, it is important to state that these are not 'solutions'; these are simply suggestions that one might want to consider for a time and constantly revisit. Within these recommendations the suggestions are not necessarily goal-oriented, but rather process-oriented. It is hoped that they might provide ideas for re-thinking and continually questioning how practices could be improved.

It is imperative to note that spaces where queer youth can feel safe in our

community centres are relatively non-existent. This was evidenced through the challenges faced in designing this study in the first place and in finding spaces where the data could actually be collected. Based on the findings, it is most important to acknowledge that spaces for queer youth are important, that they are helpful for some queer youth, and that they do provide some disruptions in the everyday functioning of heteronormativity in our community centres. As Warner and Berlant (2002) might have argued, these are, in a sense, “queer counterpublics” as they disrupt the public/private binary by bringing queer sexualities into public consciousness in a very concrete way. In other words, it is imperative that practitioners continue to support and create queer youth spaces in their community centres since “after a certain point, a quantitative change is a qualitative change” (p. 204). More queer youth spaces point to the instability of mainstream youth spaces as natural and normal. However, these spaces are not purely disruptive as they do function within the derivativeness of existing discourses, and therefore queer youth spaces cannot and should not be heralded as an end goal. As reflected in the findings, queer youth spaces are not enabling spaces for all queer youth. They reinforced certain boundaries around sexuality, race and gender, and inevitably privileged whiteness and gender identities that corresponded to normative notions of what it meant to be a boy or a girl. As a result, practitioners currently engaged in these queer youth spaces may want to ask themselves some of the following questions:

- Who is always here?
- Who is never here?
- Who is sometimes here?
- Who seems to feel more comfortable or uncomfortable when they are here?
- How does this space enable certain bodies to have privileges when they are here?
- Why might that be?
- How does this film we are currently watching justify certain ways of being queer?
- What stereotypes about queers does this film reinforce?

- How do the things we eat, the activities we play, and the ways we talk about identity reinforce white Western ideals of what it means to be queer?
- Do these youth identify as “he” or as “she”? What is the youth’s name? (this can be a helpful indicator)
- Does this space have men’s and women’s washrooms?
- Can I place a sign over the door to make them gender neutral?

Whether or not a queer youth space does exist in their community centre, practitioners and senior level administrators may want to question: In what ways are regular youth spaces exclusionary of queer youth? What is it about everyday practices and interactions in those spaces that upholds silences around queerness and reinforces the normalcy and desirability of heterosexuality as the only possible sexuality? Thinking about heteronormativity in our community centres is not only about providing a service to what the literature has identified as an “under-served” segment of the population (Johnson, 2003). It is also about calling into question an extremely deeply rooted assumption of normalcy and reflecting on how every single program, attendance sheet, registration form, and activity space reinforces and even regulates an extremely narrow notion of what is considered normal and who counts. This type of work cannot only be about ‘including’ more people into current practice. It also involves sometimes uncomfortable personal reflection and a constant revisiting of the ways in which current practice can be exclusionary and support extremely limited ways of being. This continuous revisiting, retrial, and rearticulation, is precisely what produces the necessary slippages that open up categories, trouble normalcy, and queer our community centres. If there are multiple ways of being queer and if these intersections are relentlessly considered, then new meanings and new ways of being can begin to take shape.

Implications for Future Research

The leisure and recreation literature which theorizes about queer youth (Grossman, 1992; Grossman, 1995; Kivel, 1994, Johnson, 1999; Johnson, 2003) ought to consider how certain discourses that may seem to at first justify their research (i.e. discourses of risk) can actually work to further marginalize these subjects, rendering them helpless and in dire need of saving. Rather than troubling normalcy, these approaches justify liberal notions of an idealized subject (Bryson & de Castell, 1997), against which the Other constantly fails to count as normal. In addition, these researchers should reflexively consider the ways in which their work constructs queer youth as a monolithic group, erasing and ignoring differences between and among them. As this research has demonstrated, these approaches reinscribe a white male normalcy onto projects that originally claimed to deviate from the norm (Loutzenheiser, 2001). Finally, when the creation of spaces for queer youth is offered up as a solution, it is imperative to also theorize the potential effects brought upon by those who will be working within them (i.e. youth workers). Otherwise, it seems as though these spaces are, and should all be the same, which as this research has established, is clearly not the case.

There is also much potential for future research to build upon this work. Based on this analysis of queer youth spaces, one might want to consider examining similar research questions within the context of mainstream youth spaces, bearing in mind the functioning of heteronormativity, and paying particular attention to aspects of gender, sexuality, and race. A queer approach to a study like this one could contribute to further debinarizing analyses of space and opening up possibilities for the expression of multiple sexualities within our community centres, in other words further queering community recreation. In addition, considering the present project's focus on gender,

sexuality, and race, it would be desirable and interesting to see more intersectional analyses that incorporate queer theoretical approaches as they interplay with discourses of (dis)ability and class.

Moreover, researchers in leisure and recreation should also consider historical analyses of the creation of spaces for youth in our community centres, and the subsequent creation of spaces for queer youth. One might wish to examine how heteronormative discourses have functioned over different time periods, so as to gain a critical understanding of how and why normal youth spaces have come to be and why they function as they do. Speaking with youth who do not have access to queer youth spaces of any kind would also be an extremely worthwhile project. This might include interviewing youth who live in rural areas and in smaller communities across the country, or it could also entail talking with youth in this geographic area who choose not to attend queer youth spaces or who have stopped coming.

In Closing

In contrast to what much of the leisure and recreation literature has suggested, it is hoped that this research has indicated that queering community recreation cannot be accomplished by imposing a singular solution. Although the creation of queer youth spaces in our community centres has been heralded as the solution to the problem of queer youth for over a decade (Grossman, 1992; Grossman, 1995; Kivel, 1994, Johnson, 1999; Johnson, 2003), this is not necessarily the case. In fact, the positioning of queer youth as the problem is a large part of what ought to be addressed. In addition, these spaces were not and should be offered up as universal constructions. They were highly affected by the youth workers who helped create them and who worked within them. These individuals' identities and identity negotiations were highly relevant to who belonged (and did not belong), to how they belonged, and to how these

spaces functioned within larger systemic discourses. Even though these spaces did work to open up the potential for heteronormative disruption, unveiling the instability of heterosexuality as natural and normal by introducing queer identities into public consciousness. When positioned as the sole solution or end goal, these spaces simultaneously reinforced heteronormativity by failing to trouble normalcy, repeatedly locating themselves as subordinate to normal youth spaces. However, as the findings demonstrated, this boundary between queer and normal was constantly being blurred by queer bodies that spilled over and out of queer space, and by bodies that constantly circulated into and out of the spaces. This indicated that the potential for heteronormative disruption might rest in the very way queer bodies fail to fit within the boundaries, shaking up the binaries and exposing them as discursive constructions, rather than natural fixations. Finally, although these spaces might have set out to challenge certain (hetero)norms, boundaries in terms of gender and race were negotiated in complex ways to at times reinforce dominant notions of whiteness and binary categories of gender. Therefore, the very spaces that might have been experienced as enabling for some youth were likely experienced as quite constraining by others. It is precisely within these tensions that researchers and practitioners might want to spend some time, in order to further destabilize binaries of queer/normal, black/white, male/female, and boy/girl, in an effort to continue queering community recreation literature and practice.

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Appendix A – Sample Fieldnote Guide for Observations of Spaces

- Date
- Location
- Description of physical space
- Examples of formal norms that govern the space (i.e. reinforcement of mandate, code of ethics, written and/or stated values of the spaces)
- Examples of informal norms that govern the space (i.e. actions, behaviours not formally stated but that are accepted, or dominant within the spaces)
- Description of program
- Description of program attendance
- Description of how youth worker practices shape the space (i.e. how are formal norms enforced/encouraged, how is diversity addressed, how are informal norms addressed)
- Examples of how heteronormative discourses function within the space – building on the norms

Appendix C - Sample Interview Guide

The site of the proposed research: two drop-ins for queer youth at two community centres in Western Canada. The overview background questions were designed for both the youth workers and the supervisors whereas only a few of the questions about practice were asked of both the workers and supervisors.

Overview/Background Questions

- What is the history of this queer youth drop-in?
- Who do you understand the drop-in to be for?
- Are there any formal or informal rules that govern the drop-in? [*Be prepared to come back to this question later*]
- What is the mandate?
- What do you understand to be the main purpose of the drop-in? **Probe:** any others?

Questions about their practice

- When and how did you become involved in working with this drop-in?
- How does your identity influence your work?
- What is the climate like in your community centre with regards to the work you are doing for/with queer youth?
- What are your experiences of the climate in the field of recreation in the Vancouver area when doing this kind of work?
- Why do you believe the drop-in is important/necessary?
- In your opinion, are there any labels associated with queer youth?
- Can you describe any potential risks associated with these labels? **Probe:** do they utilize any labels in their work, to push forward their agendas?
- What types of challenges do you face in doing this type of work?
- What do you understand to be the benefits of the drop-in?
- Do you see any potential pitfalls? **Probe:** strategies to address these pitfalls?
- Who do you think is missing from the drop-ins? Why?

Examples of questions posed in follow-up interviews

- In an earlier interview you talked about queer youth being at a greater risk. Do you think they are at a greater risk than straight youth?
- What do you think they are at a greater risk of?
- Do you think all queer youth experience that risk?
- Last week a few youth came into the space who had not been there before and the room fell silent until they left – what did you think of that?
- You said there used to be an Asian version of Brave that no longer exists anymore why do you think that is?
- Last week we spent the afternoon Wednesday planning the camping trip and there was a big discussion around tent distribution, meaning who was going to sleep with whom. Can you speak to that expectation of the part of the funders?