

# What Would a Non-Heterosexual City Look Like?

A Theory on Queer Spaces and the Role of Planners in Creating the Inclusive City

by

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## ABSTRACT

Planning has always interacted with issues of sexuality, but the failure of the literature to address these practices explicitly has led to the silencing of minority sexualities in planning discourse and the severe marginalization of many queer people in cities. To better understand the experiences of queer people (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender) as a basis for creating new planning frameworks that address the realities and diversity of queer lives, this thesis explores how queer people experience everyday space in the city, particularly the places they feel the most and least comfortable being queer. This thesis asks: how do relationships between the design, management, and spatial characteristics of spaces communicate values about sexual orientation and gender identity? How could planners and designers create more inclusive spaces?

To accomplish this, in-depth interviews were conducted with queer participants in Kansas City, MO and Cambridge, MA, the progressive cities in their respective regions. I utilize readings on design, politics, and identity to create a Lynchian framework for evaluating spaces based on fit, control, and access. Lastly, I document the performative characteristics of each space identified in interviews with respect to this framework.

I draw conclusions from my research findings and discuss the implications for designers and planners and areas for future research. In particular I discuss the process that planners should go through to begin re-constructing the public realm as inclusive of queer sexualities. Finally, I speculate on the kinds of spaces that might exist in a non-heterosexual city.

Thesis Supervisor: Larry J. Vale

Title: Ford Professor of Urban Design and Planning

“Take away, for the moment, the identifiable markers of the gay and lesbian experience, and imagine a social protest movement that, throughout the twentieth century, has created an independent urban culture, suffered police harassment, been legally subject to housing and employment discrimination, and, in response, waged a campaign for social justice that has intensified over the past fifty years. Then imagine, that, as planning historians, we have overlooked these experiences. If nothing else, the implausibility of this occurrence marks the gay and lesbian experience as worthy of current attention.”

—Moira Kenney, “Remember, Stonewall was a Riot: Understanding Gay and Lesbian Experience in the City”<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Moira Kenney, “Remember, Stonewall was a Riot: Understanding Gay and Lesbian Experience in the City,” in *Making the Invisible Visible: a multicultural planning history*, ed. Leonie Sandercock (Berkeley: University of California Pres, 1998), 120.

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## Chapter 1. What Sex is this Place? An Introduction<sup>2</sup>

In the Fall of 2008, I was new to both the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and Cambridge, MA. In fact, I hadn't become very familiar with Cambridge, because, after being accepted into MIT's Department of Urban Studies and Planning, I had chosen to re-locate to the North End of Boston with an old friend. After a day of classes, something took me on a longer walk than usual down Massachusetts Avenue and beyond Central Square. As I approached Cambridge City Hall, that Romanesque structure in the middle of converted factory buildings, I noticed an announcement for a "townhall" meeting. In particular, the meeting was being organized by Cambridge's Gay, Lesbian, Bi-sexual, and Transgender (GLBT) Commission and hosted by the mayor herself, Denise Simmons.<sup>3</sup>

As a queer student, I was most intrigued and excited by the thought of a local government acknowledging that its queer residents were indeed a constituency with unique needs. I went home to do my research and discovered that the mayor was openly a lesbian of color. When I arrived at the event a few nights later, I was thrilled to be ushered into the City Council's chambers where the meeting was taking place. What a coup to see queers of all kinds in the seat/s of local power.

But when the meeting started, I was caught off guard once again. Attendees voiced frustrations by a lack of LGBT "community" in Cambridge. Specifically, this translated into too few spaces to be visible to one another and to connect. These

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<sup>2</sup> The chapter title plays off of the Kevin Lynch classic, *What Time is this Place?*

<sup>3</sup> The meeting took place October 22, 2008.

feelings were shared by singles trying to date, as well as families looking to meet one another. Older people complained of the absence of a queer or queer-friendly business directory and of feeling shunned at senior health centers. In a city known to have some of the strongest legal and mayoral support for queer rights, why was there a perceived lack of spaces for queer people? How do spaces foster contact between and inclusion of people anyhow? What is the current status of queer space in cities, and how do queer people feel in different spaces and why?

This thesis was inspired in part by this experience and the questions it created, and it assumes that the spatial inclusivity of a place does not directly correlate with its rights-based claims of inclusivity. Departing from this assumption, this thesis aims to address two important omissions in planning and urban design research. The first is the lack of planning literature on the LGBT population. Since 1998, by my count, three articles have been published in scholarly journals or books by planning academics on the topic of the profession's relationship to the LGBT population as an urban constituency.<sup>4</sup>

Secondly, this thesis attempts to advance a question that has only occasionally been taken up by planners and designers. In a field seeking to influence the shape of the built environment, I'm interested in how people experience space and, from them, what we can learn about how the spaces we create

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<sup>4</sup> These are Ann Forsyth's "Nonconformist Populations and Planning Sexuality and Space: Nonconformist Populations and Planning Practice," Michael Frisch's "Planning as a Heterosexist Project," and Moira Kenney's "Remember, Stonewall was a Riot: Understanding Gay and Lesbian Experience in the City." The relevance of these pieces will be discussed further in Chapter 2.



embody values.<sup>5</sup> In particular, for marginalized groups, how do our buildings and public spaces communicate inclusive or exclusive messages and meanings?

In the introduction to *Sexuality and Space*, the published product of a 1990 Yale Symposium on architecture and gender, Beatriz Colomina asserts that the built environment is inherently representational and thus reflects socio-political attitudes, including those about gender and sexuality:

It is not a question of looking at how sexuality acts itself out in space, but rather to ask: How is the question of space already inscribed in the question of sexuality? Instead, architecture must be thought of as a system of representation in the same way that we think of drawings, photographs, models, film, or television, not only because architecture is made available to us through these media but because the built object is itself a system of representation.<sup>6</sup>

Therefore, this thesis attempts to call into question the history of and contemporary attitudes on planning, design, and sexuality and at the same time ask how queer people experience space in the city. In particular, I am studying the spaces preferred and avoided by queer people in two cities (Cambridge, MA and Kansas City, MO) because I want to explore relationships in the design, management, and spatial characteristics of those spaces in order to suggest how

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<sup>5</sup> My use of the term *space* here is to mean “everyday space.” In the context of this thesis, everyday space is *hetero-normative* space. Michael Warner introduces the term in *Fear of a Queer Planet* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), xxi. “Het[ero-normative] culture thinks of itself 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 production without which society wouldn’t exist.”

<sup>6</sup> Beatriz Colomina, introduction to *Sexuality & Space*, ed. Beatriz Colomina (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1992).

values about sexual orientation and gender identity are embodied in urban environments.

By exploring these dynamics, the goal is to suggest a way of answering the question embedded in my thesis title, “What Would a Non-Heterosexual City Look Like?” This phrase is an homage to Dolores Hayden’s seminal 1980 piece, “What Would a Non-Sexist City Be Like?” in which she asked readers to reimagine how a city might be spatially organized if working women and mothers were considered the primary “clients” of city designers. When I derive this question for my own work it reads: if architects and urban designers were to recognize all queer people – whether young or old; in families, as couples, or singles; living with friends or alone – as a constituency for new approaches to planning and design, and were to stop assuming heterosexuality and heteronormative family structures in planning practice, what could we do?<sup>7</sup> What would it look like? These are the questions that this thesis hopes to impact in the future.

For the remainder of this chapter, I will discuss *who* queer people are and the complexities of studying them as a population. I will present the methodologies of my research and the hypotheses I developed at the outset of this project.

In Chapter 2, I review the few scholarly works on planning and the LGBT population and highlight recent interactions between planning practitioners and

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<sup>7</sup> Dolores Hayden, “What Would a Non-Sexist City Be Like? Speculations on Housing, Urban Design, and Human Work,” in *Gender and Planning: A Reader*, ed. Susan S. Fainstein and Lisa Servon (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2005), 51. Hayden’s original quote reads, “If architects and urban designers were to recognize all employed women and their families as a constituency for new approaches to planning and design and were to reject all previous assumptions about a ‘woman’s place’ in the home, what could we do? Is it possible to build nonsexist neighborhoods and design nonsexist cities? What would they be like?”

queer communities. I frame this literature in the current discourse on sexuality and urbanism (mostly coming from geography departments in Australia and the UK), which is useful for understanding how the relationship between sexuality and the state may be conscripted into macro trends in urban transformation. I examine the contributions that geographers and historians have made in documenting *queer* spaces. Ultimately, I argue that to build on the work of planners, historians, and geographers, and to create a new consciousness for planners around sexuality, we must use the everyday experiences of queer people in urban space to inform a new vocabulary.

In Chapter 3, I develop a framework for evaluating the performance of “sexed space,” partially derived from Kevin Lynch’s *Good City Form* and from cross-disciplinary readings that have theorized about the social meaning of buildings and space. I suggest that all spaces are sexed, in that they represent values about sexual and gender identity. The framework provides a way to describe the performance of spaces identified as queer, queering, and anti-queer.

In Chapters 4 and 5, I present my fieldwork in Kansas City and Cambridge, respectively, organize my research findings within the Chapter 3 framework, and suggest how spatial characteristics exclude and include queer identities. Chapter 6 includes a critical discussion and interpretation of the similarities and differences observed in the research findings in each city.

And finally, in Chapter 6, I compare the research results with my Chapter 1 hypotheses, develop implications for design and planning processes, and suggest directions for future research.

### **A word about a word: *queer***

While the original research in this thesis focuses on the experiences of LGBT people, my use of the word *queer* in the thesis title (and as the primary term in this paper) also reflects a resistance to essentializing the LGBT population or to fixing the fluid spectrum of identities related to non-normative gender and sexual orientations. *Queer* suggests an unraveling of the binaries – man/woman, homosexual/heterosexual – which I believe foster the ways of thinking that lead to [homo]phobias and oppression.

I also mean to employ the power of the word *queer* as a conscious, political “taking back” of a previously derogatory term.<sup>8</sup> Furthermore, the literal meaning of the word *queer*, *weird*, suggests the questioning of what is normal. Because this thesis attempts to see how spaces question hetero-normativity, the word *queer* seems doubly appropriate.

While *queer* can challenge gender and sexual constructs and foster a collective and inclusive identity for sub-populations with a shared experience and history based on intolerance in mainstream culture and fewer civil rights, it also mustn't paint over the very real and divergent struggles of sub-populations within

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<sup>8</sup> First employed in the 1990s by academics and activists.

the L, G, B, T and beyond – including the transgender population, and instances where gender, race/ethnicity, and class intersect with queer identity to create unique experiences. Very specific, fixed identities have their own power in that they can bring attention to acute political and social struggles. Wanting to take from the strength and purpose of each of these terms, I will often use *queer* and *LGBT* interchangeably in this thesis.<sup>9</sup>

When conducting my field work, I asked interview participants how they self-identify and used that term throughout the interview.

### **What do we know about the queer population?**

The queer population is a complex group to study, most conspicuously because there are no complete data sources of the population. It's simply not counted. This is a significant issue for several reasons, including anticipating public health needs, breaking stereotypes about who queer people are, and proving “market demand” for the financing of projects such as LGBT elder housing. Fragmented datasets do exist and begin to paint some picture of who queer people are. In 1990 and 2000, the U.S. Census collected information on unmarried, same-sex partner couples. Additionally, econometric investigations of the General Social Survey from the National Opinion Research Center at the University of Chicago,

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<sup>9</sup> For an excellent and concise overview of this debate and the origins of gay and lesbian, queer, and sexuality and space studies, see: Larry Knopp, “From Lesbian and Gay to Queer Geographies: Pasts, Prospects and Possibilities,” in *Geographies of Sexualities*, ed. Kath Browne, Jason Lim, and Gavin Brown (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2007), 21-22.

conducted by Lee Badgett, have been helpful in obtaining some information on non-partnered queer people.<sup>10</sup>

These datasets have allowed some primary analyses of the class and race/ethnicity of LGBT people. An analysis of 1990 Census data by Lisa Keen and Lyn Stoesen found that the race/ethnicity breakdown of LGBT couples mirrors the race/ethnicity breakdown of the general population. Marieka Klawitter and Victor Flatt's analysis of the Census and the General Social Survey analysis have found that gay men and lesbians earn on average less than heterosexual men and women, although individual lesbians in domestic partnerships earn more than married heterosexual women. From the imperfect information we do have, studies have found that, overall, the popular perception of affluent gays and lesbians has not been borne out by the most systematic research to date.<sup>11</sup> However, this perception persists popularly, sometimes within the LGBT population itself, and within the discourse of the planning profession.

Additional work has been done to estimate the needs of queer youth. Based on a 2007 compilation of surveys, The National Gay and Lesbian Task Force (NGLTF) found that 20-40% of homeless and runaway youth identify as LGBT.<sup>12</sup> A separate NGLTF attempt to count transgender folk in 2009, found that 26% have

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<sup>10</sup> For a full review of the studies referenced in this paragraph and the next, see Ann Forsyth, "Nonconformist Populations and Planning Sexuality and Space: Nonconformist Populations and Planning Practice," *Journal of Planning Literature* 15 (2001): 341-343.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 343.

<sup>12</sup> National Gay and Lesbian Task Force, "Lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender youth: An epidemic of homelessness," National Gay and Lesbian Task Force, [http://www.thetaskforce.org/reports\\_and\\_research/homeless\\_youth](http://www.thetaskforce.org/reports_and_research/homeless_youth).

lost their jobs because of their gender identity.<sup>13</sup> The latter study supports the high poverty rates commonly associated with the transgender population.

Lastly, several recent attempts have been made to survey the LGBT aging population, including a report to be released in June 2010 by AARP, the American Society on Aging, and Services and Advocacy for Gay, Lesbian, Bi-sexual, and Transgender Elders (SAGE). Local groups have conducted their own surveys, including openhouse, a housing, community, and services nonprofit for LGBT seniors in San Francisco.<sup>14</sup> According to the founder of openhouse, Marcy Adelman, “We did a survey that was very enlightening, and primarily what we found is that a higher percentage of LGBT seniors than straight seniors are single, live alone and don’t have children.” These findings have major implications for the services and space needs of the elderly population, since children and spouses are typically the primary caregivers.

In interviews with planners in Kansas City and Cambridge, I found that neither planning department attempts to count or survey its city’s LGBT populations.

A lack of data makes queer people hard to study, but additionally, queer experiences complicate our planning frameworks. The dichotomy of public and private space is often inconsistent with the everyday lives of queers. Queer people are subject to unusual forms of discrimination; rejection by one’s own family may be

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<sup>13</sup> National Gay and Lesbian Task Force, “Preliminary Findings: National Transgender Discrimination Survey,” National Gay and Lesbian Task Force, [http://www.thetaskforce.org/reports\\_and\\_research/trans\\_survey\\_preliminary\\_findings](http://www.thetaskforce.org/reports_and_research/trans_survey_preliminary_findings)

<sup>14</sup> openhouse is spelled with lower-case “o.”

a greater fear than rejection by society at large. Thus, the hallowed privacy with which we associate the home space may provide less safety and privacy around self-expression than public space. Consequently, private space is often carved out of public space. But the opposite scenario can be true, too. Some queer adults may feel the greatest amount of privacy in their own homes and friends' homes and more exposed in the public realm.

Planner Michael Frisch argues that historically, the inversion of public and private space has hindered the ability of the queer community to create institutions of safety, support, and connection. He writes:

The atmosphere of repression also affected the development of lesbian and gay institutions...the development of institutions provides a fixity to otherwise fluid spaces created by just queer uses of public space...creating fixity also requires making public what was private.<sup>15</sup>

This supports the relative lack of queer community centers, for example, in most cities. Neither Kansas City nor Cambridge has one.

Lastly, queer identity is itself inextricably intertwined with other identities, particularly gender, race/ethnicity, and class. Queer people can and do “show up” in families of all demographic types (data previously discussed). This complicates queer experiences, which may or may not include queer as the primary identity. Sexual orientation isn't as visible to the human eye in the way gender or

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<sup>15</sup> Michael Frisch, “Planning as a Heterosexist Project,” *Journal of Planning Education and Research* 21 (2002): 263.



race/ethnicity typically is, and this quality of intentional or unintentional invisibility complicates things further.

## **Research methods and hypotheses**

My fieldwork took place over January and February of 2010 in Kansas City, MO and Cambridge, MA. Each place is the most legally progressive city in its region when it comes to queer rights (although Cambridge is unusually so), and as such I expected to find a diversity of queer people and experiences to inform my research.<sup>16</sup> My intention was not to strictly compare the cities but to capture a broader geographic context for queer experiences in the U.S. Cambridge is very compact, has a restricted urban boundary, and is built out. Kansas City has a looser urban fabric, larger blocks, more underutilized space, and a sprawling urban boundary. Kansas City is also in the middle of the country, an area where, unlike the coasts, documentation of queer histories has not been widely disseminated.

In each city, I first met with the leaders of various queer organizations. They shared context and ideas, and helped me to solicit interviews through their membership networks. I interviewed 15 people in Kansas City and 13 in Cambridge. Each interview lasted between 30 minutes and an hour, and my questions focused on where in the city interviewees felt the most and least comfortable being queer and what those spaces looked like. I encouraged

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<sup>16</sup> By legally progressive, I mean cities that have been the pioneers of legislation around queer rights, including non-discrimination in the workplace, marriage and domestic partnership, and acknowledgement of the value of queer people as citizens through ordinances that support public, queer events.

interviewees to focus on non-residential queer spaces, including commercial, indoor, and outdoor spaces.

At the outset of this project, my hypotheses included the following:

- Queer people in all places utilize a diversity of spaces and spatial networks to create safety and opportunity for connection – spaces outside of a gay neighborhood are just as vital but are often invisible to society at large.
- Spatial networks will differ significantly by age – older queer people will prefer less visible spaces and younger queer people will prefer more visible spaces.
- Spatial networks will differ significantly by class and race/ethnicity – spaces preferred by low-income and minority queers will be significantly less visible to society at large because of assumptions about who queer people are.
- There is always a strong need for queer spaces because of the general invisibility of the queer population. There is a need to be around others who share this identity.
- There is a strong need for queer youth spaces, in particular, because of the unknown likelihood of rejection by one's own family.

Based on interview data and my literature review, I developed a framework for evaluating the spaces that were identified in interviews. I went back to those spaces in each city to identify physical and spatial relationships related to the framework. I felt this was important, because interviewees varied widely in terms of their ability to characterize things in spatial terms. I also interviewed architects and developers of five recently designed queer spaces to see which design considerations took prominence in building intentionally for queer users.

My goal was to be able to use the framework and datasets to characterize the performance of a variety of urban spaces with which queers come into contact, as well as to see trends and differences based on age, gender, and race/ethnicity. This work informed my conclusions.

## Chapter 2. The City Queered: Literature at the Intersection of Planning, Sexuality and Queer Space<sup>17</sup>

In the last ten years, some planning academics have addressed the profession's past and current relationships to the LGBT population as an urban constituency. Of course, planning has always interacted with issues of sexuality, whether by promoting the heterosexual family through the design and provision of housing,<sup>18</sup> targeting heterosexual couples in tourism promotion,<sup>19</sup> or most recently, targeting heterosexual singles through the promotion of formal entertainment zones. Often these engagements are supported by implicit assumptions about the (hetero)sexual orientation and household make-up of those who planners serve. Other times, planners have consciously cleared queer space, albeit in coded terms that emphasize "what" was cleared rather than "whom."<sup>20</sup> Consequently, the identities of sexual minorities are rendered invisible and are silenced in both planning practice and literature. The absence of explicit discourse on sexuality can make challenging heterosexism difficult, but planning academics have begun to address these omissions in various ways through critical readings of planning

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<sup>17</sup> The chapter title plays off of the Spiro Kristof classic, *The City Shaped: Urban Patterns and Meanings Through History*

<sup>18</sup> See Lewis Mumford's "Social Basis of the New Urban Order," in *Culture of Cities* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1940), 465 – 471.

<sup>19</sup> Ann Forsyth, "Nonconformist Populations and Planning Sexuality and Space: Nonconformist Populations and Planning Practice," *Journal of Planning Literature* 15(2001): 354.

<sup>20</sup> "What versus whom" is a useful way of interpreting urban clearance agendas, introduced to me by my advisor, Larry Vale. Examples to follow.

theory, documentation of historical practices, and by linking the extensive work accomplished by queer urban historians and geographers to planning practices.

### **Current Planning Literature**

Planning historian Moria Kenney's 1995 work confronts how the overlooked experiences of LGBT people in the city can be integrated into urban planning history. Kenney's interest is in the collective, grassroots responses of queer people to discrimination as a way of pushing planning "to fully conceptualize on its own terms, the city as activator of social and political empowerment."<sup>21</sup> In her attempt to broaden planning history, she first examines the impact of planning policies on queer populations.

First, city agencies have used entertainment regulations and decency codes to limit queer gathering in public spaces over the last century. For example, in post-prohibition New York, Liquor Authority regulations allowed police to single out and shut down queer bars to create a particular social order.<sup>22</sup> In the 1960s, decency codes were employed to shutter queer establishments during city fairs and events, "to make the city respectable" to outside visitors.<sup>23</sup> These actions were rationalized by claims that homosexuality creates urban dysfunction and that queer lives deprave the image that the city wants to project to an international audience.

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<sup>21</sup> Moira Kenney, "Remember, Stonewall was a Riot: Understanding Gay and Lesbian Experience in the City," in *Making the Invisible Visible: a multicultural planning history*, ed. Leonie Sandercock (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 121.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 127.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 128.

Second, housing discrimination has been even more methodological. A 1989 Harvard Law Review survey found that unmarried queer couples are subject to wide-ranging obstacles to acquiring housing, including “exclusionary zoning laws, restrictive statutory provisions, discriminatory landlord practices, and narrow judicial constructions of the meaning of family.”<sup>24</sup>

And lastly, state public accommodations statutes to protect gays and lesbians weren’t passed until 1984, when California required a dining establishment to allow queer couples to sit in booths reserved for couples.<sup>25</sup> In a contemporary example of a failed public accommodations lawsuit, it is legal to bar queer people from marching in Boston’s St. Patrick’s Day Parade even though the parade utilizes the same public streets year after year.

Kenney, however, is less interested in how planning itself has institutionalized discrimination, and more interested in how political activism against discrimination, and the resulting cultural formation, shapes the form of cities. She believes that these kinds of activities are evidence of future transformations that planners can’t ignore: “planners need to understand this basic territorial shift.”<sup>26</sup>

Doctoral candidate in American history Clay Howard sees the silences around planning and sexuality as having another effect – the disguise of real material concerns as simply cultural matters:

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 129.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 127.

The historical omission leaves the claims made by urban planners, realtors, and federal officials about ‘family life’ in the 1950s without proper context, and, even more significantly it leaves in place an artificial line between the allegedly ‘material’ concerns of housing, redevelopment, and economics, and the seemingly ephemeral ‘culture’ wars over sex and family that continue to shape American politics.<sup>27</sup>

Howard specifically looks at post-World War II housing policies, which limited housing opportunities for non-heterosexuals. These policies explicitly created benefits for heterosexual families (White, heterosexual families), at the expense of other household formations.

Queer war veterans discharged for being “homosexual” were denied generous housing benefits by the VA administration.<sup>28</sup> Additionally, FHA housing loans promoted a very strict form of heterosexuality by defining the ideal mortgagee as a married couple – not singles or two unrelated people – and encouraging character examinations of mortgagees to ensure a “fit” marriage.<sup>29</sup> Thus, the underlying message was that queer people could potentially get around these regulations at the cost of silencing their own sexual identities: “In addition to channeling material resources from queer citizens to straight ones, therefore, government housing authorities also helped make a diverse array of sexual practices invisible.”<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Clay Howard, “Sexurbanization: Metropolitan Development, Urban Renewal, and the Politics of ‘Straightness’ in Postwar San Francisco,” (paper presented at the 13<sup>th</sup> National Conference on Planning History, Oakland, CA, October 15 – 18, 2009), 1.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

Finally, the creation of new housing standards during this period was predicated on the promotion of privacy in homes, including raised window heights and removed master bedrooms. Not only was the goal to promote heterosexuality and pro-creation, but to eliminate the “formation” of homosexuals:

Psychologists and public health experts from the period associated cramped conditions in apartments with mental disorders among children, including homosexuality, and they attributed an upsurge in divorces after the war specifically to a lack of sexual privacy.<sup>31</sup>

Planner Ann Forsyth brings us into the present by addressing the implications of queer populations for current planning practice. Her piece is an accessible literature review of queer studies that relate to the core issues of planning, including neighborhood enclaves, housing, the public realm, and historic preservation.

Forsyth points to the many studies published on queer enclaves, and states that urban sociologists have relied on the immigrant enclave model to understand queer neighborhood formation. However, rarely has this model translated into the incorporation of queer enclaves into city planning documents, the way that immigrant enclaves often are.<sup>32</sup> The one exception has been Chicago, IL, which included the main artery of its historic queer neighborhood, N. Halsted Street, in a citywide ethnic neighborhood streetscape improvement initiative.

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Forsyth, 345.



Forsyth reiterates queer populations' reduced access to housing stock due to zoning definitions of the *family* and the *household* that limit "unrelated" people from living with each other. In addition, she adds that special needs housing for homeless persons, or persons with AIDS, has run up against the Not In My Back Yard (NIMBY) syndrome, preventing the creation of shelters and facilities sometimes disproportionately used by queer people.<sup>33</sup>

In regards to the public realm discussion, Forsyth adds that forms of expression, like public displays of affection, have received "much less attention [by academics], even though it is in fact an important issue for lesbians and gays."<sup>34</sup>

And finally, the movement to preserve sites important in queer history has begun to be discussed, including revising the presentation of existing sites associated with queer people, nominating key queer sites as they become eligible for listing, preserving more recent sites that might be vulnerable to redevelopment, and preserving some sites associated with the history of homophobia, such as mental hospitals.<sup>35</sup> While many queer organizations have begun their own history projects (including in Kansas City), it's unclear how many preservation offices have attempted to include queer sites in their long-range plans.

Lastly, in "Planning as a Heterosexist Project," Michael Frisch locates his work in the literature by arguing that the few works that have addressed sexual orientation within planning have looked at case studies rather than planning's

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 348.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 353.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 352.

role.<sup>36</sup> He says, “I will show how planning discourse advances heterosexuality and suppresses homosexuality through notions such as order, public, family, reproduction, and nature.”<sup>37</sup> Frisch’s is the most direct critique of planning frameworks themselves. While the other pieces build primarily on the important work of queer geographers, historians, and sociologists in documenting the queer urban experience, Frisch locates heterosexism in the some of the most coveted planning texts in the field, including those of Lewis Mumford, Patrick Geddes, and Jane Jacobs.

In his discussion of order/disorder, he quotes early planners like Geddes and Mumford who explicitly linked the goals of planning to the creation of social order by promoting heterosexuality. Within the public/private discourse, Frisch reminds us that Jane Jacobs unselfconsciously documented the closing of public parks where queer people met privately in the 1950s, in order to disburse and later redesign the park space.<sup>38</sup> He concludes that the private use of public space by queer people “challenges our conceptions of the public realm.”<sup>39</sup>

As a result, Frisch argues that an institutional change via an inclusive urban planning is necessary for the creation of long-term urban transformation. Much in

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<sup>36</sup> Michael Frisch, “Planning as a Heterosexist Project,” *Journal of Planning Education and Research* 21 (2002): 255.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 254.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 262.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 264.

the vein of Dolores Hayden, Frisch writes, “in the inclusive project, ‘queer spaces’ might be planned rather than repressed.”<sup>40</sup>

These scholarly works lay the foundation for a new consciousness around planning’s relationship to sexuality, and the mechanisms and processes that have promoted one sexuality over many others. While necessary for documenting the institutionalized heterosexism in planning, much of this literature focuses on planning history. A scan of some recent practices directs subsequent inquiries of planners’ interactions with, and perceptions of, the queer population, particularly around queer enclaves and public space use. It’s helpful to analyze these practices in the context of the current thinking on sexuality and cities in the global economy. These geographers frame sexualized spaces within the “new urban order,” or, the local state as promoter of enterprise (as opposed to its previous role as redistributor of resources).<sup>41</sup>

### **Current Planning Practices**

Recently, city agencies have engaged in issues involving queer enclaves in a variety of ways, including for the purposes of neighborhood revitalization, economic development and tourism, and in response to organic efforts to create a gay district. In Oakland, CA in 2004, a partnership between a city councilman and the Community and Economic Development Agency (CEDA) launched an official effort to establish a gay neighborhood in order to “capture local dollars flowing into San

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 254.

<sup>41</sup> David Bell and Jon Binnie, “Authenticating Queer Space: Citizenship, Urbanism and Governance,” *Urban Studies* 41(2004): 1809.

Francisco” and “improve blighted storefronts and make Oakland more attractive to prospective residents and buyers.”<sup>42</sup> To commence this initiative, CEDA was asked to identify an area with low unemployment and rising homeownership rates. The subtext of the article was that Oakland should want to satisfy its large, but disbursed, gay and lesbian population in order to increase the property tax base without putting a strain on city services.

This case brings up many problematic concerns about public sector perceptions of the queer constituency. Which queer population is Oakland hoping to serve? The middle-class population with no children? Who (both gays and straights) would be displaced? Bell and Binnie suggest that the state production of these kinds of spaces “exclude ‘undesirable’ forms of sexual expression, including their expression in space – for example by reducing the ‘gay public sphere’ to consumption spaces and gentrified neighborhoods only.”<sup>43</sup> The framing of the proposed gay neighborhood in Oakland implicitly excludes transgender folk, low-income queers, and queers with children, while failing to imagine new public spaces that might be used by these sub-populations and beyond, including queer youth.

In 2002, Philadelphia, PA founded the Philadelphia Gay Tourism Caucus, “to promote gay and lesbian tourism to the Greater Philadelphia Region to capture a share of the \$70 billion gay travel market.”<sup>44</sup> The city has aggressively advertised its amenities to queer travelers, including its own gayborhood (gay neighborhood),

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<sup>42</sup> Ryan Tate, “Oakland makes gay play,” *San Francisco Business Times*, March 19, 2004, Industries Section, Print Edition. A 2009 blog piece from the same publication reported that the initiative went nowhere, [http://sanfrancisco.bizjournals.com/sanfrancisco/blog/2009/07/gay\\_neighborhood.html](http://sanfrancisco.bizjournals.com/sanfrancisco/blog/2009/07/gay_neighborhood.html).

<sup>43</sup> Bell and Binnie, 1811.

<sup>44</sup> Philadelphia Gay Tourism Caucus, <http://philadelphiagaytourism.com/>.

through an elaborate website called “Get Your History Straight and Your Nightlife Gay.”<sup>45</sup> Although Philadelphia is positioning itself as LGBT-friendly, the same questions remain. In discussing the construction of the pink economy myth, Bell and Binnie add, “The hype about gay spending power made gay culture ‘sexy’ in a commercial sense, while simultaneously desexualizing it, and the creation of new gay consumption spaces rests on a labor force who may be priced out of participating in those spaces as anything other than bartenders or go-go dancers.”<sup>46</sup> Who is made visible and left invisible by campaigns that reduce queer participation in civic life to consumerism?

Lastly, in Spokane, WA, in 2005, a grass-roots effort to establish “a neighborhood of gay-oriented homes, businesses and nightlife,” made the papers in a town that is otherwise considered conservative.<sup>47</sup> The article, entitled, “Spokane’s ‘creative class’ plans to build a gay district,” refers to the theories of Richard Florida, which suggest cities with high percentages of queer people create diverse places that attract the creative economy.<sup>48</sup> The reporter remarked that Florida’s ideas had influenced recent city planning decisions, including a university district and several arts districts. Again, Bell and Binnie remark, “The role of the state here is to foster spaces of/for consumption, to act ‘entrepreneurially’...sexual ‘others’ are among the groups seen in this formulation as making cities ‘desirable’ – a

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<sup>45</sup> Philadelphia Gay Tourism Campaign, <http://www.gophila.com/pub/campaign/gay/>.

<sup>46</sup> Bell and Binnie, 1814.

<sup>47</sup> Nicholas K. Geranios, “Spokane’s ‘creative class’ plans to build a gay district,” *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, January 15, 2005, Lifestyle Section.

<sup>48</sup> Richard Florida, *The Rise of the Creative Class: and how its transforming work, leisure, community, and everyday life* (New York: Basic Books, 2002). Florida’s famous gay index is based on U.S. Census data, which includes only lesbians and gays in same-sex partnerships.

paradoxical rebranding for groups more used to being labeled as ‘undesirables.’”<sup>49</sup> However, in contrast to the state’s perceptions, queer citizens quoted in the article had the following reasons for wanting to form the district: "Visibility equals freedom; invisibility we have dealt with all our life," and, "It would help youth struggling with their sexuality to realize they don't have to go away to a big city to be gay." My concern in planning practice discourse is that there is a singular notion of how to engage queer people as citizens around sites of consumption and housing – even when queer voices express other priorities. While queer people do need housing and access to the mainstream economy, these strategies essentialize queer people, devalue and make invisible other forms of queer community, and allow more controversial topics around the public realm to go unchallenged. These consequences can be seen in the next example of planning practice.

To turn to a different sort of planning case in which queer sites have been overlooked, the Hudson River Park Act (New York City) has called for the redevelopment of park and mixed-use space along the western edge of Manhattan. The plan includes intensifying the development of midtown piers for commercial use, including Pier 40, which for many queer youth of color, “is the only place where they could go to be openly LGBTQ without the fear of violence they often faced in their schools and homes.”<sup>50</sup> FIERCE, a youth advocacy organization, is fighting the redevelopment plans, which have already begun to systematically limit access to the

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<sup>49</sup> Bell and Binnie, 1809.

<sup>50</sup> FIERCE and Urban Justice Center, “White Paper: Expanding Access to Public Space at the Hudson River Park, March 2008,” FIERCE, [http://www.fiercenyc.org/media/docs/0457\\_FINALwhitepaper.pdf](http://www.fiercenyc.org/media/docs/0457_FINALwhitepaper.pdf).

park by its long-time users. In a March 2009 White Paper, FIERCE described its concerns as such:

Since the 1960's, the LGBTQ community has utilized the Park to create community safety nets and to access services and resources. However, after the establishment of the Hudson River Park Trust, gathering in public space requires the purchase of a permit which a majority of the surrounding community cannot afford. This has made the park an unsafe and unwelcoming space that limits access to only those who can afford it.

Furthermore:

Pier 45 reopened in 2003 with a new 1:00am closing time, higher priced refreshments at new concession stands, and heavily policed public restrooms by privately contracted Parks Enforcement Patrol. These new restrictions, lack of affordable concessions, and increased policing resulted in LGBTQ youth, homeless people, and poor people finding Pier 45 and the waterfront more difficult to access. The current redevelopment of Pier 40 should ensure that the uses and restrictions do not limit the use of waterfront for the surrounding community.

The redevelopment of the park not only threatens access by class means, but it threatens access to community space that is particularly important given the position of many queer youth of color.<sup>51</sup> Whereas the former examples of practice involve harnessing a formula of who queer people are to advance urban economic agendas, this type of practice destroys vital queer communities (that don't fit into this formula) and evicts them from the public realm. Combined, these practices

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<sup>51</sup> Interestingly, FIERCE describes one of the potential negative impacts on *queer* youth of the Pier 40 redevelopment, as "lowering quality of life by restricting *cultural expression* of the community." Culture is applied as the way of defining this particular use of space by sexual orientation, gender identity, and race.

demonstrate the absence of an educated discourse around planning and its queer constituency and the failure to construct an image of how queer people might be present in public space.

### **Queer Space Literature**

Thus far, this chapter has discussed the position of planning academia and practice vis-à-vis queer populations. Geographers and historians have made substantial contributions to documenting the spaces queers have created for themselves over the last century in spite of discrimination in planning and society. A review of this literature is important, both as a source of information for planners, and to conceive what queer space has looked like and what tensions it has produced.

It's hard to talk about queer space without first discussing "the closet," possibly the most powerful contemporary queer space, even though it is a psychological one. The closet not only represents the first "queer space" queer individuals typically experience, but it is a spatial method intentionally (and by default) used by society to isolate queer identity. The closet is encapsulated in many state policies, including the military's "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" dictate.

In a literal sense, the closet is not a place for people but for the items that serve human needs, whether these are clothes and shoes, towel linens, or office and cleaning supplies. The closet is a functional space, but its door is kept shut and it remains in the dark. Metaphors suggest the closet is a place where murderous secrets are kept ("skeletons in the closet"). Architect Aaron Betsky adds, "the closet is the ultimate interior, the place where interiority starts...it contains the building



blocks for our social constructions, such as your clothes...it also contains the disused pieces of your past...both the secret recesses of the soul and the masks you wear.”<sup>52</sup>

Further complicating the meaning of the closet is the right to privacy in one’s own home, which many queer people did not have until the Lawrence v Texas (2003) decision decriminalized private, consensual homosex. Society pushes gay people into the closet, but gay people don’t (or didn’t) legally have the promise of safety that the closet implies.<sup>53</sup>

Most queer people are in and out of this closet space throughout their lives. Even queer people who don’t mask their identities might feel they travel the earth in a portable closet making choices throughout the day about whether to open the door to people who can’t even see that it’s there.

The gay closet is a popular metaphor. It’s familiar to all. But why *this* spatial metaphor? Why coming out of the gay *closet* and not into the *gay world*?<sup>54</sup>

Queer geography really began with the study of the more visible residential concentrations of men in American cities.<sup>55</sup> These studies understood fixed territorializations to be a defining aspect of gay male spaces – concentrations of gay bars, businesses, and homes. Subsequent geographers have been highly divided along claims about gender and spatial formation.

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<sup>52</sup> Aaron Betsky, *Queer Space* (New York: William Morrow, 1997), 16-17.

<sup>53</sup> Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, “Epistemology of the Closet,” in *The Lesbian and Gay Studies Reader*, ed. Henry Abelove, Michele Aina Barale, and David M. Halperin, (New York: Roudedge, 1993).

<sup>54</sup> George Chauncey’s work in *Gay New York* claims that the latter term was frequently used in the 1930s, before the term *the closet* existed. Whereas I’m sure most gay activity throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century has taken place out of mainstream site, the idea that alternative spatial metaphors are possible is valuable for creating new frames of reference.

<sup>55</sup> Gavin Brown, Kath Brown, and Jason Lim, “Introduction, or Why Have a Book on Geographies of Sexualities?” *Geographies of Sexualities: Theory, Practices, and Politics* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2007), 6.

**Figure 1. San Francisco: “Gay residential areas” (left) and “Places where gays gather” (right) show overlapping concentrations in the center of the map, the Castro.**



**Source: Manuel Castells, *The City and the Grassroots: a cross-cultural theory of urban social movements* (London: E. Arnold, 1983), 147-148.**

The geography of female spaces has been contested, with some geographers claiming that lesbians “leave no trace of their sexualities on the landscape”<sup>56</sup> while historians have documented concentrations of lesbians in places like San Francisco’s North Beach district.<sup>57</sup>

Geographic studies in the UK, Brooklyn, and Los Angeles have conceptualized lesbian spaces in various ways. In the UK, these spaces have been described as “clusters of lesbian households amongst heterosexual homes recognized only by those in the know”.<sup>58</sup>

The study of lesbians in Park Slope, Brooklyn called it “the creation of an open identity” even though specific public spaces were highly important: “nearly

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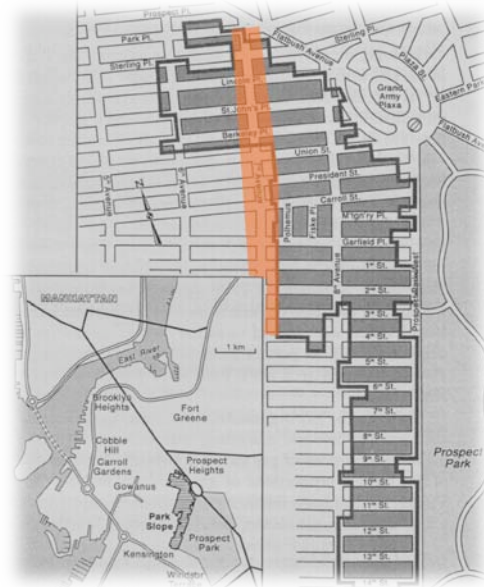
<sup>56</sup> David Bell and Gill Valentine, “Introduction,” *Mapping Desire: geographies of sexualities* (New York: Routledge, 1995), 6.

<sup>57</sup> Nan Alamilla Boyd, *Wide-Open Town: a history of queer San Francisco to 1965* (Berkeley: University of California Press: 2003).

<sup>58</sup> Bell and Valentine, 6.

everyone interviewed mentioned Seventh Avenue on a Saturday or Sunday, seeing lots of lesbians, running into people they know and feeling comfortable”.<sup>59</sup>

**Figure 2. Lesbian neighborhood in Park Slope, Brooklyn: In spite of the large boundaries, the focal point for social exchange was along 7<sup>th</sup> Avenue (in orange).**



**Source: Rothenberg, 170.**

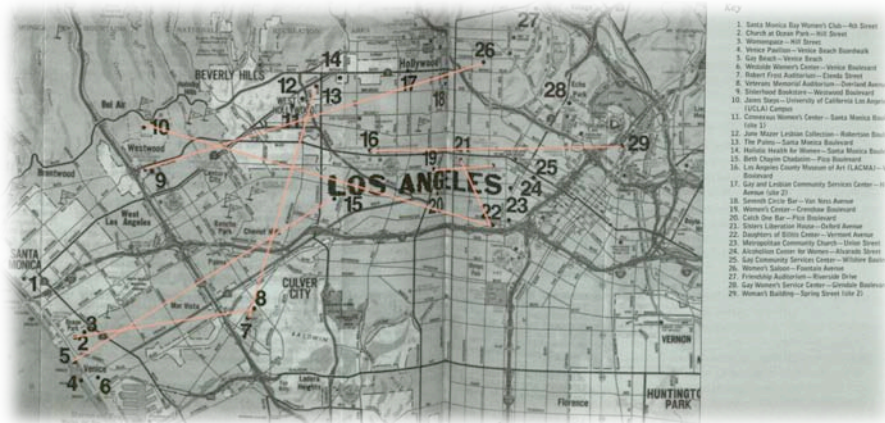
In L.A., lesbian space was characterized as points on a map – a spatial network created by relationships and not necessarily bounded in the traditional sense. The network included, “collective lesbian living spaces, service centers, lesbian-friendly spaces [which also seem to be service centers], recurring event spaces – cruises, parks, camps, resorts – and, businesses – a contracting company, a travel agency, and a bookstore” (words in brackets are my own).<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> Tamar Rothenberg, “‘And She Told Two Friends’: Lesbians Creating Urban Social Space,” in *Mapping Desire: geographies of sexualities*, ed. David Bell and Gill Valentine (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 173.

<sup>60</sup> Yolanda Retter, “Lesbian Spaces in Los Angeles, 1970-90,” in *Queers in Space: Communities, Public Places, Sites of Resistance*, ed. Gordon Brent Ingram, Anne-Marie Bouthillette, and Yolanda Retter (Seattle: Bay Press., 1997), 326-330.

**Figure 3. Lesbian socio-spatial network in LA: No central point, or nodal hierarchy**



Source: Retter, 336-337.

Meanwhile, historians have uncovered mid-20<sup>th</sup> century lesbian neighborhoods in places like San Francisco, which were defined by the spatial proximity of entertainment clubs and rental housing stock:

All of these lesbian clubs in the 1940s and 1950s opened on or near Broadway, at the heart of San Francisco's tourist district...many lesbians rented rooms on nearby Telegraph Hill, and as a result, North Beach became San Francisco's first lesbian neighborhood.<sup>61</sup>

And further still, Buffalo historians have traced the spatial progression of working class lesbian community-building between the 1930s and 1950s, “usually around bars and house parties – in which they could be with others like themselves.”<sup>62</sup>

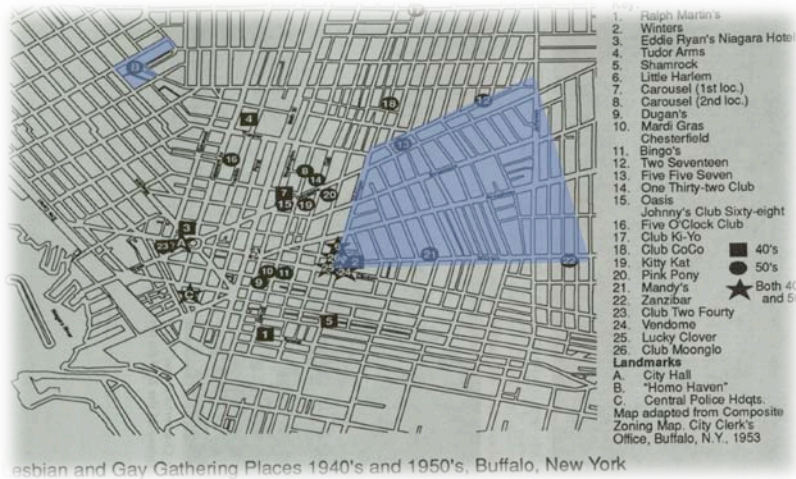
<sup>61</sup> Boyd, 69.

<sup>62</sup> Elizabeth Lapovsky Kennedy, *Boots of Leather, Slippers of Gold: the history of a lesbian community* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 1.

In the '30s, gathering spaces were short-lived and hidden. White and Black lesbians persistently sought out gay and lesbian bars and community house parties, respectively.<sup>63</sup> In the '40s, bars became more spatially concentrated in the downtown area, which was not considered a nice part of town. Also, many White lesbians regularly frequented entertainment clubs in the Black section of town.<sup>64</sup>

In the '50s, gay bars became even more centralized, “located within several blocks of one another, in the downtown section close to the main thoroughfares.”<sup>65</sup> Still, this was considered “a rough and inhospitable area” and lesbians did not “claim it as their own.” At the same time, lesbian bars began to open in the Black part of town; the Black population became much larger in the 1940s, and therefore it was easier for lesbians to be out but remain anonymous.<sup>66</sup>

**Figure 4. Downtown Buffalo: Lesbian-frequented bars become more numerous and concentrated between the '30s and the '50s. Black area (larger) and gay area (smaller) in blue.**



Source: Kennedy, 28.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., 34.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., 40-41.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., 71.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid, 72.

In Buffalo, lesbian gathering spaces were not gay-owned, and their spatial patterns were to some degree at the whim of small business economics. “Just as in the 1940s, lesbians were aware that people ran gay bars because they were lucrative.”<sup>67</sup>

These literatures provide an historical basis for the variety of queer space types and configurations used by queers in cities for defense, to make a living, to build community, to obtain political representation, and to express desire. They also unveil a texture of experiences around gender, race, and class differences. However, studies of queer spaces alone don’t help us understand how everyday space affects queers. In the next chapter, I aim to build on the work of the planning academics, geographers, and historians reviewed in this chapter to develop a new framework for characterizing the everyday spaces that queer people move through and to capture their experiences of the city.

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<sup>67</sup> Ibid., 74.

### **Chapter 3. The Queer Image of the City: Building a Framework for Evaluating Sexed Space<sup>68</sup>**

The purpose of this thesis is to suggest a way in which we might understand how physical space embodies or rejects norms around sexuality and gender identity. I refer to this phenomenon as the “sexing of space.” All space is sexed – meaning that it reflects values about sexual orientation and gender identity which are felt by users of that space.

To create a framework for evaluating sexed space, I’ve employed an iterative process that draws from the perceptions of queer people and the spaces that stand out for them in the context of their queer identities, and at the same time, extrapolates the useful parts from theories (not specifically related to queer identities) that have suggested frameworks for measuring the performance of city form, the meaning of the built environment, and the relationship between space and social order.

This is a new endeavor, and part of this work is to take up where scholars have left off. Eloquently encapsulating the nature of the research needed to be done, Fran Tonkiss’ observations stand out:

Heterosexuality is like the prevailing condition in the urban environment: something one takes for granted, adapts to, dresses for...in order to ‘see’ sexuality at work in space, it becomes necessary to define it in terms of

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<sup>68</sup> Chapter title plays off of the Kevin Lynch classic, *The Image of the City*

certain social facts – locations, populations, practices – that mark out a more or less stable geography.<sup>69</sup>

My purpose, and the purpose of building a framework, is to *see* sexuality and sexual identity at work in space by documenting and organizing the spatial experiences and perceptions of queer people in two cities.

This thesis doesn't presume that most spaces are actively designed to exclude queer people. The more relevant question is why and how in our built environment do we – planners and the general public – take heterosexuality “for granted?” How are people and spaces complicit in this, even if unintentionally? In “Architecture, Space, and Social Order,” Murray Edelman suggests that human kind needs public buildings and spaces to become “condensation symbols” in order to, “rationalize beliefs that justify established privileges and deprivations that cannot easily be changed.”<sup>70</sup> He goes on to argue, “it is as if beliefs that are undemonstrable and doubtful have to be objectified in an entity or concept that then confronts people as reality, repressing the tentativeness and the search for validation that are otherwise characteristic of the play of the human mind.” There is a human desire to see in the built environment a resolution of anxieties around identity, class, and political position, which forms the basis for the construction of the hetero-normal.

Furthermore, spatial meanings are resistant to change because the power of symbolism renders difference invisible. For example, “a typified space comes to

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<sup>69</sup> Fran Tonkiss, *Space, the City and Social Theory: Social Relations and Urban Form* (Cambridge: Polity, 2005), 105-106.

<sup>70</sup> Murray Edelman, *From Art to Politics*, ed. Murray Edelman (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 74.



stand for, and to reinforce, generalized expectations about its occupants' roles...spaces affirm the established social roles by encouraging those who act and those who look on to respond to socially sanctioned cues and to ignore incompatible empirical ones."<sup>71</sup> Thus, without a way to envision spaces – a sunny day at a park, a commute home from work to a loved one, an entertainment district for young singles – that might reflect inclusive values about sexual orientation and gender identity, hetero-normative space stands firmly, if inconspicuously, as a clarifying principle for our interactions in everyday life.

Focusing on queer perceptions, rather than a comparison between queer and “straight” perceptions, is a logical starting place. As people whose identities fall outside of social norms, queer people are more sensitive to the ways in which sexuality and gender identity are encoded in urban space. Everyday, queer people choose whether to edit themselves and their identities based on a variety of cues perceived in the spaces they move through. An evaluation of queer experiences in space draws attention to the “prevailing condition” of hetero-normative space and presents an opportunity to define space on a spectrum of its value of queer identities.

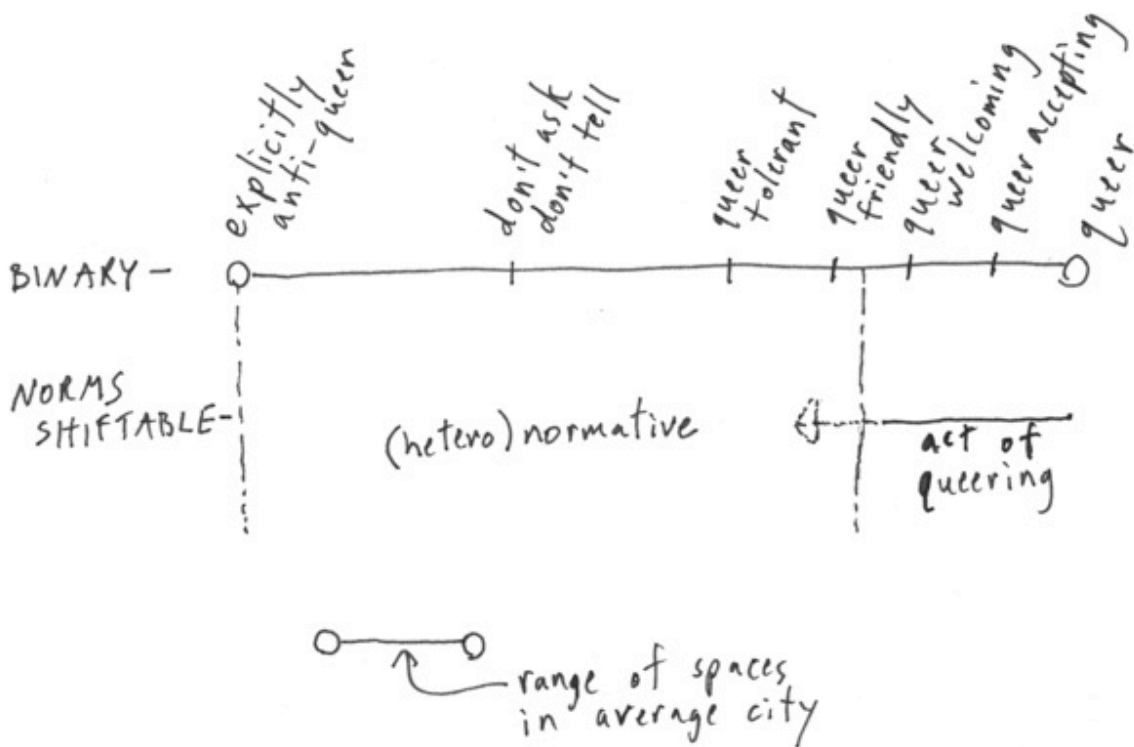
For this purpose, I have developed a spectrum of sexed space with “queer space” on one end and “anti-queer space” on the other. The in-between spaces reflect the various words interviewees used to describe everyday spaces, such as “queer-friendly,” “queer welcoming,” “queer accepting,” “open,” and “queer but

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<sup>71</sup> Ibid., 80.

straight-friendly.” Another interviewee put it this way, “There might be a difference between [queer space] and space in which there’s not a sign, but a sense...that you can go there and you’ll be welcomed.” The variety of ways to describe this in-between space is interesting. Each has a subtly different meaning, but for the purposes of my work in future chapters, I’ve labeled these spaces as queering.

**Figure 1: Spectrum of Sexed Space**



Likewise, not all hetero-normative space is anti-queer, and so this figure shows a broader interpretation of hetero-normative. Finally, the distribution of space along the line reflects the reality that most spaces in the U.S. are hetero-normative.

This investigation seeks to move beyond some of the essential studies of queer sub-cultures, enclaves, communities and historically queer spaces discussed

in Chapter 2. Rather than going directly to particular spaces, my research has started with queer individuals. Through interviews, I have let participants guide me to a variety of spaces that jump out to them on the spectrum of spaces – spaces in which they feel heightened senses of discomfort or comfort and spaces that are simply “open.” In this way, I am also attempting to address Tonkiss’ call to action: “Looking at how gender or sexuality makes a difference to the meaning, the practice or the shape of urban spaces raises the question of what ‘normal’ space would look like; unsettles the taken-for-granted order of the city.”<sup>72</sup>

## **A Framework**

Based on my reading of the literature on “design, politics, and identity” (a neglected area of focus that cross-cuts many different fields), I have developed an organizing framework for analyzing the values around sexual and gender identity embodied in the built environment. In a Lynchian vein, I ask what are the performance dimensions of spaces along which queer people will prefer to achieve particular positions and possibly varying positions within the queer community as a whole? I borrow substantially from Lynch’s work in *Good City Form*, which is so valuable for its aim at comprehensiveness.<sup>73</sup> However, I amend Lynch’s characteristics substantially to fit the narrower dimension of space performance I’m interested in, and by buttressing my framework with useful theories from those who have focused more specifically on power, symbolism, and civic space.

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<sup>72</sup> Tonkiss, 112.

<sup>73</sup> For a full review of Lynch’s ideas, see: Kevin Lynch, “A Theory of Good City Form,” *Good City Form* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1984), 111-238.

**Fit** – Lynch uses the performance dimension fit, to evaluate the relationship between the physical characteristics of spaces and the things people do (or want to do) in those spaces. He asks of city spaces, “how well [does] its spatial and temporal pattern match the customary behavior of its inhabitants?” For queers, desired behaviors might include the ability to express identity in a non-normative way, to exhibit displays of affection, to interact with people like themselves, or to be highly visible or discreet about sexual identity in public. Lynch describes comfort and satisfaction as two indicators strongly associated with fit. He also asks, are there enough of these spaces and are they of a high quality?

Physical elements of space may contribute to or detract from feelings of comfort and satisfaction. The categories of analysis described in Charles Goodsell’s *The Social Meaning of Civic Space* are useful here in identifying these elements, including the “composition of space,” the “design of semifixed features,” and “patterns of decoration and object display.”<sup>74</sup> Based on an in-depth literature review reaching across numerous disciplines, Goodsell identified items he believed to be critical for the analysis of interior civic space. Many of these have applications to the evaluation of sexed space, including spatial volume, degree of enclosure, the formality or informality of decoration, and the connotations of various building materials.

In interviews, I asked people about the places they felt the most comfortable and the least comfortable being queer. Those responses along with my own

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<sup>74</sup> Charles Goodsell, *The Social Meaning of Civic Space: studying political authority through architecture* (Lawrence, KS: University of Kansas Press, 1988), 49.

interpretations of the physical spaces discussed in interviews will inform this component of fit.

**Control** – Control is the performance dimension that addresses the regulation of space and behavior through city codes, private legal contracts, private management of space, and the perpetuation or disruption of norms symbolized in space. In his discussion of control, Lynch disentangles the various rights to space, which is useful for addressing the subtleties of how space is or is not accessed beyond the American notion of ownership. Rights to space include: to be present, to behave freely, to appropriate, to modify, and to dispose. In the public domain, distinguishing between the right to be present and the right to behave freely is particularly useful in thinking about the level of control queer people have in the city. It is important to be able to examine and measure the extent to which a place inhibits or promotes the expression of gender identity and/or sexual orientation in a free manner – whether this means dressing in a way that doesn't conform to gender norms or generally not editing behavior out of fear of harassment.

Lynch asks a number of questions suggesting ways to measure control that I think are pertinent to this study, as well. They include: to what extent do [queer] people have control over the spaces they use, do parts or all of the [queer] population have a place they control, do those who control a place have the motives, information, and power to do it well, a commitment to the place and to the needs of other people in it [including queers]? Specifically, these questions might be further judged by the management policies employed by business owners or the public

sector, the level of one-way visibility in an indoor space, or the options for activities and movement in space.

For my own work, it is particularly useful to examine the kinds of symbols that signal values about sexual orientation and gender identity. Some of these explicit symbols are already familiar to us, such as the rainbow flag and the Human Rights Campaign equality sticker.



Source: The Human Rights Campaign (HRC), <http://www.hrc.org/index.htm>

The lack of explicit signs and symbols in various spaces may say something about a perceived intolerance and a desire to be uneasily read.

Philosopher Nelson Goodman would describe these symbols as denotation, or “labeling,” “naming,” “pictorial representation,” or “application of a symbol.”<sup>75</sup> In “How Buildings Mean,” Goodman differentiated the way that buildings mean from other works of art. In addition to denotation, he grouped three (less explicit) ways of meaning – exemplification, expression, and mediated reference. Because of the often very coded nature of how space is sexed, mediated reference may be a less controversial way to signal meaning. Goodman describes it as, “[indirect] reference by a building to abstruse or complicated ideas.” Goodman’s groupings of the ways buildings symbolize are useful in analyzing whether spaces perpetuate or disrupt norms.

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<sup>75</sup> Nelson Goodman, “How Buildings Mean,” *Critical Inquiry* 11(1985): 644.

**Access** – The last performance characteristic in my framework for analyzing sexed space is likewise a Lynch term, but I will use it for a different purpose. By access, I mean how do spaces signal welcome and to whom? One of the key ideas that came up over and over again in interviews with queer people was the notion of welcoming. Interviewees always articulated their access to space as a function of how welcoming it was. So, when I use access, I am interested in what a space’s “welcome mat” looks like, what is the form of its gateway, what is the performance of its threshold?

In “Architecture and the Poetry of Space,” Louis Hammer argued, “we cannot understand the human significance of a building or its rooms without considering the process of entering and leaving...each action is an encounter with a break in space and with the enclosure of human value.”<sup>76</sup> To evaluate access, I analyze the threshold condition of spaces identified by interviewees. How is the approach to the space designed, and how does it function? How does it alter one’s sense of freedom or constraint, mobility and shelter, or fixity and oppression? Additionally, I look at the space’s connection to the public realm, the number of transition spaces between a site and the street, and the permeability of its borders. As Hammer reiterates, “one simple spatial design and this simple configuration of a doorway makes values

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<sup>76</sup> Louis Hammer, “Architecture and the Poetry and Space,” *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 39(1981): 382.

possible, indeed suggests and invents them.”<sup>77</sup> Additionally, thresholds can be sites in which different identities engage and learn from one another.<sup>78</sup>

In summary, this organizational framework will employ fit, control, and access to measure the performance of a variety of spaces in my two case study cities. Spaces will exhibit varying degrees of fit depending on how well they facilitate participants behaviors or allow participants to adapt them to more satisfying uses; varying types of control exercised in diverse ways by different groups; and heightened or diminished levels of access, welcoming, and interaction. I will apply this 3-pronged framework to the districts, institutions, commercial spaces, and landmarks identified in interviews. The goal is to be able to convincingly characterize the performance of space along various points of the sexed space spectrum.

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<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

<sup>78</sup> Stavros, Stavrides, “Heterotopias and the Experience of Porous Urban Space,” in *Loose Space: Possibility and Diversity in Urban Life*, ed. Karen A. Franck and Quentin Stevens (New York: Routledge, 2007), 178.



## Chapter 4. Queercollage: Finding sexed spaces in Kansas City<sup>79</sup>

### Queer Kansas City – Brief Historical Context

Queer activism and culture has a significant, if lesser known, history in Kansas City.<sup>80</sup> The area’s Phoenix Society for Individual Freedom was one of only a handful of American organizations to be active in the homophile movement of the 1950s and ‘60s. The Society published a monthly magazine called *The Phoenix* and hosted the first National Planning Conference of Homophile Organizations (NACHO) in 1966.<sup>81</sup>

In the late 1970s, the presence of gays and lesbians in the city’s neighborhoods became more visible and was in part associated with the historic preservation movement to buy homes and fix them up. Their presence was widely distributed, but they tended to settle between downtown and the Plaza – near queer entertainment areas.<sup>82</sup>

In the early ‘90s, the mayor agreed to create a temporary Commission on Gay and Lesbian Concerns. As a result of this commission, queer activists proposed a number of recommendations to the mayor regarding “invisibility,” “discrimination”

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<sup>79</sup> The title plays off of the Colin Rowe and Fred Koetter classic, *Collage City*

<sup>80</sup> Population: 435,825 (metropolitan: 2 Million) | 65% white | 8% foreign-born | 25% enrolled in K-12 | Most represented age range: 25 to 34 (16%)

<sup>81</sup> Research in conversation with Stuart Hines, curator of the Scoop Phillips Collection at the Gay and Lesbian Archives of Mid-America (GLAMA), Le Budde Special Collections, UM-KC Libraries

<sup>82</sup> According to Bradley Wolf, Preservation Planner for the Kansas City, MO Landmarks Commission

and “violence.”<sup>83</sup> One of the key recommendations around invisibility was for the mayor to support Gay Pride week by “accord[ing] an official proclamation just as other diverse groups are recognized.”

**Figure 1. Local queer magazine cover; picture taken at base of Liberty Memorial where the 1979 gay pride march started and ended**



**Source: Scoop Phillips Collection, Gay and Lesbian Archives of Mid-America**

In particular, the memo described the significance of the Gay Pride space as, “the major annual opportunity to affirm positive self images and self esteem” and “the major annual opportunity to educate the city about who gays and lesbians really are and promote understanding.” In recommendations to “Other Governmental Organizations,” the memo again pointed towards the impacts of invisibility on queer youth and complimented the work of the group, Passages (still operating today), in creating a space for queer youth to access information, services, and community.

Also in the ‘90s, a lesbian enclave called Woman Town was formed between 25<sup>th</sup> and 31<sup>st</sup> Streets and Gillham and Troost. A couple living in the area jump-

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<sup>83</sup> “10/1/91 Draft Recommendations from Civil Rights Commission to Mayor and Other Governmental Organizations,” Scoops Phillips Collection, GLAMA

started the initiative by advertising nationally in *Lesbian Connection*.<sup>84</sup> Women from all over the country, including the coasts, came to live in a community of women. At one point, more than 100 lesbians were associated with Woman Town.<sup>85</sup> The movement focused on the purchase and rehab of old homes spread out across the neighborhood. While Woman Town failed as an organized effort within a couple of years due to in fighting, there are still women who move there through word-of-mouth.

In 1994, the *Kansas City Star* ran a three-part series on the queer community called “Speaking Out.”<sup>86</sup> Of Kansas City as a queer space, the reporter wrote, “People who don't feel they can reveal their sexuality in a small Kansas town or an Ozarks village come first to Kansas City's bars on weekends and frequently move to the area for good. Kansas City, especially Midtown, is a place where gay people can live comfortably.” But the article also revealed a more nuanced and dynamic sexing of space in Kansas City, “Kansas City is big enough for people to revel in their homosexuality at night and then stash that part of themselves back in a closet at dawn.” A queer sports team made the following comment about being out in Kansas City, “Early in the day, you might see men kissing men and women kissing women, but later in the afternoon when we see other teams showing up, we

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<sup>84</sup> A bi-monthly, free magazine that seeks to create a worldwide forum of news & ideas for, by, and about lesbians

<sup>85</sup> According to a Karen West, who moved from Monterey, CA to participate in Woman Town in 1991

<sup>86</sup> Scott Canon, “Midwestern oasis, but no gay paradise Kansas City's lesbians and gay men long have been mostly invisible to the surrounding straight majority. Now they are...speaking out,” *Kansas City Star*, March 20, 1994, Section A.

generally don't show any affection. We don't want other people to feel uncomfortable.”

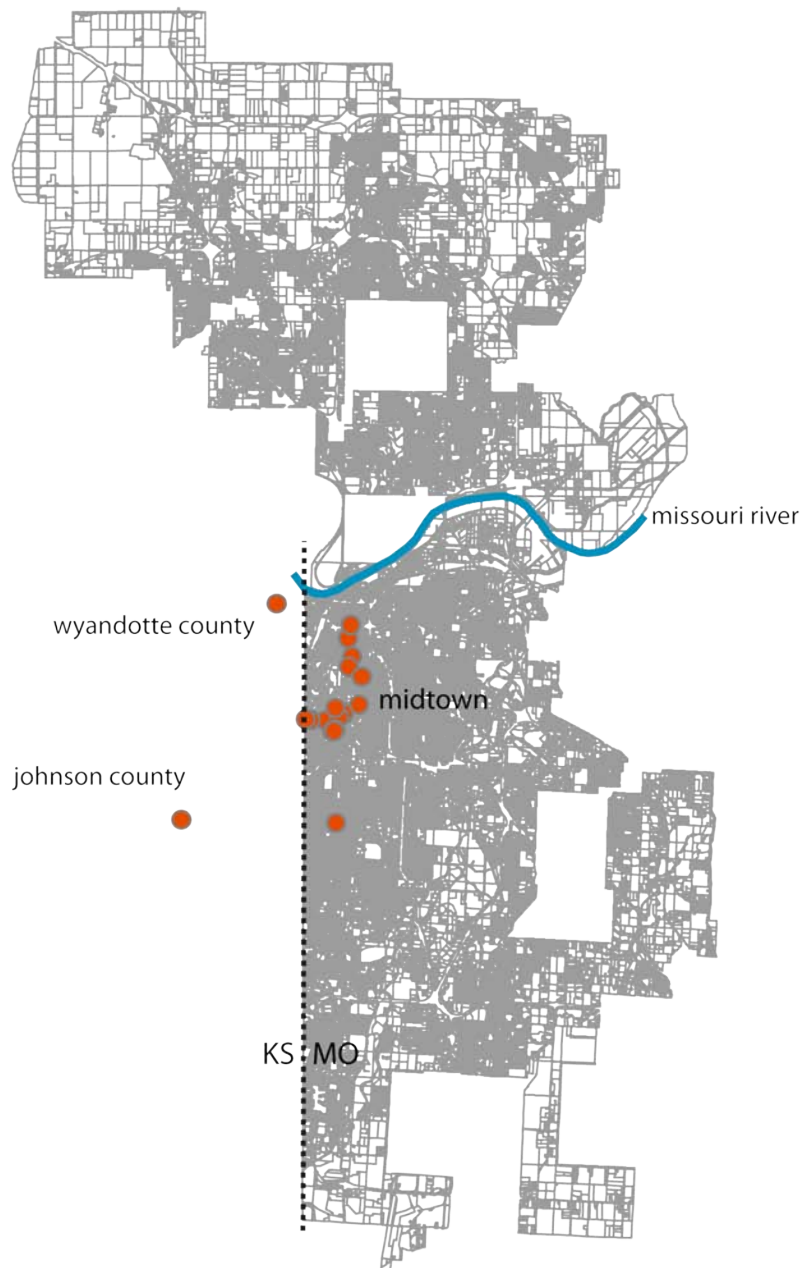
More recently, in 2006, Kansas Citians elected Jolie Justus, a lesbian, to the Missouri State Senate. And in 2008, the city became one of only 100 local jurisdictions to include gender identity among the protected classes of its employment discrimination prohibition law. Sexual orientation had been included many years before.

Much of Kansas City's activity and legal progress, however, is not felt outside of its jurisdictional boundaries. The State of Missouri has not passed employment non-discrimination protections for gay, lesbian, bi-sexual or transgender people, meaning that it's possible to be fired for being queer. It was also one of four states in which the landmark *Lawrence v Texas* (2003) ruling had a direct impact in overturning all sodomy laws that criminalized consensual sex between same-sex adults acting in private. Lastly, Missouri is one of several states in which a constitutional amendment was passed in the 2004 elections to strictly define marriage as between one man and one woman.

In addition to drawing attention to the history of queer people in a mid-western city, this short introduction points to some dynamics and tensions around place-claiming and invisibility, gender and age factors, and everyday experiences that include both queer and closeted space. It also suggests the importance of symbolic spaces, the significance of the Midtown area, and the relative significance

of Kansas City in a regional context. My fieldwork further explores these spatial, political, and demographic dynamics and others.

**Figure 2. The Kansas City Context**



**Source:** Created by author. GIS data provided by University of Missouri Kansas City (1 in. = 5.5 mi.) | The grey areas show the parcel outlines for the entire Kansas City jurisdiction. Much of the area north of the river has been recently annexed and is used for the airport and large office parks. Downtown is just south of the river. The orange dots are all of the spaces identified in interviews (queer, queering, and anti-queer) – their relative proximity is evident.

## Fieldwork

In Kansas City, I was aware of several formal queer organizations through which I hoped to access interviewees. I met with leaders of each of these groups to learn more about the spaces they've tried to create in Kansas City for queer people in addition to having them solicit their memberships on my behalf. The groups included: The Kansas City Gay and Lesbian Community Center (a group that creates programming for the LGBT community)<sup>87</sup>, Passages (a dedicated space in a church that operates a queer youth night twice a week), KC Equal (a burgeoning metro-area group focused on queer youth advocacy and supporting Gay Straight Alliances (GSAs) in schools)<sup>88</sup>, KCYoungPride (a centralized listserv to organize social events for 20- and 30-something queer people), KCMaturePride (a centralized listserv to organize social events for the 40+ queer population), and the newly founded Gay and Lesbian Archive of Mid-America (an attempt to preserve the history of the LGBT community in the Kansas City area). My efforts to reach out to Latino Pride and Black Pride were unsuccessful much to my disappointment.<sup>89</sup>

I did not conduct intercept interviews, with the exception of my interviews with youth between the ages of 18 and 20 who attend Passages. Rather I used these formal networks to solicit interviewees, and they had to respond to me with an interest in participating. In addition to my fact-finding meetings with the

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<sup>87</sup> The "Center" operated a community space in Westport for a brief time in the 2000s. A couple of years ago it made the decision to close the space based on budgetary concerns, and to focus on programs across the city instead. The space was also not ADA-accessible.

<sup>88</sup> An important concern that I wasn't able to address in this thesis is the spatial mismatch of GSAs. A KC Equal representative told me that all of the GSAs are in the suburbs – particularly interesting given the centrality of the Midtown area and discomfort with the suburbs expressed by interviewees.

<sup>89</sup> I will discuss methodological concerns in the concluding chapter.

leaders of these various groups, I was able to interview 15 queer people in Kansas City.<sup>90</sup>

*Prevailing Conditions: Hetero-normative space*

Overall, interviewees in Kansas City felt a wide range of comfort-levels in hetero-normative space. Differences seemed to have little to do with demographic characteristics and much more to do with past experiences in spaces.

Many respondents felt some level of comfort in hetero-normative space, but with reservations, particularly reflected in editing or tailoring behavior around a date or partner or when alone. Comments included:

- “I’m comfortable with my sexuality, I just let it out...at the same time there are some places when I’m on dates and my date wants to hold my hand and I’m like ‘ehhh;”
- “I never feel uncomfortable in the sense that I’m going to be hurt...I feel uncomfortable in the sense that I don’t necessarily feel welcome there....there’s certain places where if people think you’re gay it’s fine....if you actually say you’re gay it’s not....I never hide myself but I don’t necessarily flaunt myself either...I’ve worked too hard to get where I’m at;” and
- “[I tend to tailor my behavior in most places] not so much in the Midtown area but if I were going to drive out to Wyandotte County to shop or out to the ballparks...I become less engaged with my partner...I perceive that the

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<sup>90</sup> See summary of interviewee demographics and recalled spaces at end of chapter.

behavior would be frowned upon...I have been called out in south Kansas City while shopping in a grocery store with my partner.”

Spatially, these comments highlight discomfort with certain places, particularly two adjacent counties in Kansas (one urban, one suburban), and sites such as ballparks. The first commenter later told me his comfort zone for public displays of affection was limited to Crown Center and the Plaza (shopping centers at each end of the Midtown area).

In another interview, one respondent described the transition from hetero-normative space to queering space. She said, “As soon as I leave the medical center [I feel more comfortable]....I’m not being my professional self now....this is where I’m going to be myself.” This interviewee perceived work space as embodying values that do not affirm her identity as a lesbian.

On the other hand, two respondents at opposite ends of the age spectrum felt predominantly comfortable in hetero-normative space, saying, “Well, most places I think I feel comfortable...I have to look at that backwards...there are places I *don’t* feel comfortable,” and, “With the exception of a few places, I don’t feel intimidated about expressing my sexuality.”

For those who are at the beginning of the journey to understand their sexual orientation and/or gender identity, describing everyday experiences in hetero-normative space is not even possible yet to do. When asked of a young man in his 20’s about the places he felt most comfortable being gay, he responded, “I’m gonna have to answer I don’t really know on that...as I said I just accepted myself last

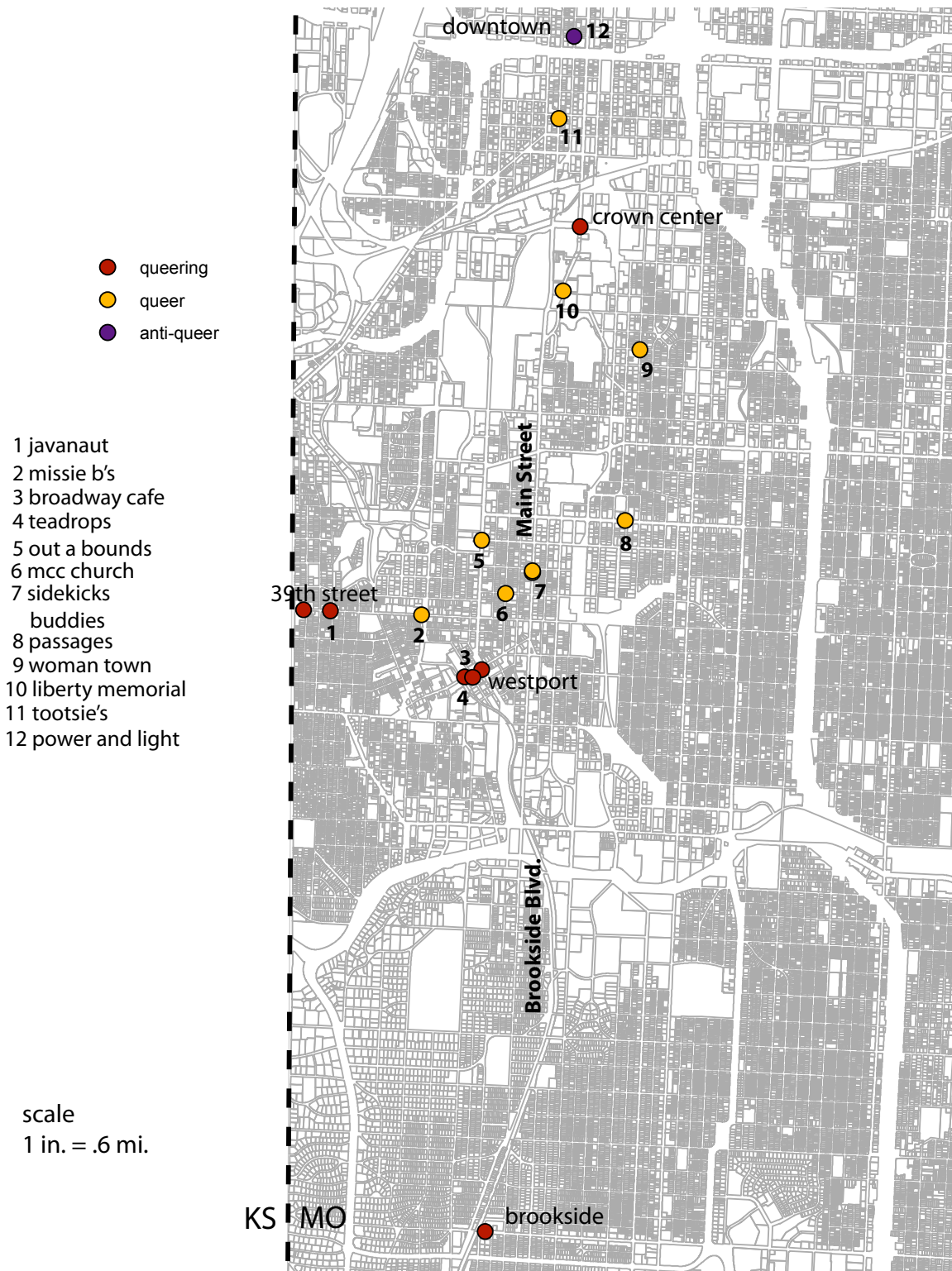


summer...so really I don't have the experience." Implied is that this young man's public identity still conforms to the hetero-normative environment around him.

These interview responses begin to reveal aspects of the queer experience in the public realm. They suggest that queer identity and relationships are often in conflict with the definition of public space in Kansas City.

**Figure 3. Locating Queer, Queering, and Anti-Queer Spaces in Kansas City**

Source: Created by author. GIS data provided by University of Missouri Kansas City



## *Queer Space*

Passages | Out A Bounds | Missie Bs | Sidekicks | MCC Church | The Fox

In Kansas City, queer space has been carved out in several places, most predominantly in bars and churches.

Queer bars in Kansas City range from a bistro, which in a class-conscious manner calls itself “the premier gay bar in Kansas City,” to a sports bar, to a handful of “late night” bars with more performative aspects including drag shows and country-western dancing, to at least one bar hidden south of the city in the suburbs. Bars were attractive to both men and women of a variety of ages, but the interview data show that some African American queer bars were probably not included.

Perhaps surprisingly, many queer spaces are created in churches, particularly for more vulnerable populations, including the queer youth space, Passages, which meets in a Methodist church, and a monthly support group for transwomen at a Brookside church. The MCC Church is itself a queer (or straight-friendly) church that also provides meeting space for many organized queer groups in Kansas City. The significance of church space to the queer community goes against popular associations of organized religion with anti-queer sentiments. However, church space may be filling a void in Kansas City for safe, cheap, civic space to hold a variety of group meetings.

## Fit

Queer bars and church spaces were recalled by several interviewees for the level of safety, acceptance, and human connection they provided. One respondent named “gay bars and gay-friendly churches” as the “places that are very safe but it’s mainly because I know they are gay-owned or gay-friendly places.” Another described queer bars as the “general meeting place for those that are alike...I go there to meet people rather than coming with my friends.” Particularly for the trans population, “Gay bars are incredibly accepting...at the beginning, they’re generally only comfortable in the bars.”

Church spaces were identified as safe places for community organizing, connection, and resources. A younger man, struggling with his sexual orientation added, “I come for the information, friends, it’s all very important...there’s just wonderful stuff here...cause I recently came to terms this summer, so I’m still just kind of at the beginning.” An older man who had been out for just the last 5 years said, “I go there because they’re very gay friendly...and I’m involved in several [LGBT] organizations in the city and we are all currently holding our meetings there.”

Bars were in highly accessible locations, typically in re-used former retail sites on major corridors. Public transportation stops were often nearby. Churches were also accessible, but typically a couple of blocks away from a transportation corridor and in a residential area.

**Figure 4. Queer bars Missie Bs (left) and Sidekicks (right); on primary roads, public transportation out front**



The institution of the church may convey a level of protection that more anonymous buildings don't. According to one respondent, "The fact that it's [Passages] at a church says something. I definitely would have to say that that contributes [to my feeling of safety]." Another respondent put it this way, "And the other thing that makes it feel very comfortable is the main purpose of the church – to make people feel a commitment to faith – is all-encompassing and welcoming to all walks of LGBT life....and I think that makes people feel very comfortable..even if you're not a big believer in religion, you feel a spirituality there that is very positive towards gay people, which you don't find a lot of other places."

Inside, queer spaces tended to be highly informal. A respondent described one bar, as a "great laid back atmosphere... a very casual place, no pompous attitudes." Bars varied to some degree in their aesthetics. Out A Bounds was very matter-of-fact with little decoration. Missie B's was also casual but with an edgier, more eclectic aesthetic. The bars had a lot of irregular, broken up spaces to get away and talk. Church spaces also had very stripped down flexible meeting spaces separated from the formal sanctuary. When speaking of the MCC Church, one

respondent said, “The variety of sizes of the different rooms that are available, and that we’re able to use any of them...allows [social interaction] to happen.”

Bar spaces also elicited criticisms. In particular, one regular patron of Sidekicks was highly dissatisfied by the space’s lack of windows, and suspected liquor licensing laws were attempting to render queer bars invisible. Another interviewee was turned off by some of the late-night bars in Midtown. Although she had spent time at Missie B’s when they had a “First Saturdays” night for women, she disliked the dirty bathrooms and felt unsafe leaving the bar at night.

### Control

There are high levels of queer control in queer spaces, because queer people tend to be the majority, managers, employees, and participants in those spaces. Said one interviewee who was a frequent visitor to the MCC Church, “Any LGBT organization in town has access to that space based on availability...the church itself is all-welcoming, but it’s very heavily LGBT....for the actual services my guess is that the crowd is 70% gay and 30% non-gay.” According to the current Pastor, who is a gay man, “We knew that was going to be the case, especially when the community center decided not to stay in their space...we purposely positioned ourselves to say we’re going to help out while the community center goes through their process, and we want the community to think of us first as being the place of safety.”

The bar spaces, with the exception of Sidekicks, maximize user control through windows with one-way visibility and double exposures. A respondent said,

“I spend most of my time near the booths against the wall, there’s a step up and I can see outside through big windows,” and, “[I stand] usually by the tall tables, that way you can watch the dance floor...see if anyone’s dancing.” Viewing spots were important to interviewees.

**Figure 5. Facades of queer bars: opaque glass (Bistro 303 and Out A Bounds) and very few windows (Missie Bs and Sidekicks); facades close to street**



Generally, queer spaces did not use explicit symbols to denote themselves as queer or queer inviting to the public. However, there was a subtle range of symbolism among spaces. Sidekicks was the most explicit; it is painted bright red, has two rainbow flags flying at each end of its façade, and a rainbow neon boot sign. Missie Bs and Out A Bounds employed subtle signifiers, such as a poster that suggests queer musical theater, understated neon rainbow lights placed in a

window on the less trafficked side of Out A Bounds, and the Out A Bounds name itself (a spatial metaphor), which suggests its function as a sports bar, but one that doesn't play in the mainstream "bounds." The nights that Passages meets, a simple orange cone is placed in the back driveway of the church.

There are also no explicit cues when approaching the MCC Church that might label it a queer space. However, the MCC Church name (within the Protestant Christian denomination) is a signifier of specific welcome to the LGBT population, although according to one respondent, "The difference is the extent this church goes [in terms of its focus on LGBT]."

Many queer spaces are "hidden in plain sight." When an older woman spoke of the Fox, she said, "There are no signs there that this is the Fox and there are no signs that this is a gay bar..so you kind of have to know the Fox and know what you're looking for...so it's kind of hard to tell people where it is and that's kind of sad...not even one [sign] on the door...there are many people out there that are still *very* closeted, so this gives them a lot of protection I think."

#### Access and relationship to public realm

Queer spaces were highly enclosed, and they created a rigid boundary between outdoor and indoor space. For some queer people, this disconnection from the public sphere creates a separate space in which "non-conforming" behavior is okay. As one put it, "[There are] no restrictions on behavior at all...you can hug, kiss, or flirt with a guy, you don't have to act a certain way..." and "people are holding hands all over the place." When one respondent was questioned about how



transwomen are perceived at a primarily male bar, she answered, “the folks that go there just want to be themselves and have a good time.” The possibility of expression and acceptance outweighed differences in gender in several queer spaces.

When moving from outside to *inside* particular church spaces, many respondents felt heightened levels of comfort, the ability to be oneself and to be treated with respect, “When I get inside most definitely...being detached from the public...definitely separate...I would say that...I just become me...that’s pretty much it...just be me” and “my comfort level is always pretty high...but once I get to the sidewalk leading up the church I feel very comfortable...once I get in the door I feel 100% comfortable...I feel 100% positive there, because it’s so welcoming...we’re all treated the same there.”

MCC Church and the Passages space had two different entrances, which reflected their respective relationships to the public realm. Passages was entered from the rear, which is surrounded on two sides by a gated driveway. Even though Passages is in a church, the act of entering in this way is completely different than the typical religious procession. The back door leads to a staircase that descends into the regular meeting space. There’s a sense of being swallowed up into a place of safety.

MCC Church’s main entrance itself was very relaxed in comparison to formal church entrances. The entryway leads you into a neutral space between the church building and the administrative building of the structure. It’s set back from the

street, and a very wide entrance path connects the sidewalk to the doorway, creating a level of openness to the public.

**Figure 6. Passages entrance (top left) from back of building, orange cone placed in drive way on meeting nights; Formal entrance into church (top right); MCC Church entrance (bottom left), casual with strong connection to sidewalk; MCC signage (bottom right)**



As mentioned before, the bars were located on highly visible commercial strips, and their façades are not set back from the sidewalk. This spatial characteristic has two consequences. First, close contact with the public realm may also increase the risk of vulnerability, making very opaque façades a requisite for safety. One interviewee recalled, “I’ve had friends who have been verbally harassed outside of the bar...someone yelled ‘fag’...and that doesn’t happen when

you're inside." Each bar had an attached parking lot, which reduces the time it takes to move from one safe space (the car) to the next (the bar).

Secondly, if queer bars are navigating a terrain of being outwardly visible and inwardly secluded, that visibility at least can also create a positive public symbol of queer presence. A younger interviewee said, "I notice sometimes when we're driving over here there's like that Buddies gay bar and that's kinda near there....and sometimes you see the gay pride flag in some shops...and it's just kind of nice to see that that's there...there's some gay community."

### *Queering Space*

Teadrops | 39<sup>th</sup> Street | Crown Center | Javanaut | Brookside | Westport

Queering spaces existed in coffee shops and in several commercial districts in Kansas City's Midtown area in addition to Brookside, a more suburban neighborhood in the southern part of the city.

The positive feelings of interviewees who talked about queering districts were shaped by the visibility of other queer people, the visibility of alternative shops and people, feeling accepted while not having to act less queer, and the ability to be physically affectionate with a partner without being called out.

The two coffee shops most identified in interviews shared some physical similarities but also had some differences. The districts included an interesting range of urban, suburban, and midtown spaces. They also shared similar characteristics albeit via slightly different performance characteristics. First, I compare the establishment scale spaces and then the district scale spaces.

## Establishment Scale

### Fit

Coffeeshops were strongly favored by queer people in their 20s and early 30s. Many coffeeshops were almost thought of as a home away from home – respondents described them as comfortable and diverse places they liked to be with intimate friends and significant others. Coffeeshops that were identified in interviews were located in the queering Westport and 39<sup>th</sup> Street areas. This most certainly added to their appeal and access to queer patrons.

Interviewees often discussed the aesthetics of coffee shop spaces for contributing to the creation of a comfortable, relaxing environment. Particularly the use of soft materials as opposed to metal was associated with these feelings. Respondents said, “I feel more at home in places that aren’t really fancy...it’s not an intimidating place....it’s old walls, old floors, local art work around...” and, “the [warm] colors there are great.”

Javanuat’s interior space was divided into a downstairs and upstairs environment. The downstairs consisted of two larger rooms with a variety of small tables and sofas. Said one respondent, “I love to go the coffee shop with my girlfriend, sit on the couch with her, and drink, and kind of cuddle....I’m pretty open, and I’ve been told I talk too loud sometimes....” The same respondent said, conversely, some of my friends like to talk more privately...so if I have a shy friend I suppose I go upstairs, because there are smaller rooms to give more privacy...”

Javanaut had high ceilings to create volume but its layout was cellular. There were lots of spaces for privacy.

The interior of Teadrops was also described as creating options for its users. One interviewee said, “I think it offers a variety for people depending on what you want to go there for...the benches and tables are lined up against the wall for people who just want to tuck away with a book or with their laptop.... my girlfriend and I go there, we’ll sit down and have a cup of tea and play scrabble for an hour.” However, the Teadrops structure was nearly transparent with two outdoor walls covered much in glass. Therefore, the space was highly visible and created little distinction between itself and public space.

### Control

“I feel at home...I don’t know what it is inside of my head...I get this way in coffee shops...I just always feel like it’s my territory and I can be as gay as I want.”

Respondents described the general diversity of coffee shops as contributing to a comfortable atmosphere. One respondent summed up the diversity effect as such, “You get a lot of art students in there, wearing grunge, and they don’t look preppy...I guess what I’m saying is that I don’t feel like the actual definition of queer when I’m walking in there, because there’s just a variety of people.” Another respondent enjoyed the mix in sexual identities, as well. She said, “It’s very comfortable and there’s a variety of people there...it’s not just a *les* coffee shop or tea house.” However, coffee shops generally lacked racial or ethnic diversity.

The management decisions of coffee shops sent very strong signals about the queering of these spaces. One interviewee commented, “It’s the employees that work there...they’re just really nice to everybody.” Many respondents were highly conscious of the power of managers to explicitly or implicitly restrict users’ behavior. One respondent directly stated, “A worker has the power over me...[ie.] if a bouncer is giving me weird looks, we’re not equals.” She added, “A lot of times the only homophobia that bothers me is when the workers in establishments are homophobic...like if I go to a bar and people are looking at me weird, whatever...but if the staff are looking at me, that’s when I get really mad.”

Nothing explicitly denoted coffee shops as queering. This disappointed one respondent. She said, “I *love* it when they have an HRC equality thing in their window...I like to know that the staff will be held to a good standard because they have that in their window.” Queer signs and symbols not only make spaces visible, but they can act as “quality control” for promoting new norms around sexuality and space.

#### Access and relationship to public realm

Compared to queer spaces, coffee shops had a more porous relationship between the interior and the public realm. They also had more transitional spaces between the sidewalk and the establishment. Javanaut was described for often having “lesbians sitting outside on the porch.” The porch acts as a semi-public space between the coffee shop and the street. Teardrops was described like this, “The way they have it set up, there’s seating outside if you want to sit on the patio

or the sidewalk, there's sofas inside, there's tables and benches inside." Common furniture makes it more inviting to move in between the indoors and outdoors.

**Figure 7. Coffee shops: Javanaut (left) set back from street, fenced in patio creates semi-public buffer between street and entrance; Teadrops (right) patio space recessed into building and highly transparent façade creates loose boundary between indoor and outdoor**



Coffee shops were much less enclosed than queer spaces. The doorways of both coffee shops stayed open during store hours in warm weather. Teadrops door was framed by two large pieces of glass. Javanaut had a more protected but equally welcoming approach.

**Figure 8. Doorway in Javanaut (left) addressed by counter and community fliers; Entrance into Teadrops (right) surrounded by glass; recessed entrance used as a lingering space**



These characteristics created greater opportunities for interactions to take place across thresholds. Particularly in Westport, the visibility of queer people at

coffee shops seemed to spill out into the sidewalk. This presence of bodies is perhaps a mechanism for appropriating space and asserting control.

### District Scale

#### Fit

Crown Center is a commercial, shopping, and residential area located at the southern edge of downtown Kansas City. It was constructed in the late '60s and early '70s as an experimental "city within a city." One respondent said, "I feel comfortable there because if you pay enough attention you can tell there are people just like me there, we're starting to come out more and more."

Crown Center has a strong symbolic and spatial link to the nearby Liberty Memorial and to queer bars on Main Street. Liberty Memorial is the site of the annual gay pride event. As a young interviewee put it:

When I go to Crown Center, on my left I see the area where gay pride is and the Liberty Memorial, I keep going, there's a park on the left...I turn right on Main, and I see a line of gay bars...that's the site where the first night of gay pride is, its called street blast; I hear a lot of laughter, everybody is so happy, you're around people just like you, a lot of people holding hands, stuff I never see, I just wish it would expand but I guess you can't always get what you wish for.



**Figure 9. View of Liberty Memorial from Crown Center**



Crown Center was the most enclosed of the queering districts, but it still felt a part of the city as evidenced by the quote above. It is enclosed once by its own spatial composition and a second time by the hierarchal massing of buildings around it.

The districts of Westport and 39<sup>th</sup> Street are south of Crown Center and also include shopping, restaurants, and residential. They are smaller in scale but highly dense areas in the heart of Midtown. A transfemale who lives in Westport said, “It’s really convenient...easy to walk and bike....I think Westport is pretty well known for being open-minded.” Interviewees responded to the human scale of both areas. One woman said of 39<sup>th</sup> Street, “It’s not an intimidating space period..cause it’s just a little street.” Another participant spoke about Westport, “The road seems smaller when you’re driving just cause it’s an older part of town...you kind of see all of these shops that you don’t really know....this place is kinda different and if you’re different, too, it kinda feels better.” Both 39<sup>th</sup> Street and Westport are open but, “It’s definitely not just open space...it’s like little passage ways and alleys behind the stores.”

**Figure 10. Small shops along 39<sup>th</sup> Street with Kansas Medical Center in distance**



Brookside is further south still by about 30 blocks. Brookside is a wealthier area with larger homes, although still with some density. One interviewee, who had lived there for several years, associated it with “happiness, safety, comfort, [and] a good feeling that I’m a part of a community.” Although Brookside had much broader roads (much liked by users of the space), the shops and activity were concentrated in one place. This created a “walkable and friendly” area – an intimate space easy to know. “Knowing it so well I feel like there’s a comfort, I don’t have to try to pretend to be something different, or be less gay than I am.”

**Figure 11. Plan of Brookside, businesses clustered in middle with residential surrounding**



**Source: Sketch by Mark Peters**

### Control

Crown Center was described as a diverse area by interviewees, but queer people weren't as visible as in other areas: "I mean you can't pick out a lesbian or gay guy the way you can pick out a White or Black person, but I feel comfortable." Displayed throughout the space were bright multi-cultural banners with the words "Surprising" and "Exciting." One African-American interviewee was comfortable holding hands there but was also cautious of upsetting families. He said, "You don't want to hear it, you hear it all the time. First it's cause you're black and then it's cause your gay, and I get the double dose, actually triple dose because I like white men."

Interviewees felt a strong sense of ownership in the Westport and 39<sup>th</sup> Street districts. One interviewee said, "Generally when I'm walking on 39<sup>th</sup> street I feel *pretty* comfortable, because I see a lot of other gay people...I figure if people are on that part of 39<sup>th</sup> street, they should expect to see lesbians...I feel like this is *my*

territory and if that bothers them than they can go somewhere else.” Another interviewee reported seeing a lot of HRC bumper stickers in the area. Westport was described as being diverse and that the “people hanging out there are more alternative.” This enabled interviewees to feel safe expressing displays of affection, “I feel like I can grab my girlfriend’s hand if I were there and I wanted to.” Also some respondents noticed the occasional gay pride flag in shops, “it’s just kind of nice to see that that’s there.”

Respondents talked explicitly about gay-owned businesses and gay-friendly organizations in Brookside. These were places where it felt comfortable to be with one’s partner. Also interviewees felt there were a large number of LGBT folk in the area that shop and eat. As a result, one respondent said, “It seems like it’s fairly safe to be myself...as out as I am in the Midwest.” A few businesses had the pride flag or decal in their window, but it wasn’t generally the case overall. Visibility of businesses, people, and signs had the following effect, “I feel like I don’t have to change my behavior. I feel at peace, that I can be myself, and *engage* with others.”

#### Access and relationship to public realm

The design of Crown Center distinctly disrupts the grid around it, and this creates a physical contrast with the surrounding public realm. The space is bifurcated by a street, which provides the only two entry points. Within the center the space was open and had a strong connection to the indoor mall through a large glass façade. Interviewees noted, “You’re on the edge of downtown Kansas City.”

Westport and 39<sup>th</sup> Street are highly public spaces but they are buffered to some extent. Westport is an historical area with an organic street pattern differentiated from the grid around it. There are several small streets and alleys that provide various levels of privacy. 39<sup>th</sup> Street is linear and surrounded by small shops. Its scale contrasts sharply from the U. Kansas Medical Center just a block away. Moving into these spaces suggests going from the institutional or the formal to the small scale and eclectic.

Brookside was the most open of all of the districts. Businesses are clustered around a kink in the grid pattern and can be accessed from all sides.

### *Anti-Queer Space*

#### Power and Light (Kansas City Live!)

Kansas City Live! is the social center of the 9-block Power and Light mixed-use district, recently constructed in downtown Kansas City to the tune of \$850 million (a third of which was subsidized by tax-payers). A single developer owns the entire project. Kansas City Live! is represented by one block of entertainment venues, and in the context of my interviews, most people referred to it as simply Power and Light (which is how I'll refer to it from here on).

Power and Light came up in nearly every interview as being an explicitly anti-queer space. It seemed to be a place that alienated on many levels, including queer identity, race, class, and small town people. Respondents said:

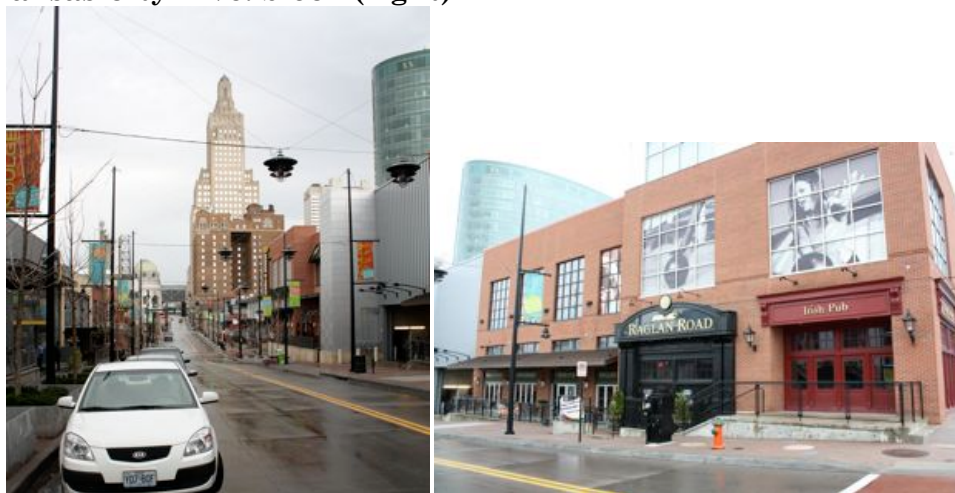
- “I don’t know many transwomen who go to that area because of the expense of it...there aren’t a lot of rich transwomen;”

- “It has the feeling of giving the impression of what you aren’t....I only came out a couple of years ago and being something that I’m not just doesn’t appeal to me anymore;” and
- “I’m not a Gucci-wearing, Armani-loving, in debt homo...I’m more of a laid back person from a small town.”

### Fit

Power and Light contains relatively small-scale buildings in the heart of downtown; it is an inward-facing block of two-story buildings. However, the context of the district left an impression on interviewees. One respondent said, “The area has a lot of tall buildings...it’s a business district.” Scattered corporate buildings tower over Power and Light, including the art deco building that used to house the Power and Light Company itself.

**Figure 12. Street in Power Light District (left), former Power and Light corporate building straight ahead and to the right another corporate structure; Exterior façade of Kansas City Live! block (right)**



Power and Light is a formal entertainment zone, but the developer created a mix of building types and materials to give the impression that development

occurred over time by different builders. Respondents reacted to its newness, the scale of the development as a whole, and its context: “When you go to Power and Light there’s a very industrial look to it...lots of neon lights, stainless steel and chrome. It’s just a very unnatural feeling...there’s no ambiance there...it just seems like it was mass produced to me.”

Inside the block is a privately owned outdoor space where concerts are sometimes held. A taut canopy over the courtyard creates a more formal order – like the ceiling of a church nave – and increases enclosure by blocking visitors from the sky.

**Figure 13. Interior space of Power and Light, canopy structures and encloses space, beer signs abound**



### Control

Even though the Power and Light dress code has been primarily criticized for being racist, queer interviewees almost always brought it up as a sign of homophobia. One respondent added, “Kansas City Power and Light is a place where they have a dress code implemented and they look down on homosexual

behavior. Some of my close friends have been kicked out. Two of my guy friends were dancing together and they got kicked out... they said we don't allow that." The code bans long, white t-shirts, excessively baggy clothing, shorts that fall below the top of the calf, shirts that hang below pant pockets, exposed necklaces on men, towels and Timberland boots, athletic wear or sweats, work/construction boots, excessively ripped clothing, baseball hats, bandanas and sunglasses.<sup>91</sup> Additionally, the dress code is clearly gender biased by targeting men.

There were also strong connections made between the place's inaccessibility to lower-income people and its attitudes toward queers. One respondent said, "I feel like the crowd that goes there is not the liberal crowd that I'm comfortable being around...and the establishments are fancier. I just feel like they're not gay-friendly. Maybe if they stuck a gay bar in there I'd like it...or at least had a gay night once a month" and "It does bring in a lot of revenue...it just isn't a very popular place towards the LGBT community. In fact I know several of them are just anti-."

One person suggested that this connection was important, because the people who spend the most money there have the ability to control what they want or don't want to see. An interviewee said, "It's a predominantly straight area...it's expensive to be there so if clientele that are spending money don't like a certain behavior they can dictate the rules."

Power and Light uses colorful banners and poster ads to market its space. Rather explicitly, they market themselves as a sexed space with the motto, "Get

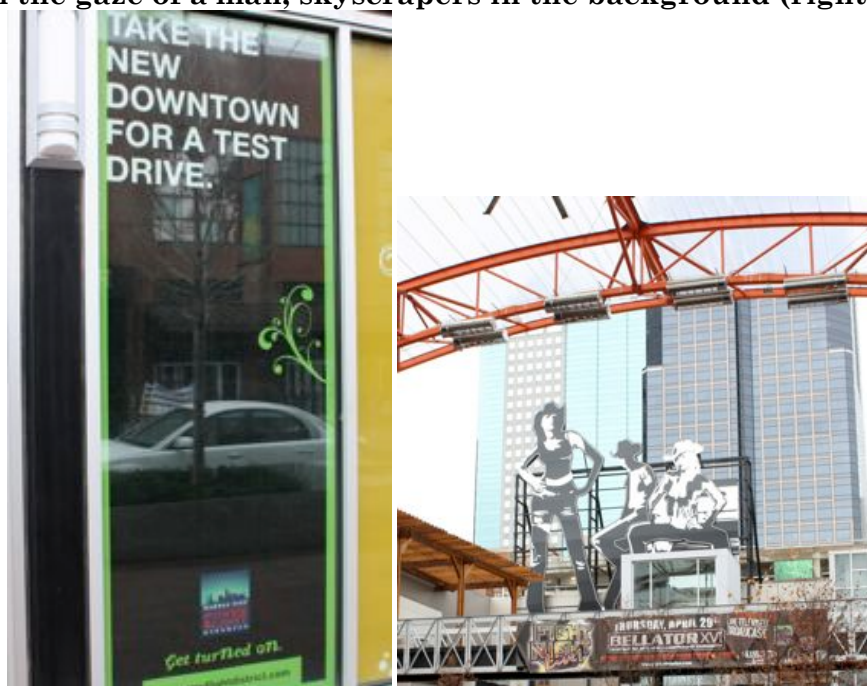
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<sup>91</sup> Debbie Coleman-Tobi, "Power & Light Dress Code Is Strictly Enforced...And Under Fire," *KC Tribune*, March 27, 2009, <http://kctribune.com/article.cfm?articleID=18732>.



turned on.” Additionally, a marquee hangs in the courtyard space that includes two cowgirls as posed objects with a guy in the background. One respondent added, “They have a lot of marketing ploys to get girls in for free which draws guys and promotes heterosexuality.” Additional signage inside Power and Light is almost completely focused on the advertisement of liquor products.

**Figure 14. Heavily sexed signage at Power and Light, geared towards heterosexual men, “take a test drive” and “get turned on” (left) and objectified women in the gaze of a man, skyscrapers in the background (right)**



#### Access and relationship to public realm

Power and Light is closed off from the public realm, because activity is concentrated in the interior. There is limited permeability between street and interior outdoor space without going through various bar establishments. Thus, access points into the space are controlled (possibly as a way to manage the open container drinking permit that the Power and Light has in this space).

**Figure 15. One pathway into Power and Light cuts through block, enters in front of stage space at lowest point in courtyard**



The combination of a structured and enclosed outdoor space that heavily promotes heterosexuality within an environment of corporate symbolism creates a highly unwelcoming space for the queer people I interviewed.

**Figure 16. Summary of Queer Spaces named by respondents, categorized by Race/Ethnicity, Age, and Gender**

Race/Ethnicity	White	Person of Color
#	12	3
Spaces	Bars, MCC Church, Passages	Passages

Age	18 - 20	21-29	30s	40s	50s
#	3	3	3	4	2
Spaces	Passages	Bars	Bars, MCC Church	Bars, MCC Church	Bars

Gender	Male	Female	Female (Transgender)
#	8	5	2
Spaces	Bars, Passages, MCC Church	Bars, Passages	Bars

**Figure 17. Summary of Queering Spaces named by respondents, categorized by Race/Ethnicity, Age, and Gender**

Race/Ethnicity	White	Person of Color
#	12	3
Spaces	Coffee shops, 39 <sup>th</sup> Street, Westport, Brookside	Coffee shops, Westport, Crown Center

Age	18 - 20	21-29	30s	40s	50s
#	3	3	3	4	2
Spaces	Westport, Crown Center	Coffee shops, 39 <sup>th</sup> Street, Westport	Coffee shops, Westport	Brookside	

Gender	Male	Female	Female (Transgender)
#	8	5	2
Spaces	Coffee shops, Brookside, Crown Center	Coffee shops, 39 <sup>th</sup> Street, Westport	Westport, Brookside

**Figure 18. Summary of Anti-Queer Spaces named by respondents, categorized by Race/Ethnicity, Age, and Gender**

Race/Ethnicity	White	Person of Color
#	12	3
Spaces	Power and Light	Power and Light

Age	18 - 20	21-29	30s	40s	50s
#	3	3	3	4	2
Spaces		Power and Light	Power and Light		Power and Light

Gender	Male	Female	Female (Transgender)
#	8	5	2
Spaces	Power and Light	Power and Light	Power and Light

**Queer in Kansas City: Some Concluding Comments**

Queer spaces had a high level of fit for their ability to provide indoor spaces that contributed great comfort and connection for older users and youth. The spaces were easily accessed by their location, they offered protection both through their form and symbolic association, and compositionally they could accommodate different users and preferences for privacy. These spaces also exhibited a high degree of queer control, decision-making, and opportunity. Queer people were free to show affection for loved ones, flirt, and play with gender roles. Transwomen didn't have to fear being discovered. Opaque windows and lack of explicit symbolism enabled greater control of spaces once inside. The threshold between queer space and the public realm was rigid, and there was little transitional space

between public and private realms. Thus the public realm was literally positioned in opposition to queer space, and sometimes this created dissatisfaction among users who wanted windows or the promise of safety just outside of the bar.

However, in many ways the act of passageway into these spaces symbolized a “coming out” to the queer community and a move from invisibility to visibility.

Queering coffee shops had high levels of fit for a range of young queer users. They were situated in walkable, small-scale districts that created a non-threatening, relaxing environment. Javanaut had many kinds of indoor spaces, which created fit for a broader audience. Teadrops was extremely open, perhaps limiting fit to those who want to be visible. The alternative, artsy, and queer staff at coffee shops contributed to a high sense of control for interviewees. However, the lack of queer signs or symbols seemed to reduce the feeling of control. Perhaps in queering spaces that are less “fixed” in queer values, queer symbols ensure that challenging norms will be promoted. Coffee shops had strong connections to the public realm, which may have been facilitated by their location in queering districts. Teadrops had almost a fluid boundary between indoor and outdoor space, while Javanaut controlled access more subtly through a series of transitional spaces between street and door. Thresholds represented less of a shift in values and more of an opportunity to play with visibility and public presence.

The level of fit for districts was generally high, but in Brookside, more specifically among older people with higher incomes, and in Crown Center, for younger people. The midtown districts created smaller scale settings with

opportunities for privacy and visibility. Crown Center's physical and psychological connection to both queer landmarks and the downtown created a sense of comfort and empowerment among users. The midtown and suburban districts had the highest levels of control, as evidenced by queer businesses, stickers, and a diversity of users. Control was less in Crown Center, which is possibly in a more beginning stage of queering. In queering districts, changes in values were often symbolized by physical contrasts between the district and the spaces around it.

Ironically, Kansas City Live! in the Power and Light District was the most explicitly sexual space of all the districts and many of the establishment scale spaces. The fit and control was low for Kansas City queers, because the negative associations with downtown form and the heavy messaging towards heterosexuality created strong feelings of rejection. Regulations and space management explicitly demeaned queer people.

## Chapter 5. Queer-colage: Finding sexed spaces in Cambridge<sup>92</sup>

### Queer Cambridge – Brief Historical Context

Cambridge,<sup>93</sup> MA was ranked in 2005 as one of the ten most liberal cities in the country.<sup>94</sup> Its citizens fondly refer to it as the “People’s Republic” for its progressive politics and provision of city services. Although it is not discussed alongside San Francisco, New York, or L.A as a center of queer activism, older interviewees described Cambridge as having its own gayborhood in the 1970s. The *Gay Community News*, a weekly journal published in Boston from 1973 to 1992, which grew to attract an international readership, had the largest percentage of subscribers in Cambridge’s Central Square in the late ‘70s.<sup>95</sup>

In 1984, the city began introducing a number of local ordinances that made it a welcoming place to be queer (see Figure 1 below).

In 1994, citizens experienced the loss of rent control as the result of a state-wide ballot initiative. This is significant, because it impacted the ability of low and moderate-income queer people to benefit from the pro-queer laws enacted over the prior ten years.

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<sup>92</sup> The title plays off the last chapter, as well as a chapter in *Collage City* called “Collision City and the Politics of ‘Bricolage.’” The term *bricolage* can suggest the appropriation of meanings to subvert them. It is also the equivalent of “do it yourself.”

<sup>93</sup> Population: 93,635 (metropolitan: 4 Million) | 71% white | 27% foreign-born | 7% enrolled in K-12 | Most represented age range: 25 to 34 (25%)

<sup>94</sup> Bay Area Center for Voting Research (BACVR): [http://govpro.com/ar/gov\\_imp\\_31439/](http://govpro.com/ar/gov_imp_31439/)

<sup>95</sup> According to 45-year resident of Cambridge, David Peterson.

**Figure 1. Cambridge Gay, Lesbian, Bi-Sexual, and Transgender (GLBT) History Flyer**

**1983**  
Old Cambridge Baptist Church declares itself welcoming and affirming of GLBT people, the first of only seven faith congregations in Cambridge to do so (to date).

**1984**  
Cambridge becomes the first city in the Commonwealth to enact non-discrimination law on the basis of sexual orientation.

**1988**  
Project 10 East, the first public school gay/straight alliance in a public school east of the Mississippi -and at the time, only the second in the country- was founded at Cambridge Rindge and Latin School. Kathy Keegan is the current coordinator of P10East.

**1992**  
Cambridge becomes the first city in the Commonwealth to enact domestic partner legislation.

**1997**  
Cambridge becomes the first city in the Commonwealth to amend its non-discrimination law to include transgender people.

**1997**  
The Cambridge School Committee (under the leadership of current Mayor, E. Denise Simmons) establishes the dedicated position of LGBT Family Liaison, to ensure that LGBT families and their children are welcome in our public schools. The Welcoming Schools Program is then formed and is coordinated by LGBT Family Liaison Melody Brazo.

**2004**  
Cambridge becomes the first city in the Commonwealth and the nation to issue marriage licenses to same-sex couples.

**2005**  
The Cambridge GLBT Commission is established to advocate for a culture of respect and monitor progress toward equality of all persons with regard to sexual orientation and gender identity.

**cambridgema.gov/glb**

**Cambridge GLBT Commission**  
Please join us at our meetings, 4th Thursday of the month.  
More information: [cambridgema.gov/glb](http://cambridgema.gov/glb)

**Source: Cambridge GLBT Commission**

When Massachusetts became the first state to make gay marriage legal, Cambridge City Hall processed the nation’s first gay marriage applications at 12:01 a.m. on May 17, 2004. City Hall opened its doors to host a celebration of over 10,000 people.<sup>96</sup> Between 1992 and 2009, Cambridge appointed a gay mayor four separate times (mayors serve a one year term in Cambridge). Ken Reeves, a gay, Jamaican-American served three of those terms, and Denise Simons, a lesbian, African-American served the most recent term. Under their appointments, the

<sup>96</sup> An extremely fond memory recalled by all of the older interviewees I spoke with.



GLBT Commission was established in 2005 and issues such as homophobia in the Haitian community were addressed in City Hall forums<sup>97</sup>.

Juxtaposed to the increase in queer rights in Cambridge is the rapid decrease in queer spaces since the 1990s. The Paradise, a bar-turned-sex club for gay men located near MIT, remains, but interviewees told me of the many gay bars now gone. Manray in Central Square was considered one of the last hold-outs. The Indigo on Main Street, Marquis in Central Square, and the Saint used to be lesbian bars. These spaces have since been converted into “high end” uses such as condominiums and gourmet restaurants.

Based on my research, the city now has just four queer-owned, retail businesses, and only one was mentioned regularly in interviews (although not as a strictly “queer” space). These businesses include a coffeeshop with two locations, 1369; a spa, Inman Oasis; and two restaurants, City Girl Café and Picante.<sup>98</sup> Each business serves a mix of clientele, and they are located in Inman Square and Central Square.

This brief history paints a picture of Cambridge as a civil rights paradise for queer people. At the same time, the disappearance of queer spaces provokes interesting questions: Does Cambridge represent the ideal space of non-heteronormativity? Is there a need for queer spaces in a place with an established and

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<sup>97</sup> These mayoral influences were recalled by Sue Hyde, Cambridge resident since 1984 and National Gay and Lesbian Task Force New England Field Organizer.

<sup>98</sup> I was told in an interview that the former owners of the Saint now own City Girl Café. However, when I called City Girl, an employee told me that at least one owner had moved away and that she would not confirm whether the café was currently lesbian owned.

progressive legal record at the local level? My fieldwork further explores these questions and others.

## **Fieldwork**

I began my fieldwork in Cambridge speaking to the co-chairs of the city's GLBT Commission, created by the City Council and codified in the Municipal Code in 2005. Its expressed purpose is to:

*Advocate for a culture of respect and to monitor progress toward equality of all persons with regard to sexual orientation and gender identity; promote policies and practices that have a positive effect on the health, welfare, and safety of all persons who live, visit or work in the City with respect to sexual orientation and gender identity.*

Although the commission is staffed through the volunteer labor of its members, the existence of such a commission is politically unusual in American cities.

One way the commission links to the queer community in Cambridge is through a number of yahoo groups, including the Cambridge Mens Group, Rainbow Cambridge, Boston Masala, and the Queer Asian Pacific-Islander Alliance. The Commission Co-Chairs distributed my solicitation for interviewees through these mechanisms. About a dozen responded to this solicitation. Through this mechanism and some of my own outreach, I interviewed 13 people in Cambridge.

Interviewees represented a reasonable (but not ideal) diversity of ages, races/ethnicities, and gender identities.<sup>99</sup>

### *General Feelings About Public Space in Cambridge*

Each interviewee felt comfortable as a queer person in Cambridge's public spaces, which included the city's streets and squares. As a young woman in her 20s put it, "You can be out on the street. Whereas, in many places, you're not allowed to be out on the street – but once you get in the door somewhere that's welcoming or supportive, you are out."

*Being out on the street* was expressed in subtly different ways by different interviewees. It included being visibly out – "hold[ing] my partner's hand when I walk down the street" or "wearing rainbow paraphernalia anywhere in Cambridge" – to being comfortable with being perceived as out, even if behavior isn't overt – "there are implicit signs of intimacy... like eating dinner together and walking around the city together and doing it all the time when we're outside of our home...and I feel comfortable doing that..." – to not having to constantly monitor one's surroundings and personal behavior in the city's public spaces – "I feel comfortable in most places and not thinking twice" or "I don't have to edit myself." One Cambridge resident put it this way, "I wouldn't be able to say, 'this place is definitely a queer space,' but I could say 'this place is *not* a queer space.'" This comment suggests a different positioning of sexed space: that "normal" space in

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<sup>99</sup> See summary of interviewee demographics and recalled spaces at end of chapter.

Cambridge is somewhere in the process of queering, and that the easier to identify “other” space is “straight space,” as the same respondent later added.

Interviewees were most conscious of symbols and signs in public space that made them feel more comfortable being queer. “I’ve seen a lot of GLBT folk with identifiers...like putting the flag on their bag...I’ve seen a lot of that.” and “Little stickers in windows for businesses...they’re nothing new but they’re showing up more and more...” and “You see a lot of equality stickers. People are very open about that.” To get a better sense of how stickers operate both spatially and in symbolic relationship to the spaces they’re attached to, I discuss my attempt to map queer stickers/symbols in Harvard Square further in this section.

Queer stickers/emblems may be a communication device that speaks more to younger people. An older respondent found, “nothing that signals it [that Cambridge is a queering space]...you certainly don’t see rainbow flags hanging...and I don’t think there’s really any gay gathering spots...you know when I travel, I look for gay neighborhoods...or gay coffee shops.” Stickers/emblems may create comfort for some in public space, but for others, they don’t replace indoor establishments or areas that serve a predominantly queer clientele.

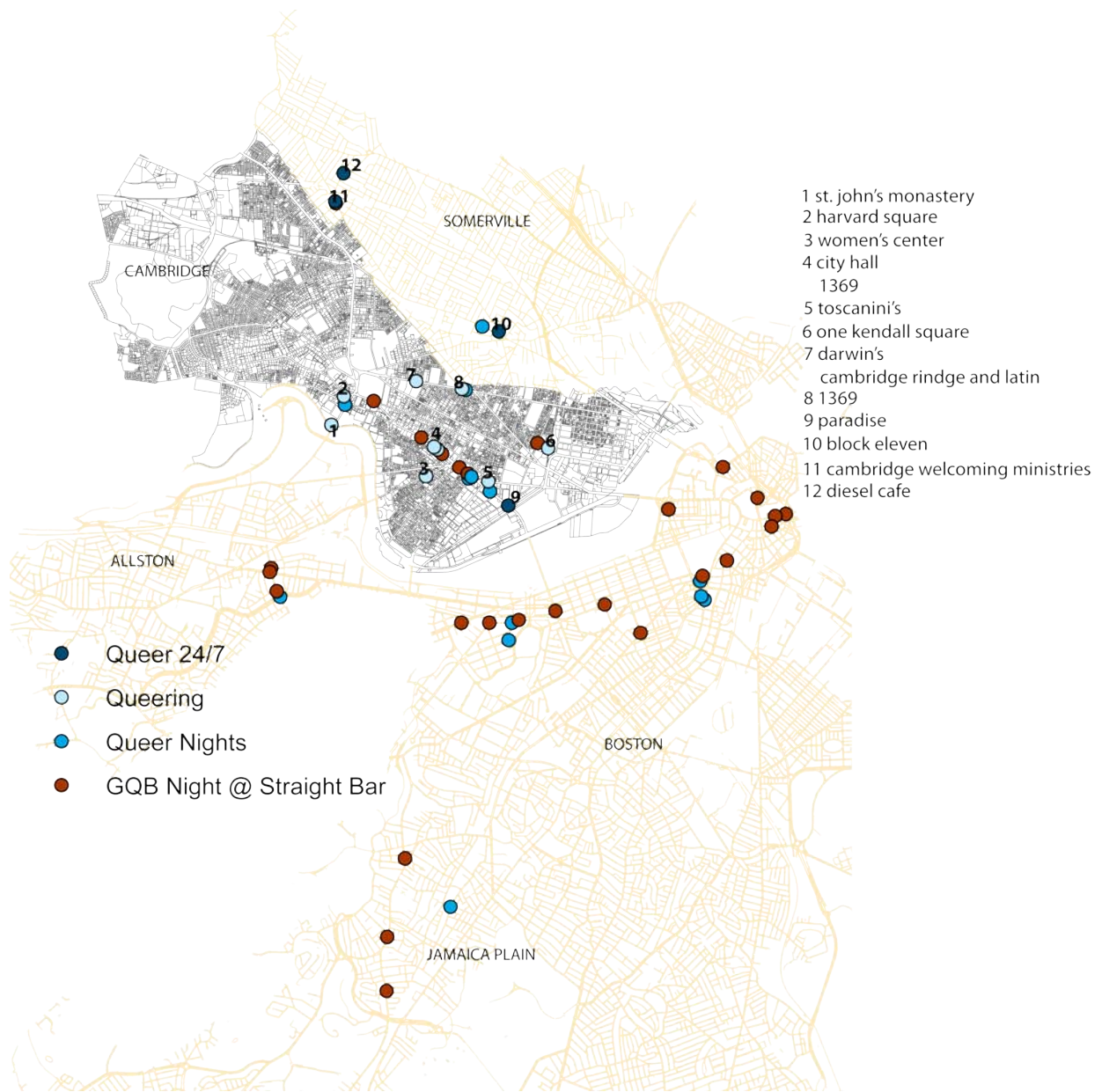
In addition, culturally diverse gatherings were discussed as spaces that helped ease norms, even around sexual orientation and gender identity – “There’s a lot of different ethnic groups, which alone makes me feel more comfortable,” and “there isn’t really a norm, and I think more of that comes from cultural diversity,”

and “[there are] all different kinds of people...I think that’s one reason I feel comfortable there.”

For some, particularly interviewees in their 50s and 60s, a queering Cambridge was symbolized by the queering of City Hall. “We’ve had two gay mayors, the city government wouldn’t bat an eye at knowing I’m gay,” and “I’ve been here a long time and there’s always been support from the administration and city government...there’s breakfast [in City Hall] on gay pride morning and everyone gets shuttled over to the parade [in Boston].”

Attitudes about the public realm in Cambridge primarily highlight differences in age. Older queer people are looking to civic institutions to establish a queer presence in public space. Younger people are sensing how public space itself is or is not queered.

**Figure 2. Queer and queering spaces identified in interviews**



**Source: Created by author. GIS data provided by MIT Geodata Repository.** In Figure 2, the nine identified queer and queering spaces in Cambridge are clustered around Inman Square, Harvard Square, and Massachusetts Avenue. One Kendall Square stands on it's own. Three of four queer spaces are in Somerville where rents are cheaper. Massachusetts Avenue has the greatest mix of queer, queering, Queer Night, and GQB/straight bar spaces.

1 in. = .8 mi.

## *Queer Space*

Paradise | St. John's | Project 10 East | Guerilla Queer Bar | Queer Nights

Most interviewees were at a loss to recall queer space in Cambridge. In comparison to Boston's South End or to Somerville, one respondent said, "I don't know of any area in Cambridge that is a queer space...that I've been able to find." Several interviewees mentioned the long-standing bar/sex club, Paradise, but none had been there in years. One older interviewee described his affiliation with Cambridge Welcoming Ministries, "the queer Methodist Church" in Central Square. However, the church is now located in Somerville because "straight people didn't feel comfortable entering the building [where they rented space] because of the gay flag flying."

I found that many queer spaces in Cambridge were ephemeral or temporal rather than spatially fixed, and I learned about them by tracking down the organizers of various events.

## Fixed Space

### Fit

Several interviewees recalled the Paradise as the last remaining queer bar in Cambridge, but few had actually visited the space in recent years or ever. Respondents described it as a sex club for a regular clientele of older, working class men. One respondent said, "It's no place to have a conversation." Many suggested that it used to be a neighborhood bar but had found its current niche in the '90s

when other bars were dying out. One interviewee said, “It still is for many men a meeting point.”

**Figure 3. Paradise: On the busy corner of Massachusetts Avenue and Albany Street; opaque windows and a discreet entrance away from the intersection**



The Paradise takes on the form of many of the bars discussed in Kansas City. Its position on a major road near the border of Cambridge and Boston give it a visible and accessible location. It has free parking attached so that patrons can safely and quickly slip into and out of the bar. It is likely a sole “paradise” for men who wish to remain publicly discrete about their sexualities or feel that spaces for desired sexual behavior are too few or too risky.

Additionally, one young interviewee discussed the Society of St. John the Evangelist, an Episcopal monastery on Memorial Drive, as a “quietly queer” place. The monastery has a weekly worship space, and “they also have a garden that’s open to the public, and I’ll occasionally go there to sit and think.”

The monastery fronts Memorial Drive. It’s a formal stone structure but modest in scale and design. A larger complex sits behind the monastery but it’s not readily apparent because of the way the structures are set back. Inside, “there’s very strict divisions among spaces...so the internal space tends to feel



intimate...and each one of those spaces feels a bit different.” The space is highly enclosed, silent, and low lit.

### Control

Paradise’s upstairs lounge is open seven nights a week. One interviewee said, “It’s not really a lesbian hangout...they’ve got male dancers and male porn on TV sets above the bar.” The primary use of the upstairs lounge is significant, as it adds an extra layer of defense space between the street and the guests and dancers. The downstairs is a flexible dance floor space mostly used on weekends. Tinted glass windows prevent the public from looking in while allowing customers to monitor outdoor activity. The Paradise sign is painted in rainbow colors and advertises the bar as queer.

St. John’s is a place of quiet that controls its separation from the outside world. Monks play an important role in creating a safe place for contemplation as opposed to a place to work or be seen. An interviewee said, “The monks work really hard to welcome young adults. They create a space for support. The monks see themselves as being called to hospitality.” Although this interviewee was younger, “It’s very much an adult space...I’m amongst the youngest who regularly go.”

### Access to Public Realm

Like the bars in Kansas City, Paradise’s interior is highly enclosed and removed from the public realm. One can easily imagine that life inside Paradise has absolutely no relationship to the activity happening outside. At the same time,

the bar does assert itself into the public view via its corner location and rainbow-colored sign.

The monastery entrance is on the edge of the city, turned away from it, facing the Charles River and Boston. The transition inside is like moving from a teetering edge to an enfolding center. Within the monastery door is a confined transitional space to collect oneself before entering into the sanctuary. In that space St. John's announces its monastic vision:

A Monastery is a "liminal" place where visitors and guests cross a threshold, a thin place dividing earth and heaven. The silence and experience of safety that characterizes monastic hospitality enables them to listen deeply. A Monastery is counter-cultural.

In a literal sense, the Monastery itself expresses the idea of passageway and of challenging norms.

### Ephemeral/Temporal Spaces

#### Fit

Project 10 East (P-10) is a Gay-Straight Alliance (GSA) at Cambridge Rindge and Latin, a public school for grades 9 through 12. The GSA was the second established in the nation (after Project 10 in Los Angeles), and GSAs' purpose is to create safe and supportive spaces in schools for queer and questioning students, help fight discrimination, and provide programming to educate student bodies at

large. The Diversity Coordinator at Cambridge Rindge and Latin and staff sponsor of P-10, Ed Byrne, currently works with about 50 queer youth in the school.<sup>100</sup>

For fifteen years P-10 had a dedicated space with big used couches and purple walls. It was open all day if students needed it. But Byrne says there wasn't a high demand for the space, and recently it was taken away during the current construction. Instead, the school has created a different support model in which space isn't always available but full-time staff is. Byrne has an open door policy and many students, usually males, come to speak to him on a regular basis. P-10's monthly meetings, attended mostly by females, now take place in a classroom.

I focused on two initiatives in the Boston area that are currently active in creating queer space for adults in Cambridge. Since 2007, a group called Guerilla Queer Bar (GQB) Boston has attempted to "take over" bars "without a gay night" on the first Friday of the month. This tactic has been repeated in several cities throughout the country and abroad (Boston was not the first). In the Boston metro area, the group is organized through Facebook.<sup>101</sup>

Daniel Robinson, the group's current organizer, said, "I don't think we're specifically going after bars that are the crowned-jewels of straightdom...I don't think it comes from an angry place, but it comes from a place where we're trying to show bars what they're missing out on in not being inclusive of the LGBT

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<sup>100</sup> I wasn't able to interview the youth directly, because I couldn't get COUHES approval to interview persons under the age of 18 without having them fill out a parental consent form. I argued with COUHES that asking kids to out themselves to parents was putting them at *greater* risk rather than protecting them. The Committee did not agree.

<sup>101</sup> Kansas City is listed as having a Guerrilla Gay Bar group, but its website is disconnected and it doesn't appear to be active. Source: <http://queersunited.blogspot.com/2009/03/guerrilla-gay-bar-worldwide-listings.html>

community...[pause]...actually I wouldn't even say that...what we're really trying to do is give the LGBT community in Boston [metropolitan area] some place other than the 3 queer bars that exist."

GQB has grown so much in popularity that at least 500 people come to the First Friday events. As a result, the main criteria for identifying bars has become about finding a place big enough, or to target two bars in one night.

The second effort, pioneered by Truth Serum, a production company led by Aliza Shapiro, promotes Queer Nights in the Cambridge area – including live music, cabaret, film and variety shows. I met Aliza when she was promoting a [rare] dance night at Zuzu's in Central Square. Shapiro usually doesn't promote dance parties, "because they're not about building community." But for her typical event formats, "there's so few places....it's really hard to get a club to give you space because they don't know for sure whether the event is going to sell out." Her best dealings have been with Great Scott, a venue out in Allston that fits all her space needs. However, "it's not a place that queers are used to getting to...maybe they think of Allston as being about fratboys."

### Control

P-10 meetings are predominantly an all-female space, and about 50% of attendees are straight allies. Overall, the school is 60% students of color, of which 50% are immigrants. Byrne said that once queer male students have internally resolved their sexuality, "they don't get anything out of it [P-10], it's too risky; the need to preserve masculinity trumps all." Byrne argued that queer youth space

needs to take place outside of school, where the social stakes aren't as high. The homophobic strategy of bullying is still not a social taboo, and it wields a lot of power in the school setting. Similarly, phrases such as, "that's so gay," frequently go unchallenged by educators and staff.

Beyond P-10, the school tries to create safe space through messaging in posters – although sometimes this creates the “trappings of safe space” if adults in power don't have any training in GLBT issues. Additionally, the principal is gay as well as three deans so that there are some authority figures that reflect students' sexualities, and the school regularly holds school-wide conversations around GLBT issues.

GQB's original intent was to create mixed spaces in terms of gender and sexual orientation. However, in the last two years, GQB has been criticized for becoming less inclusive. The current organizer admitted, “On a very typical night it looks like a bunch of white, gay, boys of a very specific type...like the kind that would go to any other gay club as opposed to people looking for a queer space because it's queer.”<sup>102</sup>

Robinson also said that he wouldn't go to most of these bars on a non-GQB night. According to Robinson, GQB nights change the spaces they're in by being stand out nights for the bar. This means, “stand out in the number of people, the number of people dancing...the amount of people drinking...they take on more of a clubby feel than a bar feel...and most of the time the DJs are the first ones to pick

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<sup>102</sup> Queer in this sense means non-mainstream.

up on what's going on...as soon as you hear a Madonna song, it's like the DJs knows what's up.”

Shapiro's audience is majority White and female (sometimes mostly queer, sometimes a mix), and with a variety of ages. Shapiro's search for Queer Night space is much different than GQB's: “When I'm looking for places to hold events, I think about young, timid queers who have come from other parts of the country and aren't 100% comfortable in their space and their skin – will they walk through the door and be greeted by a huge bouncer dude? [As a promoter], I shy away from that kind of space unless they'll let me replace the bouncer.” In particular, Shapiro educates bouncers so that they're “not harassing the trans people who don't look like their licenses.” Nevertheless, these kinds of events face great obstacles because of beliefs about the spending power of some queer people: “They [the bars] want to access the queer audience, but they don't want to call it a ‘queer night’...they think the queers alone don't spend enough at the bar.”

### Access to the Public Realm

According to Byrne, the first step into GSA space is very scary for youth, and seeing queer members who look like you is tremendously comforting. As a result, the GSA model seems to self-select based on the make-up of students who started the group. This can have definite consequences for the diversity of the GSA and its level of insularity or openness between members and non-members.

Figure 2 (p. 96) shows the spatial arrangement of GQB nights and Queer Nights. In many places the venues are clustered, so that one could imagine a GQB

strategy of starting where gay nights have precedent and then branching out. It's also notable that there is a lack of Queer Nights in downtown Boston and the Back Bay area. Both of these areas are dominated by a corporate commercial presence.

According to Shapiro, Queer Nights are quite conscious of creating a welcoming experience moving from the public realm into the venue. They do this particularly by managing bouncers and by locating nights close to public transportation stops. Although GQB's intention is to "take over" straight space to make room for queers, both Shapiro and Robinson suggested that GQB hasn't been successful in getting a wide range of queer people to their events.

### *High Points of Queering Cambridge*

Toscanini | 1369 | Darwin's | Harvard Square | One Kendall Square

### Establishments

#### Fit

Coffee shops were mentioned as favorite spaces by nearly all respondents in their '20s and '30s, regardless of gender or race/ethnicity. And as such, they were described as spaces primarily occupied by younger people, with a mix of queer/straight and male/female. They were also described as predominantly White. Coffee shops served a social and work function for interviewees.

Two of the three coffee shops were located near populations of young people: Darwin's and Toscanini's are five-minute walks from Harvard and MIT, respectively. 1369 has two locations in Central Square and Inman Square.

Coffeeshop spaces were small and casual. Seating was tightly packed, and the lack of space created intimacy but little room for the creation of distinct spaces. However, seating was oriented either near light and views or away from windows to offer some privacy. One interviewee liked this effect, “I feel more comfortable in indoor spaces...but that have some sort of character...I like that there’s a lot of windows...I don’t like feeling closed in...indoor places that are open and I can be there for a while.”

### Control

The behavior and dress of coffee shop employees were strong contributors to the queering of coffee shop space. One respondent said, “Even their employees are non-traditional/non-conservative-looking people, and that also makes it more comfortable to be you.”

One student described why coffee shops were more preferable places than others for studying, “It’s more of an artists’ culture...and it seems like the owners intentionally hire artists and punk people...it’s a little more flexible in terms of how people look...that’s why I like it there.” She went on to say, “Racial diversity of the place is not a draw...but I think the combination of having families, scholars, random artists and punk people...these are people who regularly come to this place...so it’s a more diverse set of people than you’d typically see.”

Darwin’s most explicitly announced itself as a “community” place, signified by the large area for flyers in the front window. The other two shops used



advertisements to announce their name and products in the window. None of the places explicitly denoted themselves as queer or queer-friendly.

### Access and relationship to public realm

Coffee shop facades achieved a high degree of transparency through the extensive use of glass. The least transparent façade, 1369, also has double exposures. There was a strong connection between the indoors and outdoors of these spaces, but each coffee shop had some sort of outdoor furniture to create transitional spaces.

The coffee shops are easily accessed from the sidewalk, but the experiences of entering them are slightly different. Two of three have a slightly recessed entrance. At 1369 and Darwin's, you are greeted by the counter as you enter. However, Darwin's entering space is separated from seating space by a wall. 1369 renders you the most "seen" upon entering. But perhaps this visibility facilitates acknowledgement rather than judging. One interviewee said, "1369 is very inviting for everyone, from students to the homeless – even dates I take there." Upon approach, Toscanini's full glass façade leaves you exposed, but you arrive in the back of the space upon entering.

**Figure 4. Queering coffee shops: 1369 (top left, bottom right), Darwin's (top right), and Toscanini's (bottom left), large surfaces of glass make interiors visible, furniture outside of the shop provides a semi-public space attached to the shop**



## Districts

### Fit

Harvard Square was unanimously named as a highly favorable space by interviewees of all ages, genders, and races/ethnicities. Several gay men discussed One Kendall Square – one calling it “the closest it gets to queer space in Cambridge.”

Harvard Square is undoubtedly marked by its connection to Harvard Yard. Much of it is constructed in brick – visually referencing the university. Several respondents described the boundaries of Harvard Square as a moving radius emanating from the T-Station as its central point. In the words of one respondent, “Most specifically in the immediate vicinity of the T station..so anywhere from the

movie theater to Verdict's to where Crate and Barrel used to be to Harvard's restaurant to the Charles Hotel restaurant, to the burger place, Charlie's Kitchen, Wagamama's...yea it's almost like a complete radius...and we even walk through Harvard Yard."

The T station is a part of a small plaza, which brims with activity. It includes a semi-permanent periodical stand, street performers and exhibitors, and a variety of seating options around the station. Often, groups of youth congregate there. One respondent said, "It's a place for public art....vendors, musicians, dancers...I think that's really important in terms of making a wide range of people feel comfortable."

**Figure 5. Harvard Square: Center of the Square is the T Stop, allows various seating options, self-expression, entering or leaving the T**



Interviewees commented on the presence of a variety of shops, even though many have been replaced with chains in the last 10 years. Still, in comparing Harvard Square with Cambridgeside Galleria, one respondent said, "Recognizing and serving an alternative audience makes me feel more comfortable...[in Harvard Square], there are mainstream and alternative stores but because they're all mixed together I feel better."

Harvard Square buildings are medium scale, they cover the entire parcel, and present a continuous storefront. But there are several small alleys and spaces in which to escape. In response to frequent trips to a particular restaurant in the square, one interviewee noted, “I’ve brought a lot of women there, and I’ve never felt judged or ostracized...it’s *hidden*...it’s not that large.”

**Figure 6. Harvard Square alley (left) and One Kendall Square (pathway), both combine open spaces with more intimate paths**



One Kendall Square is a newly branded, eleven-building campus, which is predominantly an office and laboratory space combined with a small, formal restaurant/entertainment zone. Nine of the eleven buildings were constructed before 1919, and several were part of the Boston Woven Hose Factory. One Kendall Square is actually in between Kendall Square and Inman Square, which are quite distinct places. Inman Square is the site of three queer-owned businesses and small-scale shops and restaurants. Kendall Square is the home of MIT and a quickly growing high tech sector.

One Kendall Square was recalled, in part, because it is the home to Kendall Square Cinema, which has a history of showing edgy films. The Cinema has been operating since 1995 (and was bought as a part of the One Kendall Square package in 2006), but it isn't connected by a direct pathway to the main part of the campus. One Kendall Square's 1,500-space parking garage is connected to the Cinema, which provides greater accessibility (the nearest T station is a full 15 minute walk).

### Control

Harvard Square was described as a space with a lot of diversity, activity, and many small and interesting restaurants and shops.

The space's connection to the institution of Harvard was seen as a positive thing, both in terms of the students that were visible in Harvard Square and the experience of walking through Harvard Yard itself. "There are college students, homeless people, punks on the street, families of all different shapes and sizes and colors...that's one thing that I really like about it...it's quite vibrant, it's quite active...I think that's one reason why I feel comfortable there."

Another expressed his comfort level as such, "There's a lot of activity, a lot of little shops that are geared towards the alternative life (coffee shops, health conscious, poetry places)...a lot of students...a lot of openly gay guys. I would definitely hold hands with a boyfriend in Harvard Square. Probably the campus, too, but I haven't tested it." Another said, "I always feel comfortable dressing the way I want to...presenting gender however I want."

Particularly in Harvard Square, interviewees noticed queer stickers, “You see ten in one block and that starts to send a message.”<sup>103</sup>

For One Kendall Square, one respondent said there’s “a lot of gay men there...groups of gay people talking very openly...probably because its an artsy place...the restaurants [it seems] have....just groups of gay people congregating there...” He added, “I wouldn’t say it’s a gay area, but definitely a large percentage [so that] I feel *very* comfortable there.”

Near the Kendall Square Cinema, interviewees noted that movie posters signal unconventional themes. One respondent prefers to hang out in the cinema or right in front of it. The plaza attracts crowds in the summer. Otherwise, the signage is very muted throughout the campus.

#### Access and relationship to public realm

Both Harvard Square and One Kendall Square are highly public spaces. One accesses Harvard Square by foot or through the T station. The area around the T station is very exposed but one has the *option* to be in a more enclosed space by ducking into an alley or a set back doorway. The area is cordoned off by an imaginary circular boundary (as discussed in interviews). These spatial dynamics create the ability for densities to be present. The T station provides an easy escape.

One Kendall Square is in a less pedestrian friendly area. It takes on the aesthetic of the corporate labs nearby, but it has tried to create human scale

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<sup>103</sup> However, when I tried to map them, I only found an HRC sticker and a stained glass rainbow flag and on the same building. Perhaps, the stickers being referred to our inside the stores or on persons bodies, although that seems at odds with how the sticker sighting was described.



passageways and gathering spaces that allow movement throughout the campus.

Perhaps *because* One Kendall Square is less accessible, in an office location, and has a more anonymous aesthetic and signage, it is particularly well suited for gay male gathering and cruising.

**Figure 7. Entering Harvard Square (left) and One Kendall Square (right), both welcome through large open spaces that narrow into a mix of smaller paths and gathering spaces**



### *Anti-Queer Space*

Like queer space, anti-queer spaces in Cambridge did not easily come to mind for interview participants. Rather than one place being immediately mentioned by a majority of interviewees (like Power and Light in Kansas City), a few people mentioned particular places that made them feel uncomfortable, although they were never described as *anti-queer*. A middle-aged, male interviewee recalled the MIT campus and the Kendall Square area, because, “I felt it was more straight-oriented.” The respondent added that a lack of visible gay groups in the sea of student organizations and a few instances when people seemed taken aback when learning he was gay left him, “pretending I was straight, and not really talking much...I just found myself retreating in.”

A younger, genderqueer/female felt “less comfortable being visibly queer in East Cambridge, Lechmere, and the Cambridgeside Galleria Mall.” Specifically, the lack of visible queer people and stores that cater to alternative clientele made her feel that, “they don’t to serve me as a customer.”

And finally a younger, bi-sexual woman was frustrated by her experiences at a nice restaurant, Dali’s. She said it was “all about looking a certain way,” and that she didn’t feel she was accepted by the “hetero-looking, older” clientele.

These feelings of discomfort should not be discounted; rather they complicate – even to a small degree – the experiences of queer people in the public realm in Cambridge. They reflect the continuous state of questioning and behavior management and modification that many queer people struggle with in public places.

### *Is Queering Cambridge, Queering Enough?*

In spite of feeling safe and comfortable being queer in most places in Cambridge, every respondent expressed a desire for a physical space that was permanently owned or controlled by a representative of the queer community. While Cambridge as a whole felt safe, there was something beyond safety/comfort/tolerance that interviewees honed in on – “acceptance,” “gathering,” reliable spaces that support connection and thriving.

Some interviewee responses suggested that there were still risks associated with being out in Cambridge’s public space, thus the need for “a place where you can go all the time and you’d know you don’t have to worry – ever,” and “it would be



nice to know there were a destination where when you walk through the door...there wasn't going to be any question in your mind that you'd be 100% welcome no matter what..." and "there needs to be something for people who aren't as comfortable as I am...or who are looking for something that is more specifically identified and that there is some outlet for that in a specific location in Cambridge."

Another respondent, again, suggested the function of thresholds in spaces like these, "Just knowing that everyone around you was welcoming and comfortable and there's absolutely no question about it...because the very act of going through the door was saying a lot...that you had to be comfortable with all of it." The door acts as a regulating threshold, keeping out those who would threaten the ability of the queer space to function.

Others suggested that physical space could provide a place for support, connection, and celebration in a way that the dispersed Cambridge queer population couldn't do on its own: "Without that space, I feel like I'm thrown into the general population, and it's kind of watered out," and "for young people I think it's really hard...I don't think there is one public space designed specifically for gay gathering" and "gay neighborhoods... or gay coffee shops...that's not happening in Cambridge... a glbt space would be wonderful...a place that would be multi-generational...it would be great to have a place for kids...and to have gatherings for people with families.... and having support spaces there... I think it would really have to cover all aspects of our community, which has many different forms...and many different needs."

Even temporary spaces can be found lacking, particularly because they change locations often enough that they aren't able to develop a regular customer base: "Whereas now you have to locate gay nights, and that's so annoying...and then sometimes you go and they suck...it's not consistent." Ironically, this interviewee shares the same perceptions as the promoter who is struggling to create consistent Queer Nights.

**Figure 8. Summary of Queer Spaces named by respondents, categorized by Race/Ethnicity, Age, and Gender**

Race/Ethnicity	White	Person of Color
#	9	4
Spaces	Paradise, GQB, P10, Queer Nights	St. John's, P-10, Queer Nights

Age	20s	30s	40s	50s	60s
#	3	5	2	2	1
Spaces	GQB, Queer Nights	St. John's Queer Nights	Queer Nights	Queer Nights	Paradise

Gender	Male	Genderqueer/female	Female
#	7	2	4
Spaces	Paradise, GQB	Queer Nights	St. John's, P-10, Queer Nights

**Figure 9. Summary of Queering Spaces named by respondents, categorized by Race/Ethnicity, Age, and Gender**

Race/Ethnicity	White	Person of Color
#	9	4
Spaces	Coffee shops, Harvard Square, One Kendall Square	Coffee shops, Harvard Square

Age	20s	30s	40s	50s	60s
#	3	5	2	2	1
Spaces	Coffee shops, Harvard Square	Coffee shops, Harvard Square, One Kendall Square	Harvard Square, One Kendall Square		Harvard Square

Gender	Male	Female/Genderqueer	Female
#	7	2	4
Spaces	Coffee shops, Harvard Square, One Kendall Square	Harvard Square	Coffee shops, Harvard Square

**\*I've chosen not to have a table summarizing anti-queer spaces, because interviewees did not describe any spaces as explicitly anti-queer.**

### **Queer in Cambridge: Some Concluding Comments**

Locating queer space in Cambridge was something I had to search for throughout my fieldwork. Queer spaces tended to have high levels of fit but for very particular groups of queer people. The appropriation of large bars into club space matched well with desires of younger, queer men. The sex bar mainstay on the corner matched well with the desires of discrete older men. P-10 was a safe haven for young women of diverse sexual orientations, and Queer Nights, having perhaps the lesser fit due to inconsistency, met the needs primarily of queer women of different ages. The Paradise had a high degree of control, similarly using techniques described for Kansas City bars. However, P-10's control was somewhat compromised because of its location within a social pressure-filled school environment, suggesting that a queer youth center with higher levels of control would have to occur outside of the school system. As ephemeral spaces, the basis for evaluating control within the GQB and Queer Night format is slightly different. Because these formats rely on temporary consumption space, control seemed to be dependent on the perceived buying power of the group. However, Queer Nights used other tactics to increase control, such as ensuring that venue employees were educated about and welcoming to a variety of queer people. P-10, GQB, and Queer Nights had a very intermeshed relationship with the public realm for queer space. This had the potential both to create a more "queered" public realm. But also the

transience or “placelessness” of these spaces frustrated some queer people, and the exposure alienated more vulnerable members of the population.

Cambridge’s queering highpoints were the most recalled and discussed spaces during my fieldwork. Queering coffee shops exhibited most of the characteristics displayed in Kansas City’s coffee shops, albeit under tighter space restrictions. Coffee shops offered open, mixed, and intimate spaces with a porous relationship to the public realm.

Queering districts were the most highly discussed spaces in interviews, suggesting an important comfort with outdoor public space in Cambridge. In particular, fit, control, and access in Harvard Square were communicated through the densities and cultural diversity that the space’s location and physical characteristics fostered, a range of shopping options, the ability to be in open or more enclosed space, the presence of street performers, the visibility of queer people, and the perception that space had been marked as queer through stickers and emblems. One Kendall Square had a higher level of fit for men, and the variety of spaces and pathways, and presence of an arts cinema, increased this fit. The appropriation of outdoor gathering spaces after work hours and the relative distance from other nodes of activity may have fostered a sense of control, and the right level of access, for male queer users of the space.

Like queer spaces, anti-queer spaces were harder to recall for interviewees, although some found discomfort in a few particular places without naming them anti-queer. Discomfort was mostly associated with large scale, corporate places – a

university campus that controls a significant amount of real estate around it and a large mall development project. There was a low visibility of queer people in these places, and participants felt pressure to conform to surroundings.

## Chapter 6: Design for the Queer Good: Reflection, Synthesis, and Future Directions<sup>104</sup>

The two previous chapters presented the experiences of 28 queer people in two cities. The data collected reflects and challenges the themes developed in Chapter 2, including the regulation of sexuality in space, the experience of the closet, the state promotion of narrow space types/sexualities, and the overlooking of spaces used by non-normative sexualities. Specifically, the data elaborate on a number of instances in which queer people feel their identity being regulated in public space – explicitly by peers, and less explicitly by formal public or private codes. The data also show a network of spaces in cities in which queer people feel comfortable outside of explicit queer consumption districts or campaigns. Data allude to some instances in which queer space has been eliminated, although the reasons and the specific role of the state are less clear.

How did findings compare with my hypotheses at the outset of this project – particularly as it relates to the space preferences of queer people and within the queer population, by age, gender, and race/ethnicity? I will review each hypothesis, referring back substantially to the charts at the ends of Chapters 4 and 5.

### Hypotheses Reviewed

- Queer people in all places utilize a diversity of spaces and spatial networks to create safety and opportunity for connection – spaces outside of a gay neighborhood are just as vital but are often invisible to society at large.

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<sup>104</sup> The chapter title plays off of the Serge Chermayeff classic, *Design for the Public Good*

Neither Kansas City nor Cambridge has a gay neighborhood, yet many queer and queering spaces were identified as places of safety and connection in both cities. In particular, religious institutions, queer bars, coffee shops, and commercial districts (often with a square or plaza in the center) created the networks that most interviewees utilized. Besides queer bars, these are not the spaces I necessarily anticipated at the beginning of this research. Particularly the importance of religious institutions and coffee shops struck me. In some respects the latter may mirror macro trends in the privatization (or changing form) of public gathering space and a work- and tech-driven culture that fits well at the coffee shop. Perhaps the coffee shop, with a low economic barrier to entry and [often] free internet access, is the new face of public space and civic participation. Regardless, many queer people are attracted to coffee shops because they are designed to allow for both privacy and socializing (fit) and they encourage “non-conformist” ways of being rather than regulating behavior (control).

Religious institutions, specifically within the Episcopal Church (St. John’s), the Methodist Church (Passages), the Baptist Church (Brookside), and the Metropolitan Community Church, were places where queer groups gathered. In spite of the notion that religious groups largely reject queer folk, queer people were attracted to specific church spaces because of their welcome, their combination of formal aesthetics (symbols of protection) and informal gathering spaces, and because queer people are granted high levels of control when they use the space. As



mentioned earlier in this paper, church spaces are likely filling a gap in cheap, civic space.

Lastly, as the hypothesis proposed, very few of the queer or queering spaces identified were explicitly labeled as such, making them less visible to the general public. The most visible spaces were the queer bars, which also surprised me to some extent. These weren't the bars hidden in marginal parts of town (although those no doubt exist and weren't captured in interviews.) Queer bars were located along major corridors or heavily trafficked intersections and were the most likely to have explicit queer friendly signage. This had a positive impact in announcing a public queer presence, particularly for younger people.

Many interviewees talked about the presence of queer stickers/emblems in certain parts of town, but my own observations found these to be quite subtle in scope. For example, I was surprised that coffee shops, even the ones owned by queer people, included no explicitly welcoming signage for queer people. However, even a small presence of queer symbols in an area made a large impact on how interviewees perceived the environment. It's quite possible that these symbols would not be visible to the public at large.

- Spatial networks will differ significantly by age – older queer people will prefer less visible spaces and younger queer people will prefer more visible spaces.

In both cities, the largest preference differences by age were seen in queering spaces. Queering spaces were more frequently recalled by younger interviewees. Older people (and younger) were quite comfortable in queer spaces, like churches and bars. Besides coffee shops, the identified queering spaces were outdoor spaces –

larger areas with a variety of activities. This complicates the hypothesis. In fact, older people preferred and related to more fixed institutional spaces (MCC Church, Cambridge government buildings), which are arguably more visible. Older people expressed greater comfort with *indoor* spaces and less with *outdoor* space. Younger people spent time in more mixed and temporal spaces, many of which were outdoor. The spaces are arguably less visible as queer, but the queers that use them are potentially more visible to the public depending on how they represent and express themselves.

- Spatial networks will differ significantly by race/ethnicity – spaces preferred by low-income and minority queers will be significantly less visible to society at large because of assumptions about who queer people are.

The largest preference differences by race/ethnicity were seen in queer spaces in Kansas City. Queer interviewees of color recalled just one queer space; in particular, bars were only identified by White interviewees. 20% of those interviewed in Kansas City were persons of color, including African-American, Asian-American, and multi-racial, although 35% of the population as a whole is non-White. Kansas City has a large and established African-American population and a growing Latino/a population. Based on some conversations with local organizations, I know there are other public spaces and establishments used in particular by queer Blacks (although I don't know where). I was unable to access this population, although I tried through a local pastor who works on AIDS issues, a local AIDS organization with staff who focus on the Black and Latino communities,

and by contacting the directors of Black Pride and Latino Pride. Nobody returned my calls.<sup>105</sup>

In Cambridge, interviewees of color responded similarly to White interviewees, although they made a point of describing Cambridge as “very white.” Rather, queer people of color felt most comfortable in spaces with other types of diversity present, like cultural and arts-based. 30% of those interviewed in Cambridge were persons of color, including African-American, Indian-American, and Asian-American. This is proportionate to the population at large, but of course makes for a small number of interviewees of very diverse backgrounds.

- There is always a strong need for queer spaces because of the general invisibility of the queer population. There is a need to be around others who share this identity.

In Cambridge, I was surprised by the comfort many queers felt in normative space and yet the unanimous consensus that queer-identified businesses and community spaces were needed. This suggests that queering Cambridge hasn't queered enough. It highlights the characteristics that queering spaces don't have: very high levels of control realized through design and space management and a more rigid boundary between the space and the public realm. This suggests that queering needs to be a constant process and that queer institutions remain necessary while new norms are being created.

- There is a strong need for queer youth spaces, in particular, because of the unknown likelihood of rejection by one's own family.

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<sup>105</sup> I believe my response-driven method for soliciting interviews was ineffective for locating more queer Black and Latino/a folk in Kansas City. This could be due to fear of exposure or lack of trust in an unknown white outsider (myself). With more time, a snowball and venue-based approach I believe could have achieved greater results.

The limits of organizations like P-10 within school settings, makes the existence of queer youth space outside of the school system crucial, in addition to support and education within schools. In particular, GSA spaces were used predominantly by queer and straight females in both cities and rarely by males, while the Passages space in Kansas City was incredibly diverse and had equal gender representation. The use of Passages' services, including a safe space, and at times, food and temporary housing, make its demand and effectiveness clear.

And lastly, a category I did not hypothesize about was gender, although I was aware that the stereotype in queer communities is that social gatherings are highly divided by gender. The only spaces for which I found this to be true were queer spaces in Cambridge (in addition to the comments above about youth.) Cambridge's only queer bar is decidedly a male space. And surprisingly, ephemeral queer spaces were highly gender-based, too. GQB, while intending to be a mixed, was predominantly male. The large bar format seemed to be a strong fit for particular kinds of males. Queer Night spaces were predominantly female and transgender, with the promoter making a particular attempt to enhance queer control by training bar staff to be welcoming.

### **Inventorying and Inventing**

The act of inventorying is an act of inventing – highlighting the creative potential of conceiving taken-for-granted acts and spaces differently, and constituting a world that was not previously recognized.<sup>106</sup>

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<sup>106</sup> Gavin Brown, "Thinking beyond homonormativity: performative explorations of diverse gay economies," *Environment and Planning A* 41(2009), 1503.

**Figure 1. Queer, Queering, Anti-Queer, and Normative Space in Cambridge, MA and Kansas City, MO categorized by fit, control, and access**

<b>Cambridge, MA</b>	<b>Fit</b>	<b>Control</b>	<b>Access</b>
<p><i>Queer Space</i> -Fixed -Ephemeral</p>	<p>-On major corridor -Internal divisions of space create variety of experiences</p> <hr/> <p>-Created by queer presence in hetero-normative space -Venue based on size, proximity to queer-friendly spaces</p>	<p>-One-way visibility or no windows -Varying explicitness of signage -Queer and supportive management/staff</p> <hr/> <p>-Very gender segregated -Varying levels of control, typically less control due to social pressure, untrained staff, perception of low buying power</p>	<p>-Highly enclosed -Rigid boundary -Discrete entrance -Attached parking lot</p> <hr/> <p>-Near public transportation -Near queer-tested places</p>
<p><i>Queering Space</i> -Establishment -District</p>	<p>-Small scale -Informal interior -Intimate but little room for distinct spaces</p> <hr/> <p>-Defined boundaries -Physical connection to student/arts institutions -Mix of activities, street performers</p>	<p>-“Alternative-looking” employees -Diverse (except racially) -Not explicitly denoted as queer</p> <hr/> <p>-Diverse -Visibility of queer couples -Visibility of queer or punk stickers/emblems/posters</p>	<p>-Visual connection between indoors and outdoors: extensive use of glass -Transitional space between street and façade</p> <hr/> <p>-Temporal variation in being highly public and anonymous -Mix of open and enclosed spaces -Density of developed structures</p>
<p><i>Anti-Queer</i> -N/A</p>	-	-	-
<p><b>Baseline:</b> <i>Normative Space</i></p>	<p>-Normative space is queering -Little editing of behavior, visible diversities, queering of government space -But also, “watering down” of queer -Desire for 100% queer welcoming space</p>		

Access	Control	Fit	Kansas City, MO
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Highly enclosed</li> <li>-Rigid boundary between indoor and outdoor space</li> <li>-Informal entrances, even for institutional spaces</li> <li>-Attached parking lot</li> <li>-Facades close to street</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Majority queer management and users of space</li> <li>-One-way visibility, double exposures, or no windows</li> <li>-Varying explicitness of signage, typically less explicit</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-On or near major corridor</li> <li>-Institutional or anonymous commercial facades</li> <li>-Informal interior</li> <li>-Flexible spaces</li> </ul>	<i>Queer Space</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Porous relationship between indoor and outdoor space</li> <li>-Mix of transitional and open connections to public realm</li> </ul> <hr/> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Physical contrast with surrounding environment</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Users have diversity of “looks” and sexual identities</li> <li>-“Alternative-looking” employees</li> <li>-No explicit signage</li> </ul> <hr/> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Visibility of queer people, queer stickers, or queer establishments</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Aesthetics employ warm materials and colors</li> <li>-Informal interior</li> <li>-Variety of spaces for privacy</li> </ul> <hr/> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Symbolic link to queer monuments</li> <li>-Variety of enclosures that change with density: double enclosure, labyrinthine, open but concentrated</li> </ul>	<i>Queering Space</i> <hr/> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Establishment</li> <li>-District</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Activity concentrated in interior</li> <li>-Enclosed</li> <li>-Exposed entrances at lowest elevation of space</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Explicit use regulations (ie. dress code)</li> <li>-No queer bar or queer night</li> <li>-Perception that money controls space use</li> <li>-Explicit heterosexual signage</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Industrial aesthetic</li> <li>-Symbolic link to corporate Kansas City</li> <li>-Formal spatial composition</li> <li>-Inward-facing</li> </ul>	<i>Anti-Queer Space</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Firmly hetero-normative, often regulated by an implicit “don’t ask don’t tell” policy</li> <li>-Strong awareness of distinctions between space where it’s safe to express queer identity and the majority of other spaces</li> </ul>			Baseline: Normative Space

In the quote above, Gavin Brown suggests the creative potential inherent in exposing perceptions and practices that have remained invisible to a large part of the population. The tables above review the inventory of everyday spaces outlined in Chapters 4 and 5 and hold them up to one another. What do we learn about the performance characteristics of spaces highlighted by queer people in cities? How might this help us re-structure and re-frame space in a way that actively recognizes queer experiences?

Located at the bottom of the chart, normative space in Kansas City and Cambridge reveal perhaps the greatest difference between cities. Kansas City's public realm was more hetero-normative as reflected by the pressures interviewees felt to edit their behaviors or closet their identities. In Cambridge, the public realm had a more queering norm, and this was evidenced by interviewees' comfort being "out on the street" in a variety of ways (Lynch's second "right" of ownership).

It is significant that most spaces recalled in Cambridge interviews were queering spaces. In fact the "ends" of the spectrum of sexed spaces barely came up in conversation; rather, through my own experiences I sought out people who were involved in trying to create queer space. Knowing that the normative space in each city is quite different, it's note-worthy that the characteristics around fit, control, and access of [fixed] queer and queering spaces are very similar in both cities.

Queer spaces combine accessibility with privacy. They re-use former buildings, create opaque thresholds between the street and interior space, and protect movement to some degree between the space and a participant's

mode of transportation. There's a high level of queer control in these spaces. The interior space is informal and typically flexible to accommodate a diversity of uses and levels of privacy. There's little difference between this format in Cambridge and in Kansas City, except to say the queer space format has been steadily declining for over a decade in Cambridge, to the point where almost no queer spaces were recalled by interviewees.

Perhaps as a result of this decline, queer people are attempting to create ephemeral queer space in Cambridge. These spaces are typically buffered by surrounding areas with some record of being queer friendly, and they are near public transportation. However, control in these spaces is reduced. It is typically limited by gender and weakened by social pressure within the school system, by untrained staff at event venues, or dictated to a significant extent by perceived buying power. These spaces are important for their presence in hetero-normative space, yet their ability to achieve a sustained impact is unclear.

The characteristics of queering spaces are also similar in both cities. Queering spaces are not physically intimidating. Their fit tends to be smaller scale, informal, and compositionally flexible. For establishment scale spaces, access is often embodied in a visual connection between indoor and outdoor space. Many spaces have some sort of transitional space between inside and outside, which both acts as a buffer between the street and the indoors, and allows the indoors to push out into the street. These spaces are not typically



regulated or controlled either through formal management practices or by the looks/gazes of others using the space. And perhaps most importantly, queering establishments tend to be found in queering districts. This makes districts and their urban design characteristics and geographies particularly useful to document.

Queering districts often access physical connections to strong symbolic places or institutions perceived to be meaningful to queer folk. Main Street and Liberty Memorial in Kansas City were linked to two of its four queering districts. In Cambridge, school and art institutions were linked to both queering districts. Additionally, all districts employed some device to create a feeling of enclosure (yet permeability), or a protective boundary. At Harvard Square, a psychological boundary rotated around the T station; at Crown Center a double enclosure of buildings both identified the place with the city and acted as a buffer. At 39<sup>th</sup> Street and Westport, a different scale of buildings and grid pattern created a felt separation. And lastly, a sense of visibility increased control and came up in many conversations about queering districts – whether it was a diversity of culture and gender expressions; same-sex couples showing affection; stickers on bags, cars, or storefronts; or the traditional gay flag.

Ultimately, this research should allow planners and designers to both promote space for queers in cities and diminish the dominance of heterosexist frameworks in which public spaces are constructed. “Only by self-

constructing queer are we not excluded,”<sup>107</sup> and this summons acts of design, creation, and proposition. In this light, how can queer be self-constructed for its promotion by designers and planners?

First, I want to make an argument about why planners and designers should be applying these ideas to public space: There was a high percentage of consumption-based spaces versus non consumption-based spaces identified in each city. In places with a highly supply of space, like Kansas City, this might appear to be satisfactory because there’s theoretically enough room for everyone at a low cost, even if space quality is just par. However, there are other concerns about the diminishing visibility of queer events in Kansas City’s public spaces. Towards the end of this thesis process, I learned that Gay Pride, of which the highpoint is typically a parade through the city, had become simply a weekend celebration in a park. Likewise, some of the traditional annual events being organized in Kansas City, like Outfest, have moved from visible street locations to parks, citing logistical problems closing off streets. Limiting queer visibility on the streets suggests an alarming step in the wrong direction, particularly for a city in which most space is firmly hetero-normative.

For a high-cost and land restricted area like Cambridge, there seemed to be a desire, yet a great struggle, to support stable queer spaces. In large part, these efforts relied on renting private space, and the cost associated with this was prohibitive. I bring this up, because I think it has significant

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<sup>107</sup> This is taken from a comment that my second reader, Michael Frisch, made to me.

implications for the need to queer, or to keep queering, public space. And this is an area in which I think planners and designers can be active.

For grassroots queer organizations, advocacy needs to happen not just around rights but around material concerns such as accessible public spaces, preservation of queer history, job training and counseling for youth and transgender folk, and prioritized public permitting for queer events.

Below, I propose key themes of attention for designers, planners, and activists in moving us closer to the non-heterosexist city related to fit, control, and access. These themes should be taken as a starting point to be experimented with and developed, both conceptually and in real projects and policies. In the non-heterosexist city, queer spaces alone aren't the goal although they are certainly necessary in the interim. Queer suggests a stasis. Instead, the active process of *queering* the public realm must be continuously at work.

### **Self-Constructing the Queer Public**

Fit: *Privacy in public* – Re-imagine how public spaces (parks, streets, plazas, etc.) are used, specifically as places where people have contact with one another in many different ways. Consider space forms from the open to the intimate that foster human connection from the unplanned to the deliberate group's, couple's, or single's use of space.

- a. Break up space into a variety of volumes and sizes.
- b. Play with enclosure, irregularity, and transitional spaces.

- c. Utilize queer concepts, like opacity, contrasts, and informality/bricolage.
- d. Reform public permitting processes in a way that prioritizes social use of street space.

Control: *Visibility* – Support the visibility of a diversity of sexual and gender identities in the public realm, as well as, displays of affection and desire between people of the same sex





- a. Weaken hetero-normative regulation
  - i. Public money supporting entertainment zones should be thoughtfully applied. No public money should go to zones with behavior regulations.
  - ii. Reconstruct planning policies around the household not the family.
  - iii. Promote queer public art installations to make it impossible to ignore “incompatible empirical cues” (from p. 40).
- b. Encourage greater sense of queer ownership of space – create small gathering spaces linked to historical queer spaces, institutions, memorials, parks, and so on.

Access: *Queering thresholds* – Encourage queer space to push into the public realm, while allowing it in some respects to remain protected

- a. Use public money to support queer community space, most importantly queer youth space.
- b. Design space entrances that allow for both visibility and discretion.
- c. Push queer institutions to design attached outdoor space inviting to general public.

Very recently, a precedent has begun to be set for spaces designed specifically for queer users. While none of them are publicly-owned, four out of five are integrated with the city fabric, and two (CAMP Rehoboth and the Elder Housing Village), have created outdoor space that explicitly remains open and inviting to the public at large. The chart below reviews the five spaces (one unbuilt) – three community centers and two LGBT elder housing communities – by fit, control, and access.

**Figure 2. Five Designed Queer Spaces in Four Cities categorized by fit, control, and access**

Designed Queer Spaces		Fit	Control	Access
<p>The Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender Center <b>San Francisco</b></p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Utilizes “community symbols” like translucency/transparency rather than vocab of gendered space</li> <li>-Irregular interior spaces allow glimpses, cruising</li> <li>-Old and new building challenge notion of one “true identity”</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Programmed for variety of uses, including ceremonial room, meeting spaces, counseling rooms</li> <li>-Gender neutral bathrooms</li> <li>-Center signage references rainbow symbol</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Has both highly visible and highly discreet entrances on opposite sides of building</li> <li>-Located outside of (and equidistant to) three queer neighborhoods</li> <li>-“Flamboyant” building contrasts with more conservative surrounding aesthetic</li> </ul>	
<p>CAMP Rehoboth Community Center <b>Rehoboth Beach</b></p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Flexible interior, “don’t know what program will be needed in the future”</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-References rainbow colors in signage, donor wall, courtyard umbrellas</li> <li>-Balances visibility to community at large with privacy</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-“Public face” of structure is courtyard (businesses, cafes, tables); open to public but semi-enclosed by queer community space</li> <li>-Courtyard visible from street, a series of spaces to move through</li> <li>-Distinct contrast to less designed surrounding buildings</li> </ul>	
<p>The LGBT Center at Penn <b>Philadelphia</b></p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Highly flexible student group office spaces; recognizes that identities are shifting</li> <li>-Queer wall art</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Building is majority for queer use, some spaces open to other student groups</li> <li>-Space extremely popular with all students</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Integrated with main Penn campus</li> <li>-Modern interior is distinct contrast to historical surrounding buildings</li> </ul>	
<p>LGBT Elder Housing Village <b>San Francisco</b></p> <p>Unbuilt/conceptual (no picture)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Village with mixed-income housing, queer theater, retail</li> <li>-Clustered housing with shared open space</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Mixed-income, multi-cultural</li> <li>-Primarily for queer seniors</li> <li>-Worked with neighborhood to discuss inclusive and open space</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Integrated into Hayes neighborhood and mainstream healthcare system</li> </ul>	
<p>RainbowVision Properties <b>Santa Fe</b></p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Residential development for “second fifty years”</li> <li>-Medical services, assisted living, restaurant, gym</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Queer majority community, 70% queer / 30% straight</li> <li>-Queer entertainment programming</li> <li>-Rainbow flag used as signage</li> <li>-Rooms named after historical LGBT figures</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Enclave separate from downtown Santa Fe</li> <li>-Designed as semi-circle</li> <li>-“El centro” is communal center of property</li> </ul>	

## **Methodology and Additional Research Directions**

Methodologically, this thesis was meant to be a broad-brush approach (or inventory) to understanding and re-framing the spatial experience of queers in cities. Needless to say, it can be difficult to compare experiences over such a wide range of spaces. At the same time, I think it's important to try to capture the big picture first before exploring the nuances; otherwise, it's difficult to make wider-ranging claims about how hetero-normative space impacts non-normative identities. It would be interesting for future researchers to do another broad-brush study with a much larger and more diverse interview pool, and then for more focused studies to follow that explore particular types of space.

Who and what might this future research encompass? A greater level of diversity was missing in my interview pool. For example, it would be highly interesting to compare "Gay" Pride, "Black" Pride, and "Latino" Pride in Kansas City and other places. In Cambridge, it would have been helpful to interview queer youth at Cambridge Rindge and Latin, a diverse school with support for queer students. The Director of the Diversity program offered to arrange interviews, but I was not able to get COUHES approval to interview persons under the age of 18. This last point suggests there is still much to be done at the university level to support queer research across fields.

I solicited interviews through formal and informal networks that largely communicated over email. While this was highly successful in securing interviews in a limited amount of time, it must be acknowledged that parts of the queer

population who aren't a part of these networks (for any number of reasons) were not included in this research. Those sub-populations may have very different feedback about the places they use and how they feel in public spaces in Kansas City and Cambridge. With more time, it would have been highly interesting to incorporate several additional methods, including both a snowball and venue-driven approach to connect with people not tapped into more formal networks, who don't use the internet, or who wish to remain anonymous about their identities in public.

In particular, it is important to further explore the outdoor, public realm, including an in-depth study of queering districts and an in-depth study of queer experiences in the hetero-normative realm (which might involve more time-consuming research like accompanying interviewees in various spaces).

One way for planning research to continue to gain consciousness around these topics is to examine the planning documents of initiatives that have cleared queer space or promoted it. The goal would be to see how public space is framed and thought about in plans, and the explicit and implicit objectives vis-à-vis queer users. Potential examples include Liberty Memorial and Penn Valley Park in Kansas City (which eliminated roads and put up gates to limit cruising), Nationals Baseball Park in Washington D.C. (which cleared long-standing queer clubs to build a baseball stadium), and the N. Halsted Street streetscape initiative in Chicago (which promoted the city's queer main street). Additionally, city-wide open space and design guidelines should be critiqued through a sex and gender lens.



Lastly, it would be valuable to study the planning and development documents of formal entertainment zones, like the Kansas City Live! section of the Power and Light District (there are similar districts in other cities) to examine how stated objectives translate into the creation of heterosexist spaces. Many of these spaces are funded with tax-payer dollars, and as such, they should be held accountable to queer tax payers. This is only the beginning, and there are many exciting directions in which this research can move so that we can possess a deeper and broader picture of the spatial experiences of queer people (and other marginalized groups in cities), and build on the positive construction of queer in the public environment in which we live.

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