QUEER(ING) COMMUNITY: QUEER COMMUNITY, SPATIALITY, AND TEMPORALITY IN MADISON, WI

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Abstract

This thesis is a blended ethnographic analysis of the queer nightlife scene in Madison, Wisconsin USA, focused specifically on queer pop-up events. These events began in reaction to a homonormative and exclusionary permanent gay nightlife scene. I begin by providing background about Madison, its queer subculture, and the racial and class dynamics within the city. In the first chapter, I address the complications of defining queerness and community in both academic and organizing work, engaging in theoretical understandings of both terms, as well as incorporating the definitions and understandings of research participants. I use discourse analysis to parse the descriptions of several queer pop-up events in Madison and the political engagements of both permanent gay bars and Queer Pressure, a significant queer pop-up event series. In the second chapter, I begin with an analysis of the notion of the sacred within th scene, then move to engage with Jack Halberstam's concepts of queer temporality and spatiality to consider the implications and possibilites of pop-up and queer takeover style events, in part by reflecting on sets, the spaces the parties take place in, and the transient nature of event series and Madison queers. In the third chapter, I take up the question of queer politics and intersectionality by reading Micheal Warner's definition of queer politics alongside Lisa Duggan's conception of the homonormative, and reflect on the resonances of intersectionality and crip theory within these frameworks. I then discuss the homonormative politics of the Madison LGBTQ+ community, and contrast them with an analysis of Queer Pressure's political commitments. The final section of this chapter is a case study of the No Cops at Pride movement, reactions to and consequences of its engagement with radical queer politics, and a brief analysis of the resonance of this movement in 2018 with the racial justice mass movement of 2020. Ultimately, I do not strive to make any overarching conclusions with this thesis, but rather to take seriously and consider deeply a particular moment in time in the place that I consider home, and to gesture towards a more complex engagement with the queer spaces that exists in between the rural and the urban in the United States.

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Thank you to Robert- for everything.

This thesis is dedicated to the radical queers who have changed my life- thank you for your generosity with your time, thoughts and energies. I can't wait to dance with you again.

Declaration

I hereby declare that this thesis is the result of original research; it contains no materials accepted for any other degree in any other institution and no materials previously written and/or published by another person, except where appropriate acknowledgment is made in the form of bibliographical reference.

I further declare that the following word count for this thesis are accurate:

Body of thesis (all chapters excluding notes, references, appendices, etc.): 20,965 words

Entire manuscript: 23,801 words.

Signed

Jennifer Edwards
20 June 2020

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Introduction

Background on Madison, Wisconsin and the Queer Nightlife Scene

Madison, Wisconsin has a reputation in Wisconsin and the Midwest generally as "77 square miles surrounded by reality"[1]- the city is viewed as a politically and socially progressive island in the midst of a much more conservative state and region. It is frequently named one of "the best places to live in America"[2] and specifically, one of the top five most gay-friendly cities in 2010. It has a vibrant queer community, with several gay bars, a large annual celebration of LGBTQ+ Pride, and many organizations catering to the interests of queer people. However, if you look a little deeper, you'll find that things aren't as rosy as they seem. The city has enormous issues of racial and class inequality, including massive disparity in rates of incarceration for Black men, a deeply racist school-to-prison pipeline, and income inequality along racial lines[3]. The "gay-friendly" city services cater almost exclusively to cis white gay men, nearly all of the queer-identified permanent spaces specifically target gay men, while all of the spaces for the rest of the LBTQI+ community are temporary. These temporary spaces are typically straight spaces which have been "taken over" for an evening. There are several groups which exist in this temporal and spatial flux, which form, organize and disperse again, including Lesbian Pop Up Happy Hour (LPUHH), Queer Pressure (now defunct

[1] A city motto proposed by then-Mayor Paul Soglin in 2013, after a derisive comment by a former Wisconsin governor. "Wis. Mayor Proposes 1st Motto for Capital of Madison: '77 Square Miles Surrounded by Reality' | Fox News." July 12, 2013. https://www.foxnews.com/us/wis-mayor-proposes-1st-motto-for-capital-of-madison-77-square-miles-surrounded-by-reality.

[2] Adwar, Corey. "7 Reasons Why Madison, Wisconsin Is The Best Place To Live In America." Business Insider, September 24 2014. https://www.businessinsider.com/why-madison-wisconsin-is-the-best-place-to-live-2014-9.

[3] Oliver, Pamela. "Reports on Wisconsin." https://www.ssc.wisc.edu/~oliver/racial-disparities/reports-on-wisconsin/.

but hugely influential), and Dyke Dive, and each attracts a different sociopolitical identity group. LPUHH tends to take place in more expensive bars and identifies itself as "filling the void of Madison's lack of Lesbian Bars with a monthly pop-up bar"[4], while Dyke Dive occupies more working class "dive" bars and defines itself as "a Madison, WI pop-up bar held at 'dive' or 'neighborhood' bars for dykes & friends of dykes"[5]. Queer Pressure targeted slightly different (and a broader range of) identify groups, occupying a variety of spaces and holding different events such as concerts, art galleries, and dance parties. Queer Pressure organizers described the group as a "collective of queer-identifying djs, artists, performers and more who seek to promote queer art and creation. Queer Pressure is explicitly political… (and) seeks to curate a better nightlife community for queer people in Madison, WI. We seek to push the boundaries of homonormativity and create events for and by queer people".[6]

Most of the analysis in this thesis will center on the impact of Queer Pressure on the queer nightlife scene in Madison as of summer 2019. Queer Pressure went dormant in November 2018, after the couple who were the central organizers of the events broke up. They have gone on to work on different ventures, including Hot Summer Gays and QueerIRL. Queer Pressure was cited as deeply influential by many of the organizers I interviewed, as well as the attendees of all sorts of queer events in Madison. Due to its critical position in the evolution of the nightlife scene, a fair portion of my analysis will address Queer Pressure, despite it being functionally non-existant at the time of field work. I was unable to meet with organizers of LPUHH and Dyke Dive, which will be

[4] "Lesbian Pop Up Bar // Madison Edition - About," n.d. https://www.facebook.com/pg/lavendarpopupbarmadison/about/.
[5] "Dyke Dive - About," n.d. https://www.facebook.com/pg/dykedive/about/.
[6] Queer Pressure Collective. "About," n.d. http://www.queerpressurecollective.com/about.

addressed in the work as well- these organizers were particularly resistant to participating in research, and their events are frequently critiqued by the people I interviewed for being exclusionary.

I put these groups and events in contrast with permanent gay bars in Madison, particularly Woof's (largely regarded as a leather bar for Bears, open since 2007), Prism (formerly known as Plan B, a gay dance club mostly frequented by younger gay men, opened in 2009), and Shamrock (a gay dive bar popular with older gays that's been open since 1986). These bars, particularly Prism, have had some tensions with Queers of Color and lesbians in the past. None of the queer temporary events occur in any of these permanent gay spaces, which advertise themselves as open to any and all LGBTQ+ people.

I'm interested in the ways this built-in impermanence affects belonging and kinship formations, as well as what exclusions must exist and in fact constitute these formations. I'm interested to find out about the queer and/or feminist politics of the organizers and events, and how those politics manifest in practice, particularly around subculture formation. There's a complex racial and class dynamic in Madison, with incredible inequalities between the wealthier white population and the generally much poorer Communities of Color, with these inequalities reflected in physical geographic space. I suspect that one of the exclusions in the establishment of queer belonging and kinship is racial and class-based, and want to explore how these exclusions are internalized and implicitly constitute the scene. I want to analyze how these communities understand themselves in relation to class and racial dynamics, to speak to those who are both "inside" and "outside" the defined bounds of the queer scene, and

to work out how definitions and manifestations of community operate in the specific context of Madison WI.

Central research questions

How does queer community form, function, and sustain itself in impermanent temporalities and/or spaces? What exclusions are necessary for the composition of these communities to be stable? Along what lines are these exclusions drawn? How do these barriers affect those on both the exterior and interior of the scene?

Chapter Summaries

- Chapter One will address definitions of queerness, complicate the idea of community and specify alternate terms, including “scene” and “subculture”. This chapter also describes and analyzes the queer pop-up events in Madison, and concludes with a brief consideration of the politics and risks of outness.
- Chapter Two is about the temporality and spatiality in the queer scene, including thinking about transient populations, the temporary nature of the events themselves, both in terms of individual parties and series, and the spaces they take place in.
- Chapter Three takes on the idea of queer politics. I will begin with a discussion on homonormativity and radical queer politics, then move to the specifics of Madison’s political landscape. It will address the explicit politics of Queer Pressure and the implications of these political commitments. Finally, I will take

the specific case of the No Cops at Pride Movement and its consequences for the queer scene in the city.

A Note about Theoretical Frameworks

Each chapter of this thesis addresses a different theoretical body of work, so it seems more useful to contain that area of analysis within them, rather than present an overarching framework here. I will be engaging significantly with Jack Halberstam, Micheal Warner, Kimberle Crenshaw, Robert McRuer, and Alan Blum, among others, to work in a blended ethnographic style, and attempting to integrate theory with interview content and observation from my field work, in order to accomplish a broader understanding of my central questions in this research.

Situated Knowledge, Positionality and Autoethnography

I am writing from first and foremost a commitment to principles and practice of feminist and queer anthropology, specifically ethnography. As I am working as an ethnographer in an explicitly queer context, particular attention and value is placed on situated knowledge, positionality of myself as the researcher, and special attention to potential impact my presence may have on the scene. We can start with the practice of situated knowledge and positionality. As articulated by Margot Weiss: “situating the author in the text performs complicated rhetorical work: it simultaneously acknowledges the situatedness and partiality of all knowledge while conveying to the reader that transparent self-representation is both possible and crucial to evaluate the truth claims

of the ethnography."[7] The impossibility of complete and objective knowledge has been argued by many feminist theorists over the past 30 years, (Haraway 1991, Mohanty 1984/1991, Butler 1990) and the idea of "situated knowledge" was introduced by Haraway in 1988, where she argues for a "feminist objectivity [that] is about limited location and situated knowledge, not about transcendence and splitting of subject and object. It allows us to become answerable for what we learn how to see,"[8] and calls for knowledge production which is "always constructed and stitched together imperfectly, and therefore able to join with another, to see together without claiming to be another,"[9] allowing us to resist the totalizing notion of masculinist scientific objectivity and acknowledge the power relations and inequities within scholarship while still being able to generate new knowledge from a feminist perspective. The practice of situated knowledge implicates within it a researcher who occupies a specific vantage point from where they produce knowledge, who is never outside of the discourse and sociality of the space they are writing about. This positionality, per Haraway, "is, therefore, the key practice in grounding knowledge organized around the imagery of vision, and much Western scientific and philosophic discourse is organized in this way. Positioning implies responsibility for our enabling practices,"[10] demanding a feminist ethics of care towards the subject of our research, our participants and the implications of our final work towards those communities.

[7] Weiss, Margot. "The Epistemology of Ethnography: Method in Queer Anthropology." *GLQ* 17, no. 4 (2011), p. 654.
[8] Haraway, Donna. "Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective." *Feminist Studies* 14, no. 3 (1988), p. 583.
[9] Haraway p. 586
[10] Haraway p. 587

In this vein, my own position in regards to this research is a sort of incomplete insider role. I lived in Madison part time over the summers of 2013 and 2014, and moved there full time in January 2015. I attended the latter half of my undergraduate degree at a small liberal arts college in Madison, and remained there for a year and a half after graduating undergrad, working various restaurant industry and office jobs. I formally came out in the summer of 2018 online, but was attending queer events and parties like those discussed in this thesis from 2015, and my queerness was openly known among my friend group during that time. As a white, college-educated cis woman in Madison, I did not directly encounter the classism and racism that is prevelant in the city, but through my work with non-profit organizations and student-led efforts around minimum wage increase advocacy, low-wage workers' rights, and reproductive justice, I feel I was more engaged in and aware of the systems of inequality in Madison than typical undergraduates and recent grads.

I intentionally did not interview former romantic partners for this work, but given the nature of the small and tight-knit queer scene, there was overlap in friends, former housemates and collegues, making my presence and prior relationships within it a central feature of the ethnographic process. In many ways, I also represent the liminality of the city, which some of my participants articulated as a central feature of queer scene in Madison. I was there for a few years for college, stayed for a bit after graduating, then moved away for grad school. Although I return with a fair degree of frequency (over summer and for winter breaks), and I will be returning for a year between completing my MA and beginning a PhD, Madison will never be a permanent residence for me, as is the case for many of the young queer people who live there. In the time that I had been

largely away from the city, during the academic year 2018/19, Queer Pressure events had ceased to be held under that moniker, and the gay dance club that features prominently in many of my interviews had changed ownership and names (from “Plan B” to “Prism”) and has since closed entirely. This, and other smaller things in the city, indicate how rapidly the queer scene changes as spaces and people exist in a constant state of flux and renewal. My position as an ‘insider’ is questionable, as I returned for a few months explicitly for research, and while living and working in Madison, remained constantly aware of my researcher-self and the expectations of the ethnographic research I was doing. I chose intentionally not to pursue new romantic relationships while doing the research, which had been a key part of my participation in the past. I stayed largely sober for all the queer parties and events, and I didn’t participate in the drug culture of the scene during my field work period. Over the course of my interviews of both party organizers and attendees, my presence at queer parties was increasingly noted as and described as ‘researcher’ or ‘observer’, rather than as a regular party attendee, and people began to approach me with their own commentary and notes on what was happening around us. This couldn’t have been avoided, of course, but it means that I was increasingly understood by others as a researcher and in some ways outsider to the scene, rather than a peer or potential romantic partner.

However, in this work, there is an overwhelming sense of researching and writing *myself*, trying to articulate and understand my own subjective experiences of the complexity and dissonances of queerness in Madison. I came to this topic because there were huge parts of my own queerness that I could not find in the queer theory and ethnography canon. Madison occupies a sort of liminal space that is, in my mind,

underrepresented in work about queer communities, as it's neither a massive urban center like New York or Los Angeles, nor does it fit within the category of 'rural'. There is quite often a dichotomy in theory about the "rural-urban divide", which does not leave room for the in-between spaces of small cities which share elements of trends in both urban studies and rural studies, but do not fit neatly into either category.

I also, in reading the canon of queer theory, found my identification with the specific category of 'queer' to the underrepresented to the point of near non-existience. There's a larger amount of literature in queer theory addressing the experiences and identities of cis gay men, a more limited literature on the experiences of lesbians, and even fewer pieces on bisexuality. Many of these use "queer" as a term to express a particular politics or academic sensibility, but they do not use it as an identity category. This may be an issue of recency, as "queer" as an identity has only gained significant popularity in recent years. For my ethnographic work, I specifically sought out participants who identify as queer, or who felt connected in some way to the idea of a queer identity. This will be addressed fully in chapter one, "Defining Queerness and Community".

For these reasons, I will be blending more traditional feminist ethnographic practice with autoethnography, defined by Ellis and Bochner as "an autobiographical genre of writing and research that displays multiple layers of consciousness, connecting the personal to the cultural… [autoethnographers] focus outward on social and cultural aspects of their personal experience; then, they look inward, exposing a vulnerable self

that is moved by and may move through, refract, and resist cultural interpretations"[11]. While doing the fieldwork, I found it impossible to disentangle myself from the stories my participants were sharing, and many interviews ended up in more of a conversational back-and-forth, sharing experiences, rather than a more traditional interviewer-interviewee dynamic. I found many moments of resonance and connection with all of my participants, and I feel this thesis would be an inaccurate representation of the fieldwork if I were to not include my own affective and relational experience. However, I will not be undertaking a complete (auto)ethnography, but rather a hybrid ethnographic-theoretical model of research, relying primarily on interview accounts to engage with existing theoretical understandings, either in agreement or challenging dominant theoretical understandings of queer theory, community studies, and counter-cultural studies. I found that my most productive and useful data came from interviews, rather than participant observation and attendence at the queer events, so I will not be using "thick description" very heavily, not will I be leaning into a narratvie style of storytelling, both hallmarks of recent trends in ethnographic research. This is due both to the data I collected and the limitations of my fieldwork time and personal experience.

Research Methodology and Recruitment Process

My methodology utilizes qualitative data which was collected from mid May until late August 2019 in Madison, WI. The primary basis of my analysis are the individual interviews I conducted with members of the queer scene in Madison. I conducted 15

[11] Ellis, Carolyn, and Arthur Bochner. *Evocative Autoethnography: Writing Lives and Telling Stories*, 2016, p. 65.

interviews, and have found 13 of them to be productive and relevant. I spoke to four organizers of queer pop-up events. These interviews were structured around questions about the queer subculture, identification with spaces/social groups, and reflections about the function of queer spaces in Madison. We further discussed queer politics, their organizing principles, and their own experiences of queerness in Madison. Additionally, I spoke to eleven event attendees and members of the queer scene, largely female or genderqueer and in their mid to late 20s. I was able to speak with several trans folks, as well as two people who described themselves as “elder queers”- in their 40s or 50s, who had a different perspective on many of the things I address in this work.

I recruited for my interviews primarily using social media and existing relationships through word of mouth. I created a flyer which was shared in several Facebook groups and on my personal page, and it was additionally shared online by my friends and acquaintances. A few additional interviews were conducted through snowball method, wherein participants connected me with friends and housemates who were also interested in participating. I created a website where interested participants were able to find out more about the project and who I am as an interviewer.

Image 1.1: Call for participants flyer for social media

Call for Participants!

I'm looking to interview folks who identify as non-heteronormative who live in Madison, particularly trans folks and people of color. Interviews will about an hour and a half to two hours and will cover community, belonging, and identity. Please email me to get something scheduled.

About the Project

I'm conducting ethnographic research in Madison Wisconsin during June/July 2019, focusing on temporary queer spaces and events. I'm interested in how the unique temporal and spatial nature of these events impacts belonging and inclusion. I'm focusing on intersections of race, class, sexual identity, and (dis)ability in community formation and belonging. The bulk of the research will be in semi-structured interviews and informal observation. This field work will contribute to my MA thesis, and I plan to publish non-academic articles related to the research.

Image 1.2, 1.3, 1.4, 1.5: Screenshots from my project website, including a more detailed call for participants, a longer description of the scope of the project, an self-introduction, and an ethics, privacy and data protection statement.

I included my consent form as a link on the website, and I walked through the provisions and requirements of it with each participant in person before obtaining their signatures. The consent form can be found in appendix on page 92.

I also utilize discourse analysis of online event announcements, Facebook groups, and other messaging about queer community in Madison to expand my analysis of queer communitiy building in online spaces. I'm interested in the language used in these event announcements around ex/inclusivity, and will be contrasting these messages with the interviews I conducted and the participant observation I did at events. The vast majority of information about events in physical space is conveyed via social media, particularly via Facebook events and groups, which came up repeatedly as a potential barrier to access in the interviews.

Further field research and participant observation took place at the spaces I have identified, primarily temporary pop up spaces as well as a few small festivals and Pride events, where I spoke to participants and observed group dynamics. I attended roughly 20 events over the course of the summer, which I found to be mostly useful in understanding what the interview participants described and experienced. Some analysis will be based on this field observation, but most of the analysis in the thesis will center on the interview content.

Finally, I utilize some demographic data collected by other organizations, which is overlaid with information about specific disparities in the queer subculture that came up in my interviews, to analyze intersections of race, class, and sexuality in the geographic space of Madison. One of the most useful primary sources in my work will

be an extremely fascinating and well-documented study done in Madison in 2012-2013, which highlights a plethora of data points and demographic points of interest and paints a clear picture of systemic inequalities in terms of race and class: “Race to Equity: A Baseline Report on the State of Racial Disparities in Dane County.” from the Wisconsin Council on Children and Families. This source includes useful maps and analysis about the state of racial segregation and accessibility.

Data Protection and Confidentiality

In compliance with best practices for data protection and anonymity, I followed the following steps to ensure the highest possible security of data. I recorded all interviews on a localized app to my phone while my phone was in Airplane mode, uploaded each of the recordings to my encrypted Google drive account (using a localized and private Boxcryptor account with two-factor authentication) with file names that do not contain identifying information about the participants. I then removed the audio files from my phone after uploading them, and maintained one document which connects the interview participants’ identities to their relevant recordings and transcriptions, which is only accessible on my local hard drive and is password-protected. All transcription was done using the platform transcribe.wreally.com, all done by hand without voice recognition or other softwares. After the transcription was complete, I transferred the file to my encrypted Google Drive and deleted all data from transcribe.wreally. All interview .mp3s and transcriptions will be kept for three years after the completion of this thesis, then completely deleted.

Chapter One: Defining Queerness and Community

One of the central questions of this work is what, precisely, community means, and how and to whom “queer community” is extended to individuals and groups of people. All of these pop-up events began as a response to a feeling of exclusion and harassment within the established gay bars and clubs, and a sense of overrepresentation of gay white men within the LGBTQ+ groups in Madison, to the detriment of queer women, nonbinary people, and queer People of Color. I want to start with some definitional work, as “community” and “queer” have different meanings in academic, activist, and social spaces, and these definitions can contradict each other or become too broad. I will also spend some time discussing how my participants define queerness for themselves. I will be using these and related terms throughout this work, so I want to clarify here what I mean when I write them. Next, I will analyze the language used by queer pop-ups in Madison. Finally, will briefly touch on the limitations of the scene- specifically, people who are queer who do not participate in events, and part of why that’s happening. To begin, let’s think about “community”, and alternate articulations of the concept which may be more apt in this thesis.

Defining Community and Queerness

Academically, Halberstam traces a useful definition of community in *In a Queer Time and Place:* “Community, generally speaking, is the term used to describe seemingly natural forms of congregation. As Sarah Thornton comments in her introduction to The Subcultures Reader, "Community tends to suggest a more permanent population, often aligned to a neighborhood, of which family is the key

constituent part. Kinship would seem to be one of the main building blocks of community" (Thornton 1997, 2). Subcultures, however, suggest transient, extrafamilial, and oppositional modes of affiliation. The idea of community, writes JeanLuc Nancy in “The Inoperative Community," emerges out of the Christian ritual of communion and expresses a sense of something that we once had that has now been lost-a connection that was once organic and lifegiving that now is moribund and redundant. Nancy calls this the "lost community" and expresses suspicion about this "belated invention": "What this community has 'lost'-the immanence and the intimacy of a communion is lost only in the sense that such a 'loss' is constitutive of 'community' itself" (Nancy 1991, 12). The reminder that quests for community are always nostalgic attempts to return to some fantasized moment of union and unity reveals the conservative stakes in community for all kinds of political projects and makes the reconsideration of subcultures all the more urgent,”[12]. So, as we see, Halberstam is complicating and deepening a surface understanding of community to be read as something more than ‘natural forms of congregation’- he traces academic commentary about seeing community through traditional modes of sociality- the family and the church, which have been eulogized, particularly by conservatives, since the late 20th century and especially throughout the first quarter of the 21st century. Halberstam acknowledges here the conservative bent of many projects that gesture towards community- I think here about the Madison Community Foundation, which seeks “to enhance the common good through philanthropy,”[13] but whose function is to be a stopgap for addressing social issues in a

[12] Halberstam, Jack. *In a Queer Time and Place*. New York and London: NYU Press, 2005, p. 154.
[13] “About MCF.” https://www.madisongives.org/about.

conservative governmental system which does not see its function to support and protect its citizens (examples of the MCF work include large donations to a nonprofit which fights against ongoing environmental degradation, a private trust for the underfunded public library system, and a group that provides housing for people experiencing homelessness- all functions that previously the state was funding or litigating). Halberstam instead points towards the importance of studying subcultures and scenes. He says “subcultures… suggest transient, extrafamilial and oppositional modes of affiliation” as a way of understanding the complexities and intimacies of groups of queer people who congregate but who are not nostalgic for forms of conservative social order which have historically oppressed and excluded queers. In this work, I will be using the terms ‘scene’ or ‘subculture’ when referring specifically to those groups and events which reject, implicitly or explicitly, the nostalgia for normative structures, and will be using ‘community’ in reference to homonormative groups, in situations when scene/subculture isn’t appropriate, such as in national discourse or when referring to broader groups of LGBTQ+ people, rather than specifically the group formations I’m focused on, or when quoting from other texts. Next, let’s clarify what I mean when I use the word “queer” in this text.

Queerness as a concept is notoriously difficult to definitionally pin down. The most popular understanding of its meaning is also the broadest, and most contradictory- “in both popular and academic usage in the United States, ‘queer’ is… understood as an umbrella term that refers to a range of sexual identities that are ‘not straight.’ But in some political and theoretical contexts, ‘queer’ is used in a seemingly contradictory way: as a term that calls into question the stability of any categories of identity based on

sexual orientation… [and operates] as a *critique* of the tendency to organize political or theoretical questions around sexual orientation per se."[14] The choice to specifically use queer as a term can be understood in several additional ways- as a reclaimation of a homophobic slur, as a gesture towards the political movement of HIV/AIDS activism in the 1980s and 90s, as a resistance to the homonormative politics of assimilation and acceptance, as a refusal of easy categorization, the list goes on. The origins of what has broadly been termed "queer theory" "reveal considerable disagreement over its relationship with and debt to philosophy, women's and lesbian studies, second wave and postmodern feminism and gay and lesbian studies… [and] contemporary queer theory remains in continuous conversation with innumerable bodies of scholarship,"[15] making it hard to define disciplinarily as well. Defining what queerness means has become more complex as it has begun work as an identity category itself, rather than an umbrella concept to capture other identities within it. A population survey of a representative sample of sexual minorities in the U.S. conducted in 2017/18 found that 5.8% of the population surveyed identified *as queer,* rather than as gay, lesbian, bisexual, or "other" ("other" included asexual, pansexual, and antilabel), with further information collected about attraction, partnering, and demographics such as race, age, and education level[16]. The survey found that queer-identifying people were overwhelmingly cisgender women (56.4%) or gender non-conforming/non-binary people

[14] Somerville, Siobhan B. "Queer | Keywords for American Cultural Studies, Second Edition." NYU Press. https://keywords.nyupress.org/american-cultural-studies/essay/queer/.
[15] Nash, Catherine. *Queer Methods and Methodologies: Intersecting Queer Theories and Social Science Research*. Edited by Kath Browne. 1st ed. Routledge, 2016, p. 4.
[16] Goldberg, Shoshana K., Esther D. Rothblum, Stephen T. Russell, and Ilan H. Meyer. "Exploring the Q in LGBTQ: Demographic Characteristic and Sexuality of Queer People in a U.S. Representative Sample of Sexual Minorities." *Psychology of Sexual Orientation and Gender Diversity* 7, no. 1 (2020): 101–12. https://doi.org/10.1037/sgd0000359.

(33.6%), and were younger and highly educated. This identification in itself throws something a wrench into the definitions of queerness explored above, particularly those which are popular in academic circles as a sort of resistance to stable categorization. What does it do to scholarship about sexuality and subcultures if the categories themselves are in perpetual flux, particularly given the recent rise in identification with queerness as identity? My call for interview participants was shaped around this identification: “Are you queer, based in Madison, Wisconsin, and interested in chatting about queerness and community? … I’m writing my master’s thesis about queer community in Madison”[17]. This, in ways I had not predicted, shaped the sort of people who reached out or agreed to be interviewed for the project, very much along the lines of the findings of the Goldberg et al. survey: my participants were almost entirely female (both cis and trans) or non-binary/ gender-nonconforming, highly educated, and younger (75% of my participants were in their mid to late 20s). As I will elaborate on later in this chapter, many of my participants articulated an experience of distancing from categories like bisexual or pansexual, instead finding the complexity and open-endedness of a claim to queerness to be most accurate or useful in their self-identification.

Participant Definitions of Queerness

At the start of each interview, I asked participants “what does queerness mean to you?” This wording was important to me as it didn’t immediately require a commitment to identification or foreclose the possibility of alternate identity claims, as several of my

[17] In my reading, I’ve come to prefer scene and subculture, rather than community, as referenced above, but in my call for participants, I did not yet have this clarity.

participants identified as being part of the “queer community” but used “lesbian” or “gay”, or used “queer” and “gay” interchangeably in reference to themselves. For several participants, it was important to claim a specifically *queer* identity, which I will be elaborating on in just a moment. Queerness was consistently defined by my interview participants in several overlapping and significant ways. There were three dominant trends in the responses of my participants: 1) the openness and mutability of queerness, 2) other identity labels not feeling accurate or comfortable, and 3) the radical political history and implications of the claim. These trends follow the academic difficulty I articulated about defining “queer”, and in some ways cannot be reconciled. After thinking through how each of these trends was articulated by my participants, I will turn to the queer events and analyze how they identify and use the language of queerness (or not). Next, I will turn to and reflect on the idea of a “queer scene” as such, both through the event descriptions and the experiences and thoughts of my participants.

First, many of them were drawn to queerness as an identity because it is open and mutable. This idea came up in several ways throughout the interviews: “it can mean anything except straight”, as “a broader more ambiguous term,” and as “a dynamic, changing [word], [which] acknowledges the potential for others to change as well.” The idea of a mutable and changing sexuality was understood as important to communicate, as many people said that their own journeys and identifications had not been straightforward. One person who identified specifically as queer said that “I realized I was attracted to women early in college or late in high school, kind of, and I searched around for a label. I used pansexual for a while then realized no one really know what that meant, or there were a few people who did but I had to explain it too much. Then I

identified as gay for a while, but it just was too challenging to have to navigate and re-evaluate myself every day or week or month… like am I adhering to this label? Am I gay, or am I bi? What am I? That was just… it was too stressful and I realized I don't actually owe it to anyone to like label in any particular way if I know that I'm just not straight, then I'm just going to call myself queer. It's just less stressful and I don't need to stress myself out about it." For this participant, there was a pressure to have a word to identify with, to claim in social and dating spaces, based on a non-heterosexual attraction, but found other words to be too restrictive, articulating that a constant process of re-evaluation can be frustrating and difficult to navigate. Related to this, several participants found that other, seemingly similar terms for sexuality were inadequate or felt incorrect for their own experiences. Quoting another participant: "there's reasons why I don't like the word bi as an identity term, cause I feel like it implies a binary, and I feel like it implies this 50/50 split of attraction and I don't feel that way, and I feel like pan would be a slightly more accurate label for my sexuality, but I like queer in its vagueness and openness," while another said that "It's kind of a flexible word, in my opinion, that you can use, you can be pansexual, bisexual, all kinds of different things," without needing to specify or be misunderstood through the use of other identity terms. One person who found themselves distancing from using "gay" to refer to themself said that "I feel like [queer] almost started to be used because LGBTQIAA etc was just becoming too cumbersome, but people wanted to be able to manifest that inclusion at the same time. The acronym is a lot for people to say or remember, if it's being truly inclusive, so I feel like that's absolutely why queer has become more prominent. I almost imagine it like if the acronym is alphabet soup, then

queer kind of fills in all of the space around the letters or something." The openness and inclusivity of the way queerness has been mobilized as an identity category allows for a wide range of sexual attraction to be possible, as well as addressing the fluidity of attraction in ways that terms like "gay" or "lesbian" can foreclose.

For many of my participants, their identification with queerness is rooted in a commitment to radical politics. This claim was echoed not only by organizers of explictly political queer events, but also by attendees and others I interviewed. For one organizer, "When I was first coming out, my social circles were very much sort of anarcho-punk scene, and my introduction to queerness was through this very political lens as a alternate label to just gay, cause it was a politicized view, so that would have been in like 2011, 2010 and yeah, it was kind of this not just gay, but queer as a political identity that was broad, encompassing of intersectional politics, things like that," while an event attendee said "[queer identity means] dissidence in many ways, and to me, it's a political stance, but it also means not agreeing in a way with what the establishment is telling me, who I should be and I should identify myself." Another event attendee said "I think... knowing some of the more radical history wrapped up in the word and being invested in that history and invested in anti-assimilationist queer movements… so I think queerness in that sense has this sense of broader community with a radical history, and definitively not a simple radical history." The specifics of these radical politics, and how they manifest at events in the scene, will be addressed in a later chapter, but I find it interesting that for several of my participants, their identification with queerness was not just as a broad category, but also as a political statement, and several participants articulated these ideas together, or as interrelated. They tapped specifically into the

AIDS/HIV activism of the 1980s and 90s of groups like Queer Nation, and addressed explictly the racial dynamics of that history. Several participants who addressed the political component of queerness as important to their identification are also involved with groups like LGBTQ Books to Prisoners and the ongoing No Cops in Schools campaign, both of which center racial justice and queer concerns in their organizing.

Pop-up Descriptions and Analysis

I want to move now to thinking about the ways in which the pop-up events that initially caught my attention claim an affiliation with non-heterosexual identities. Each does so in different and interesting ways, utilizing very different language based on who they consider their audience. I would like to consider the linguistic and community-building implications of these events and their audiences. To begin, here are each of the group's self-descriptions, pulled from their websites and Facebook pages.

Queer Pressure: "Queer Pressure is a collective of queer-identifying djs, artists, performers and more who seek to promote queer art and creation. Queer Pressure is explicitly political and began as a DIY project by Sarah Akawa (Saint Saunter) and DJ Boyfrrriend. This collaboration seeks to curate a better nightlife community for queer people in Madison, WI. We seek to push the boundaries of homo-normativity and create events for and by queer people. Events hosted by Queer Pressure are political and intentional spaces for members of the LGBTQ+ community guided by ethics: predatory behavior is not tolerated, racism/classism is actively opposed, all gender expressions are welcomed & affirmed, venues are wheelchair accessible, feedback/suggestions are welcome. Events held with support by Queer Pressure encourage safe(r) space

practices including wheelchair accessibility, gender neutral bathrooms, and leadership by queer people in the planning and development of events."

Queer Cafe: "A LGTBQA+ pop-up event community. We meet once a month at various locations to make art, work on projects, or just sit and sip warm drinks among others in the community."

Dyke Dive: "A Madison, WI pop-up bar held at "dive" or "neighborhood" bars for dykes & friends of dykes - all flavors are welcomed, we just wanted a catchy name."

Lesbian Pop Up Hour (LPUB): "Filling the void of Madison's lack of Lesbian Bars with a monthly pop-up bar."

Hot Summer Gays: "HSG is a collaborative event series showcasing the best queer music, art, and performance held annually during summer in Madison, WI. HSG is planned and produced by Saint Saunter, Dyke Dive, and queer.irl."

To begin my analysis of the self-identifation and allgeiences of these groups, I want to start with considering identity language, in the vein of my above discussion about the complications of the word "queer". In these descriptions, the use of "queer" vs "LGBTQA+" vs "dyke" vs "lesbian" signals target audiences and political allegiances in the larger LGBTQ+ movement and socialization[18]. "LGBTQA+" as used by Queer Cafe is the most inclusive and large-tent identification marker. Although some quibbles are possible (ie. not including some letters, even with the "plus" symbol included), Queer

[18] There's no particularly neutral language I can use here, I've settled for "LGBTQ+" due to its mainstream acceptance. Normally I'd use "queer" but as it has a specific and significant presence in my argument, I have chosen not to use it.

Cafe is signalling in the broadest possible terms its inclusivity. This operates in interesting tension with the title of the event itself. “Lesbian”, as used by LPUB, is much more narrow, calling in one specific group within the LGBTQ+ umbrella, using largely politically neutral language to refer to homosexual women. This is contrasted with Dyke Dive’s intentional use of the loaded term “dyke”, which has been used as a slur both historically and by some conservatives in the present, but which has been reclaimed by some lesbians (for instance, in Alison Bechdel’s long-running comic series “Dykes to Watch Out For”). However, the push for reclaiming dyke has not been universally embraced, incurring a great deal of debate in the lesbian community.[19] Most of this debate has largely quieted, and many groups and events have claimed the word- for instance, Dyke March, Dykes on Bikes, etc. It’s interesting to consider the class position signalled by Dyke Dive, particularly in contrast with LPUB. These groups occupy very different spaces within the city of Madison, with LPUB occurring in more expensive cocktail bars (the average drink cost at these bars is between $10-12 USD), while Dyke Dive takes over much cheaper local dive bars (average drink between $4-6 USD)- the class dynamics of these events will be more fully addressed in a later chapter, but it’s worth bookmarking them here. There is a relationship between the class politics of identification as a dyke or as a lesbian, as well as discourses between integration into homonormative social practices and intentional resistance to this normativity, which is

[19] See: Penelope, Julia. "Whose Past Are We Reclaiming?" *Off Our Backs* 23, no. 8 (1993): 12-25. http://www.jstor.org/stable/20834534. Or Brontsema, Robin. "A queer revolution: Reconceptualizing the debate over linguistic reclamation." *Colorado Research in Linguistics* 17, no. 1 (2004): 9.

echoed here in the way these events are described by their organizers and who they define as their target audiences.

"Queer" has some of the same intonations of reclamation as "dyke", with an added element of a sense of political commitment, as discussed above. Queer Pressure has taken an explicitly political stance on deploying "queer" in their organizing. Queer Cafe has not utilized the political undertones of queer in their event series, and appear to be using it in the mainstream sense, as echoed in their use of "LGBTQA+", as has Hot Summer Gays. One interesting tension with HSG in particular is their emphasis on queerness in their description but use of "gay" in the title. Although clearly functioning as a pun on "hot summer days," the seeming interchangability of "gay" and "queer" for this group, especially given the organizing combination of one of the DJs who started Queer Pressure and the organiziers of Dyke Dive, adds layers of complexity to these groups and their linguistic commitments.

The use of identity language indicates specific political and ideological commitments, and is deeply tied to the history of different factions of the LGBTQ+ community. Use of identity language is not neutral, and is an indication of belonging and identification. LPUB is clearly not meant for gay men, and has some underlying tensions with the trans community.[20] Queer Pressure, with its explicitly political use of "queer", is a provocation for the homonormative ideologies present in the Madison community, and explicitly says as much in their self-description. Using "queer" or "dyke" conjuges both

[20] I'm thinking here specifically of "political lesbians" and the complex relationship between the lesbian movement and the trans movement, which was reflected in some of the interviews I conducted. I'm interested in addressing these tensions in a future work.

transgression and identity reclamation in the face of hate and homophobia. These groups are expressing different projects and priorities in the choice of language they use.

One common element of all the pop up events addressed above is the idea of "community" in some way, although their gestures towards forming community (in the more conventional conception, rather than the more complex analysis that Halberstam is using, and which I'm extending to the rest of this work) and who is included in this purported community differ significantly. Community here can refer to a specific locality, like Madison, Wisconsin, as all of these descriptions reference, or to the LGBTQ+ community at large, as seen in Queer Pressure and Queer Cafe descriptions. It can also refer to a specific subset of the LGBTQ+ umbrella, as seen in the LPUB and Dyke Dive descriptions. However, there are differing senses of engagement with the purported community each group targets. Queer Pressure engages the most deeply with the potential involvement and needs of their attendees. The organizers actively request feedback and suggestions, and attempt to center concerns of marginalized members of the queer community (explicit anti-racism and -classism policies, accessible venues, etc), perhaps most closely aligning with Halberstam's emphasis on 'scene' and 'subculture', rather than 'community'. The absence of these commitments to marginalized members of their purported communities in the descriptions of the other pop-ups indicates a lack of attention for marginalized attendees, or perhaps a definition of community that, however unintentionally, excludes some of the most vulnerable.

The use of "we" in these descriptions is significant and differs in implied meaning across these groups. The "we" in the Dyke Dive description references the founders of

the group, rather than the attendees or broader community of lesbians in Madison. Queer Pressure's "we" in their mission statement is in reference to the organizers as well, and indicates those organizers' political commitment to the stated purpose of the group. Queer Cafe's "we" implies a more inclusive sense of the word, inviting the reader to be part of the group when they meet, and to participate in the activities the group hosts. LPUB does not have any reference to a "we", nor any language around community aside from a geographic reference. These presences and absences may indicate how the organizers of these groups conceptualize their relationship with attendees or outsiders. Queer Pressure's stated openness to feedback and sensitivity to attending to difference indicates a broad understanding of community, while LPUB's comparative closedness forecloses a broad coalition or sense of collective political solidarity. Both Dyke Dive and Queer Cafe rest somewhere between these two groups, with differing understandings of community and relationship between organizers and participants.

All of these events, save for Queer Cafe, specify their events as occuring and being for residents of Madison, Wisconsin. For my interview participants as well, queer subculture was very tied to location, and reflected that their most immediate association with the scene is geographically bounded, mostly centered on their social networks and extensions thereof. From one of the event attendees: "For me, I feel like it does center to a certain degree around events in town, and also just in the groups of friends that I'm surrounded by that are my communities," which was echoed through other interviews with both organizers and attendees. From an organizer, her sense of belonging and subculture is "fellow queer people [who] have always been my family, since I've come

out, and I have been lucky in that they're not always the same group of people, but I've always had a tight knit group of queers who were family to each other. So then, when I started throwing parties it felt like an extension of that." For others, there was a split between queer subculture as it has been understood politically, as a group of LGBTQA+ people with obstensibly similar interests and concerns, and the way they experienced their own queerness: "I feel like I would have to say queer *communities* cause I think I like the idea of a large sort of queer community, and I definitely feel...queer communities that I've been a part of have been more segregated and homogenous and more white, so I feel like that's why I would say communities, cause I feel like there's aspects of queerness that I don't know anything about or experiences that I'm not as connected to, but I do think in an ideal sense queer is such a broad identity, and politics that like, it could encompass so many people." This participant, in her discussion about her own community, specified that she felt it was entirely place based, either in Madison or the place where she attended university. Her reference to the whiteness of the queer scene in Madison will be more fully explored in the chapter about queer politics, but what is interesting to me here is the idea of communities subcultures in the plural form, both in terms of understanding a larger coaltion that is not bound by specific geography, and in addressing the concept within the city of Madison itself. Although my work in this thesis is inherently limited, and I will be focusing on the queer scene in Madison for much of my analysis, it is significant to recognize the multiple layers of belonging, cultural identity, and discourse that extends beyond their specific location and which surrounds all queer people. To return to working within the specific geographical boundaries of Madison and the surrounded area, I want to briefly touch on queer people who are not

part of the Madison queer subculture in a legible way, and the thorniess of being out of the closet.

The Limitations of the Scene and the Dangers of Outness

It is important here to address the concept of outness and how it relates to participation in the queer scene. Given that Madison is a relatively small city, where it seems like everywhere you go, you know someone there. Queers who are not out to their families, workplaces, or social groups articulated complicated feelings about their inability to participate in the scene. One of my participants discussed that she could not risk going to any of the queer parties: “I’m out in a certain capacity, but not in other capacities, and you just never know who you’re going to run into [at the parties], and you don’t know who they’ll tell… it’s a very weird bubble, because I mean, I’m thoroughly supported by my partner… he will always support me if and when I come out to people, and I have my own little supportive bubble, and my best friends are super supportive about [my queerness] but if I venture outside of the bubble it’s a little scary… I’d like to come out to my parents but I just don’t know if they’ll ever be ready to hear it. I don’t know how they’ll react… Especially for people who are from small towns, it can be dangerous.” As I discussed in the introduction to this thesis and in the Queer Politics chapter, Madison is often viewed as a progressive island in a conservative state, and as my participant mentioned, many people come from small, conservative towns and aren’t out to their families. There is a constant risk in running into someone from your town at one of these parties, for them to mention seeing you to someone else, and for word to get back to people you do not want to know. This participant mentioned that one of the reasons she was vigilant about this and did not attend anything queer-adjacent was that

she worried her family would cut off any contact with her young nephews. This point was especially vivid for me, as after I came out as queer, my extended family reacted terribly, and I have not seen any of them or their children since, including my older half-brothers. Painfully, she told me that part of the reason she has not come out to her family is because she saw what a disaster it was for me. I mention this because I think it's important to consider that a queer subculture that does not recognize the risk for closeted people to participate, and which urges loudly proclaiming an affiliation with explicitly queer politics is one that cannot include and represent all queers, and should not claim to do so.

Conclusion

To conclude, in this chapter I've tried to lay out much of the groundwork for the rest of the thesis. Much of it will be useful in understanding the distinctions I make moving forward, particularly around the words "community", "scene" or "subculture", and "queer". I will be using "community" to refer specifically to groups which have a particular conservative or normative undertone and to those too broad to be understood as either a scene or subculture. I will be using "scene" to indicate the concept of a particular temporal or spatial group of people, while "subculture" will refer to groups of queers which are a bit broader and more encompassing than a specific "scene". I'll be digging a bit more into the underpinnings of the concept of the scene in the next chapter. I also discussed the difficulty of defining queerness, beginning with some existing research before getting into how my research participants defined the term of themselves. Their definitions fit into roughly three categories of identifying with the openness and mutability of queerness, finding that other identity labels not feeling

accurate or comfortable, and an affinity for the radical political history and implications of a claim to queer identity. Next, I considered the language used by the pop ups in their own descriptions, and potential implications of this language. The majority of this thesis will be focused on Queer Pressure and other events planned by the organizers of Queer Pressure, but I found it productive in this chapter to contrast that group with other event series that were happening contemporaneously. Finally, I briefly addressed closeted queers who are not participants in the queer scene. They will be largely absent from the rest of my analysis, and it felt important to mention their experiences here at the beginning of the thesis. In the next chapter, I will move to discussing temporality, spatiality and the Madison queer scene, to think through how queerness is manifested in the physical world of parties and nightlife, and will more deeply some aspects of the scene which were only briefly touched upon this chapter.

Chapter Two: Temporality, Spatiality, and the Scene

"For me, Queer Pressure was just this magical space, sacred. It felt like church… there was a quote from somebody recently about their first… party that they attended… they said something like 'I walked in, and there were brown bodies, black bodies, bodies with hair and their hair was out, and everyone was sweating and covered in glitter and not wearing much clothes'... there was a magic in the comfortability that people felt at those parties." - Queer Pressure Organizer

"The scene often appears sacred because the practices it cultivates could be interrupted by interests that do not engage it with the gravity it thinks it requires." -Blum, *Scenes*[21]

Sacred Queer Spaces

The above quote from Blum has stuck with me since I read it, reappearing in my mind periodically when I thought about what a scene might be, and how one might interrogate the feeling of collectivity that borders on the sacred, at some of the very best queer parties and events, and I was immediately reminded of the Blum quote when the idea of the sacred as it came up in my interview with an organizer. I think a productive way to begin addressing what is happening in the Madison queer nightlife scene is to start by reading these two quotes together, and perhaps for my own edification, to pay close attention to the subtleties of these two comments.

Let's start first by closely reading the quote from Blum. The sentiment, particularly the notion of "appearing sacred," irked me on first reading- this phrasing implies that the scene is not, in fact, sacred, but merely seems to be on the surface, although perhaps not to those on the inside of it. The scene seems to dictate the actions of its participants - "the practices *it* [the scene itself] cultivates," (emphasis added)-

[21] Blum, Alan. "Scenes." *Public* 22–23 (2001), p. 9.

implies to me that the scene is greater than its participants. This makes sense, if we read it in terms of performativity. If we take “scene” in a theatrical sense, wherein actors perform a series of lines and actions for an audience whose level of participation is in their function of viewing, the scene is larger than the predetermined actions of the actors, but is rather a specific combination of things, particular in its ephemera and evocative of emotional responses from the audience. If we extend this understanding of scene from its theatrical connotation into that of nightlife, as this is the particular interest point for this analysis, the scene is more than the actions of individuals participating, whether they’re dancing or ordering drinks or flirting with each other, but rather the affective impact of the actions of individual participants, in conjunction with the space, time, and particular person viewing the scene, to create a full experience. Individuals within the scene are compelled into specific practices (dancing, drinking, flirting) which are cultivated by the established norms of the scene itself. As discussed in the Intersectionality IRL chapter, there are further established sets of (un)acceptable practices within the queer party scene in Madison, which involve political commitments of anti-racism, anti-homophobia, anti-classism, as well as ongoing emphasis on affirmative consent and prevention of harassment, among other things, which compel participants are to perform in specific ways beyond the standards of nightlife protocol.

These scene norms seem to make more likely “interruption by interests that do not engage it with the gravity it thinks it requires”- for these interests, either outsiders to the queer scene or insiders who are not dedicated to the same political and social commitments, interruption seems quite possible, in many forms, from minor infractions that threaten to jepordize the vibe of the event to much larger issues, like calling the

police or instigating violence (which are often the same thing, given the risk of police brutality, particularly to trans people and POC). The scene in its entirety does not seem at risk of this disruption, but rather the practices it cultivates are jeopardized- there will be other parties even if one particular event is disrupted. It is this precise risk of failure or interruption that makes the scene appear sacred- a perfectly whole and impenetrable moment is clinical and unhuman. The risk of infiltration which could tear apart the carefully curated communal practices is what makes the moment in the scene appear hallowed. Finally, the inclusion of “the gravity it *thinks* it requires” (emphasis added) implies a sort of self-seriousness, bordering on pretension, for those invested in the successful accomplishment of the scene and its practices. Perhaps the potential violation of cultural norms that have been established and carefully protected from interruption is not quite so dire as it's made out to be, because after all, this really is just a successful party series with a slight political bent. There are other outlets and spaces for both dancing and political engagement, none of which are perfect, but then again the parties are not perfect either. What is important, though, is that this self-seriousness is a requisite for the feeling of the sacred to be present in the scene, for its viewers and participants.

With all of that said, I would like now to consider the quote I began the chapter with from an organizer of the Queer Pressure parties. I find the way she phrased her sentiments interesting, and the areas she addressed intertwined in complex ways. To conjure the scene as a sacred space, she brings up the central importance of embodiment, of seeing “brown bodies, black bodies, bodies with hair and their hair was out, and everyone was sweating and covered in glitter and not wearing much clothes”- it

sounds like a fairly standard queer party, but for the organizer, having experienced the racism and homophobia in the Madison nightlife scene, the liberating scene she describes was nothing short of a coup. An important aspect of her rhetoric here is that she's quoting someone who has just walked into their first party, an outsider until the moment they become a participant in the scene, to talk about why this embodiment is important. These parties were not solely to address the organizer's frustration with the Madison scene and her mistreatment by existing club owners (for more on this, see the Queer Politics chapter)- they were to provide opportunities to share the magic she felt was possible in queer parties with people who might otherwise not experience it in this way. For the organizer, creating a comfortable space for marginalized people was a requisite for a connection to the sacred. This connects with Blum's understanding of the sacredness of the scene- because the organizer seeks to create a space where People of Color, people with perhaps non-normative body hair, people in scanty clothing, the risk of interruption is quite high if someone who finds these things problematic enters the space. That outsider could say just a few things, or simply be present in the space with an aggressive affect, to make people uncomfortable, self-conscious, or triggered, and that disruption has the potential to destroy the energy of the event. These carefully curated practices are fragile, and Queer Party organizers were constantly on alert for those who would put them at risk.

Queering Time and Space

Perhaps this constant vigilance is why the parties themselves were fairly infrequent, and the series itself was relatively short-lived. There were seldom more than

one or two events under the Queer Pressure moniker a month, with fewer events during colder months, and the series was active from 2014 until spring 2019. Despite this, the party series had an incredible impact on the queer scene in Madison, and people who only went to one or two parties talk about them with a kind of reverence and intimacy that is notable, and that resonated with my own experiences. Almost everyone *loved* Queer Pressure, and spoke about both its impact and the loss they felt when the organizers announced it was ending, myself included. The ongoing influence of this event series cannot be overstated, and part of why I wanted to write this thesis was to consider this from a theoretical perspective. I think that part of what enabled Queer Pressure to have the sort of success it had was that it brought to life in Madison the concepts of queer time and queer space.

Queer temporality and spatiality conceptually address the continuous simultaneous collapsing and reconfiguring of horizons of possiblity of queer experience. Jack Halberstam says *In A Queer Time and Place* that "'[q]ueer time' is a term for those specific models of temporality that emerge within postmodernism once one leaves the temporal frames of bourgeois reproduction and family, longevity, risk/safety, and inheritance. 'Queer space' refers to the place-making practices within postmodernism in which queer people engage and it also describes the new understandings of space enabled by the production of queer counterpublics,"[22] and on this definitional front, I'm in agreement. Particularly of interest to me in Halberstam's discussion of queer time is the idea of leaving temporal frames of heteronormativity, and perhaps even homonormativity, where normative concepts such as risk/safey and longevity can be

[22] Halberstam, Jack. *In a Queer Time and Place*. New York and London: NYU Press, 2005, p. 6.

reevaluated. Particularly for the black and brown bodies that the organizer describes at the quote at the beginning of this chapter, risk and safety are perpetually being undermined by racist systems of oppression, where something as simple as going for a jog or to the grocery store or wearing a hoodie can suddenly become life-threateningly risky activities, and safety is a less stable category. Queers have also experienced the inversion of these categories, from the HIV epidemic that Halberstam discusses in *In a Queer Time and Place* to queer-bashing (primarily, though not exclusively) in rural spaces across the U.S., to the constant violence faced by trans women particularly. For many queers, especially femme queers, there is constant risk of harassment and assault in many social and nightlife spaces. Longevity is also vitally at play in Madison- both for the events and for the people who live in the city. Event series come and go fairly quickly, as one person I spoke to mourned, describing events that I was never able to attend: “there was this studio called Everyday Gay Holiday that existed for a year that was run by one of the poetry fellows… [there were] queer photo pop ups and queer fundraisers and art shows and mixers and stuff like that. I was really sad to see that space go when all the organizers had to leave town, but that's just the thing, it seems like it's pretty transient in a lot of ways.” The transience she talks about is a constant, and in such a small city, there are a handful of people who do the bulk of the organizing work (nearly all of my participants could name most of the individual organizers off the top of their heads), and when organizers inevitably leave or grow tired of their projects, they take with them huge parts of the structure that queer subculture in the city is built on.

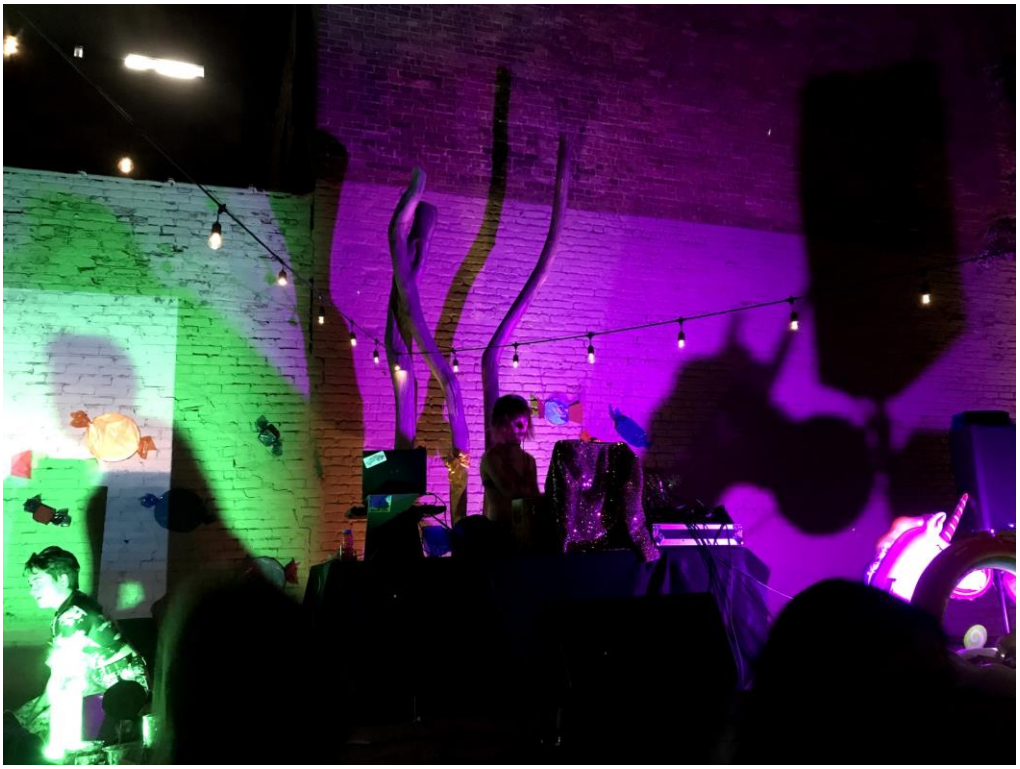
As the center of a large university system, young people come and go fairly quickly, whether they move to Madison for college or shortly afterwards for job opportunities, or come to attend graduate school, they generally do not stay long into their 30s, particularly queers. Many, many queers decide to leave for larger cities, either regionally or in different areas across the country, for work or to seek larger (or perhaps just different) queer populations. For many of us (and I count myself in this group), Madison is a liminal space, to be loved and hated and fully experienced before moving on to the next locale. As one interviewee put it, “my experience in Madison being transient, I think it does affect the way I tap into communities, because I'm not necessarily looking to be like, ‘this is my community!’ I think it makes it harder to be long term invested in it… I think because I'm [only] tapping in for so long, I do feel like I'm just tapping in, like oh cool, I'll come back to what's going on but I'm not necessarily going to be part of building something longer term because I'm not here longer term”. This particular interviewee had grown up in Madison, had moved away for college, and returned throughout college in the summer and had just moved back after graduation. Her queer experience and commitment to the scene was bound up in the queer temporality and spatiality that Halberstam discusses, as she experienced Madison in nonlinear and sporadic bursts and spoke of frequently feeling as though she was returning to a different queer scene whenever she came home.

An additional area of analysis of the Queer Pressure events, and all of the queer pop-up events in the city (including Dyke Dive, Lesbian Pop-Up Happy Hour, and one-off events like Hot Summer Gays) is their constant changing of venues. All of these events “take over” bars and event spaces for an evening, none of which are gay bars or

permanent queer spaces. Organizers set up entire sets in a day based on the theme of the event, including video projection screens, props, and DJ booths, only to take them down hours later in preparation for the next event (see images 1 and 2). In discussing queer spatiality, Halberstam defines the concept as “place-making practices within postmodernism in which queer people engage and it also describes the new understandings of space enabled by the production of queer counterpublics”. I find this term and definition to be an interesting jumping off point of analysis of the queer events I’m discussing- I want to discuss what sort of place-making practices are at work here, as well as the new understandings of space happening with these events.

Placemaking

To discuss about placemaking practices, I want to start with the commitment to cultivating queer space through decoration and physical objects in the party venues. A



significant aspect of the parties were the temporary, sometimes elaborate sets that organizers designed and built, based on the theme of the

event. Some themes from the summer of 2019 included candy, astrological signs, cowboys, and “anything but clothes” (see images 2.1 and 2.2 for a sense of these themes and sets). I think that these settings are part of the effort to distinguish these parties from gay bar spaces, which generally don’t have theme events or sets besides the standard DJ stage setup. They’re also fairly campy- take the “anything but clothes” (“ABC”) theme. ABC parties have long been standard in fraternities and sororities in the U.S., and it’s often an excuse for people to dress themselves in the most provocative or silly clothing possible. This mainstream practice takes on a queer twist at the queer ABC party, as conventional sorority or fraternity parties are not particularly welcoming of queer expression and identity. These placemaking practices enable a distinct kind of engagement from queer participants, allowing them to engage with perhaps dressing in gender nonconforming ways, or to experiment with alternate versions of themselves that are more confident or creative than they would be in their day to day lives. The sets also transform ordinary places into distinctly queer and campy spaces that can be occupied in different ways. I’ll get to the places in which the events were held shortly, which are interesting in their own right, but a lot of the work of queer spatial place-making occurs with these sets and themes.

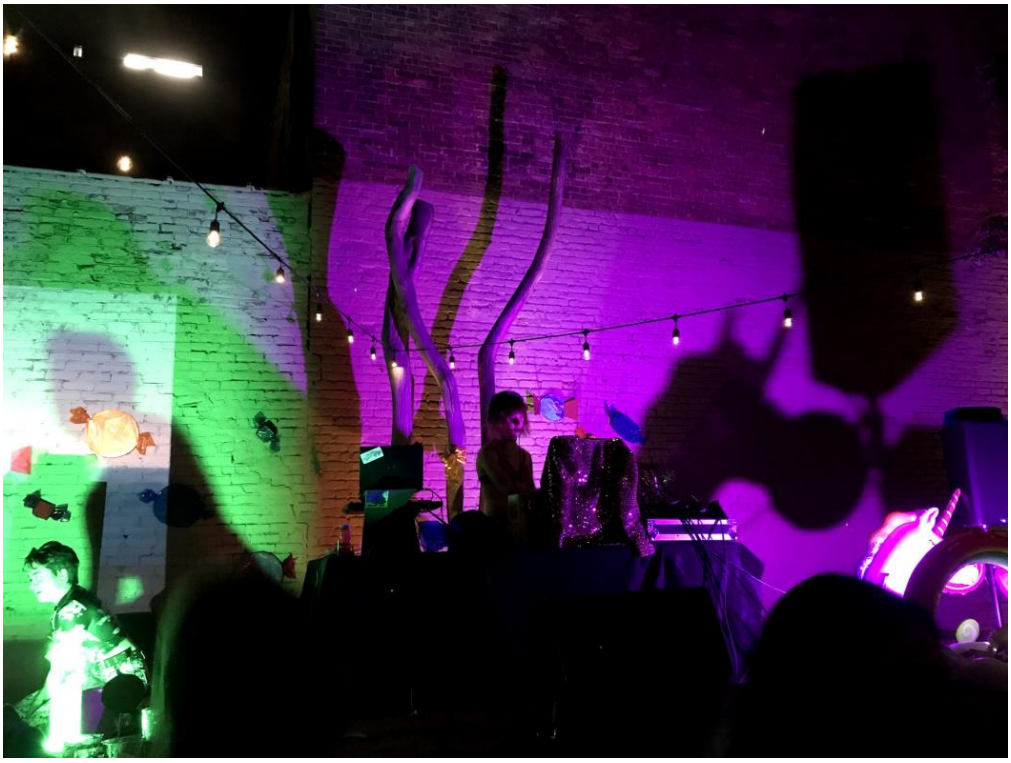


Image 2.1: lights and DJ set up for a queer pop up night, June 2019. Image by author.

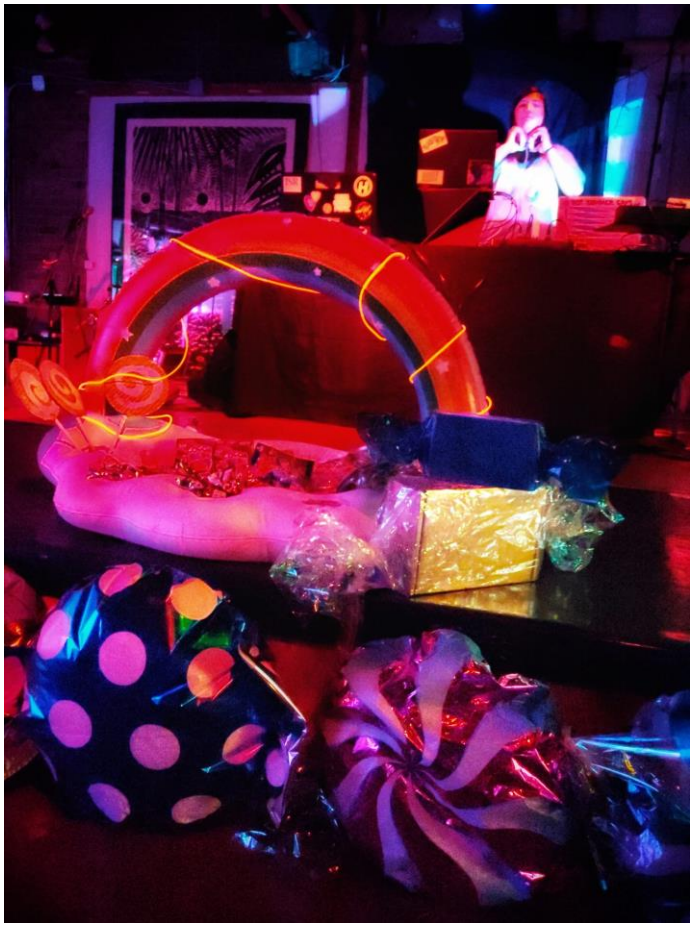


Image 2.2: Set from “Candy: another sweeter dance party” queer event, July 2019. Photo from public Facebook event page.

In terms of more logistical elements of placemaking in the party scene, there are always elaborate light systems, and often projectors playing thematic video onto screens or walls at these parties. The videos vary, from abstract telescoping colors and shadows to scenes from old films to music videos. A DJ booth is set up on either the stage that is already present in the space or, if no stage is available, a temporary makeshift platform is built. If the event takes place in a restaurant space, as they occasionally do, particularly during colder months, the tables and chairs are cleared from the space and pushed up against the walls. If venues do not have built-in sound systems, large speaker towers are brought in and placed on stands to be taller than most attendees, and have the capacity to play incredibly loudly and with high quality audio.

At the end of the events, usually around 2:30 or 3 AM, the entire set is deconstructed, including all audio and visual equipment, and the space is returned to its pre-party state. Remaining event attendees often assist in this deconstruction, depending on their level of intoxication, carrying deflated kiddie pools and laptops and lighting systems back to the organizers and DJ's cars. In my attendance at these parties during my research, I often ended up assisting in this process. I found this deconstruction to be lustral (to tap again into the sacred discussion from earlier in the chapter)- it was often a jarring adjustment from the darkness and volume of the party to the much quieter process of taking apart the set, returning stray glasses to the bar, and taking stock of items left behind by party attendees. The DJs and organizers would discuss the event, often passing each other cigarettes and talking about when the next party would be and what to do differently in the future. These experiences did not feel like they took away any of the magic of the previous few hours, but instead like part of that magic; in around 30 minutes, it's almost as though the space had never had held a throng of sweaty, dancing, joyful queer bodies, a fairy tale-like transformation of spatiality.

As the events were always moving around, and didn't occur in the same space twice in a row, part of the excitement and freshness of attending the parties was the potential of a new space to occupy, and the knowledge that even if you hadn't been to a particular bar or venue before, you would be able to comfortably occupy that space as a queer person, because it had been vetted by the organizers beforehand. From one of the organizers: "it gives people... a gateway into spaces where they maybe wouldn't have gone otherwise, because they know they'll feel comfortable because Queer

Pressure [chose] it, but they get to experience it, whether it's a fancy cocktail place or a warehouse or wherever it is, with this crew that makes them feel safer." As discussed in the Queer Politics chapter, there was a great deal of vetting and policies that Queer Pressure put into place around cultivating safe(r) spaces for queer POC and trans people particularly, and not having a set venue meant that if one space they took over did not meet their expectations, they were able to move on and not go to that venue again. From the organizer again: "as Queer Pressure grew, so many bars in town [saw] it as a big money maker. So places want[ed] to host Queer Pressure, but we didn't necessarily want to be endorsing one specific place, because bars make so much money off of these roaming parties, when they happen to have a following". These parties were extremely popular and were often the highest sales night of the month for the bars they took over, so it was also important for Queer Pressure organizers to use that power responsibly in supporting venues that had inclusive policies and especially those which were POC-owned. This is not without its problems, as it provides a capitalist underpinning and power to a group which declares itself anti-capitalist, and in some ways replicates models of normative gay culture around financial influence and "the power of the purse" which Queer Pressure seeks to resist, as discussed in the Queer Politics chapter.

The venues that were taken over were varied in their day-to-day functions, and the queer takeovers create what Halberstam refers to as "new understandings of space enabled by the production of queer counterpublics"[23]. Queer pop-ups, both those oragnized Queer Pressure and stand-alone events or series held by the former Queer

[23] Halberstam, Jack. *In a Queer Time and Place*. New York and London: NYU Press, 2005, p. 6.

Pressure organizers, happened in many different spaces across the city. I do not want to list all of the venues, but I think highlighting a few here is useful in understanding the varied spaces that are taken over by queers. One space that is popular and has hosted several different events is Robinia Courtyard, a building which houses a coffee shop, a bar and a slightly upscale restaurant, all built around a central outdoor space, located on the near East side of Madison . Queer events have been held in the outdoor space, as seen in image 2.1, as well as in the restaurant area, in image 2.3. This venue is distinct in that it houses several spaces that have been used for parties, and each one has a different aesthetic and impact. The outdoor courtyard area is quite spacious, and has a large wall for video projection. Since the courtyard is open to the sky, soundwaves are dispersed. Events held inside, generally in Jardin, are much more crowded, the space is much darker and the crowded space results in a different auditory experience.

Image 2.3: Jardin, the restaurant in the Robinia Courtyard complex. Image from Jardin website.

Another frequent location for queer pop-ups is Tavernakaya, a sushi restaurant and bar in the center of Madison located on the Capitol Square, as seen in image 2.4. It's a large space, and the front entire front wall works like a garage door, opening up into a large patio space that is frequently used during the queer parties that occur there during the summer months. Depending on the event, dining tables in the whole space are pushed back to accommodate crowds, or if it's a smaller event, only a few tables near the front are moved. The space has a built-in disco ball and colorful lighting system, and the sound occasionally becomes deafening as it bounces off of the hard surfaces and high ceilings of the restaurant.

Image 2.4: Dining space at Tavernakaya. Image taken from The Capital Times review of the restaurant.

Finally, I would like to mention one of the most unique spaces that queer pop-ups are held in, Madison Local Motive. This venue is a series of permanently parked train cars which have been entirely renovated, located near the Capitol Square on the near South side. The space is cramped, gets hot very quickly, and the way sound and music moves through the space is quite interesting, as it bounces off of curved surfaces and is absorbed by crowded bodies. See images 5 and 6 to get some sense of the space.

Image 2.5: Exterior of one of the train cars. Image from Madison Local Motive website.

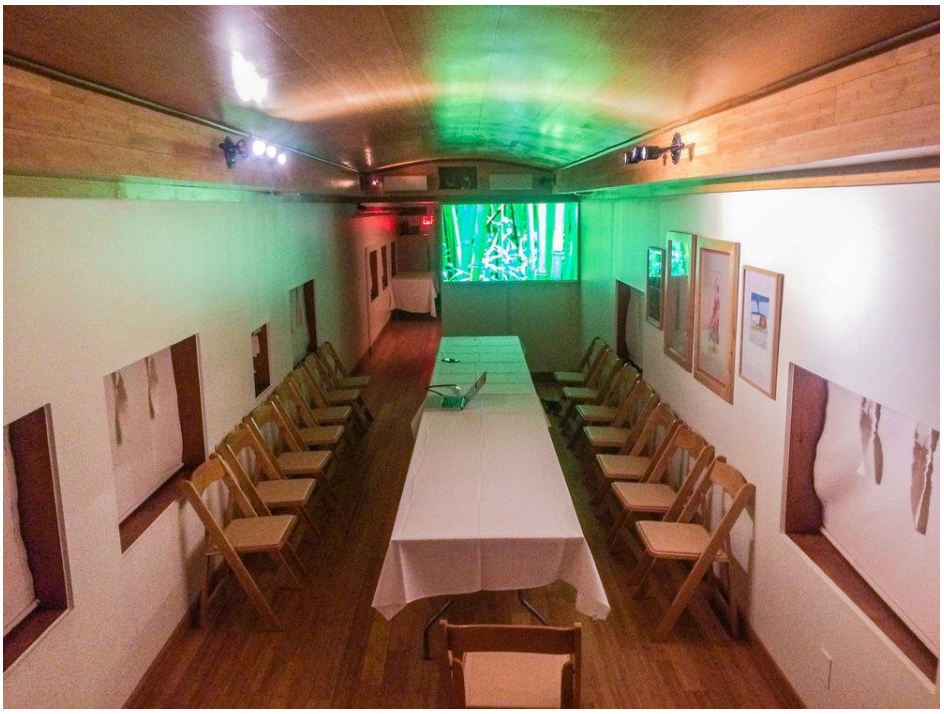


Image 2.6: Interior of one of the train cars. Image from Madison Local Motive.

Queer Pressure, and other queer pop-ups, enable new understandings of these spaces, as they are repurposed and reimagined to meet the interests of the organizers and

attendees. Spaces usually used for more upscale dining are filled with queers in glitter and costumes, and where there would usually be a soundtrack of quiet contemporary music is instead pumped with loud electronic music or rap. An old train car is turned into a space of queer joy. These reimaginings of ordinary places are part of what made Queer Pressure so special to me- they invited me to think about new ways to occupy spaces, and they encouraged queer people to not only exist but to dance and sing and flirt where otherwise heterosexuality is the dominant mode of being.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I was interested in thinking through some of the theoretical and physical implications of queer temporality and spatiality within the Madison queer nightlife scene. I began with a close reading of a quote by Alan Blum from the essay "Scenes" about the notion of the sacred in scenes, in conjunction with a quote from an organizer of Queer Pressure addressing the same topic. The discussion then moved to a reflection about Halberstam's work on queer temporality and spatiality, and applied his definitions concretely to the parties happening in Madison. Particularly of interest to me here are the construction of sets, the temporary transformation of these spaces, and the deconstruction at the end of the night. Finally, I considered some of the specific spaces that are taken over by these events, and why these takeovers are so affectively interesting to me. There is far more relevant theory to these topics than is addressed here, and I hope to think through this with more complexity in future work. In the next chapter, I will be addressing the political implications and commitments that have been briefly mentioned throughout this portion of the thesis.

Chapter Three: Queer Politics / Intersectionality IRL

In the course of my fieldwork, in nearly all of my interviews, I was struck by the intense political engagement of queer-identifying people in Madison. They were deeply involved in organizing work with explictly anti-racist, abolitionist, and anti-imperialist groups, particularly the No Cops in Schools campaign, LGBT Books to Prisoners, Freedom Inc., and the Forward Marching Band. Many people identified an explictly political edge in their identification with the term “queer” (see the Defining Queerness chapter for more on this), and indicated an affinity for the history of queer identification (with reference to 1980s and ‘90s AIDS activism in particular). The founders to Queer Pressure discussed at length the political intention and origins of the event series, which is echoed as a significant factor in their popularity by attendees. However, despite these intentions and efforts by event organizers and queers in the scene, events themselves remain overwhelmingly white, the larger LGBT community continues to have persistent issues with racism, and fractures continue to form in the community around issues of assimilation and the role of police in queer spaces (particularly around Pride events). In this chapter, I will discuss the concept of queer politics from a theoretical perspective, including a discussion of intersectionality and crip theory, before moving on to the function of homonomativity in Madison and the inherent tensions between radical queer politics and homonormativity in the city. Then, I will specifically discuss the politics claimed by the Queer Pressure organizers and the event series. Finally, I will move to an example of these politics in action, regarding the No Cops at Pride movement and the discourse that stemmed from it. Now, let’s move to a consideration of the theoretical

understandings of queer politics as such, tracing its roots back to the late 1980s and early '90s in New York City, before moving on to the specifics of Madison.

What constitues a "queer politics"?

"Every person who comes to a queer self-understanding knows in one way or another that her stigmatization is connected with gender, the family, notions of individual freedom, the state, public speech, consumption and desire, nature and culture, maturation, reproductive politics, racial and national fantasy, class identity, truth and trust, censorship, intimate life and social display, terror and violence, healthcare, and deep cultural norms about the bearing of the body. Being queer means fighting about these issues all the time, locally and piecemeal but always with consequences… *Queers do a kind of practical social reflection just in finding ways of being queer.*"[24]

As argued by Michael Warner in the introduction to *Fear of a Queer Planet,* the development of a queer personhood comes with the weight of a vast array of social and political baggage, and the process of finding belonging, of "finding ways of being queer", brings these issues into clear focus. The United States has in some ways made strides towards equity in sexual identity since the time that Warner wrote this passage (especially if you're someone who values homonormative goals like marriage equality or adoption), but queers in the United States are still fighting for workplace protections[25],

[24] Warner, Michael. "Introduction." In *Fear of a Queer Planet: Queer Politics and Social Theory*. Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 1993, Xiii. Emphasis added.
[25] Liptak, Adam, and Jeremy W. Peters. "Supreme Court Considers Whether Civil Rights Act Protects L.G.B.T. Workers." *The New York Times*, October 8, 2019, sec. U.S. https://www.nytimes.com/2019/10/08/us/politics/supreme-court-gay-transgender.html.

immigration rights[26], medical coverage[27], or other issues affecting complex and intersecting identities. A queer politics, therefore, is one that is built on fighting a thousand fights at a time, many of which are an uphill battle and all of which have consequences directly and materially impacting the lives of queer people all over the country and world. These politics are clear in the organizing efforts of groups like ACT UP and Queer Nation in the late 1980s and early '90s, wherein fighting for recognition and research of the HIV/AIDS crisis and systemic abuse of queer people meant fighting against racism, sexism, homo- and transphobia, and capitalism itself at the same time. These groups, in ways that are not immune from critique, found the numerous intersections of race, class, gender, ethnicity and sexual orientation to be fundamental to addressing the myriad abuses and marginalizations facing the queer community.

This is directly contrasted with homonormative politics, "a politics that does not contest dominant heteronormative assumptions and institutions but upholds and sustains them while promising the possibility of a demobilized gay constituency and a privatized, depoliticized gay culture anchored in domesticity and consumption"[28]. Homonormativity sees no particular urgency in mobilizing around issues of immigrant rights, workplace protections, or any other "leftist" political projects in the U.S., emphasizing instead the importance of "acceptance" and making mainstream

[26] Conniff, Ruth. "Neighbors Shocked as Michael's Closes Because of Visa Problem." *Wisconsin Examiner* (blog), August 23, 2019. https://wisconsinexaminer.com/2019/08/23/neighbors-shocked-as-michaels-closes-because-of-visa-problem/. A Madison business owner closed his ice cream shop when his husband (a Mexican immigrant who had lived in the city for 30 years) was denied a visa extension and was barred from returning to the United States.

[27] Ollove, Micheal "States Diverge on Transgender Health Care Coverage.". *Governing.com,* July 18 2019. https://www.governing.com/topics/health-human-services/sl-transgender-health-care-coverage.html.

[28] Duggan, Lisa. "The New Homonormativity: The Sexual Politics of Neoliberalism." In *Materializing Democracy*, 175–94. Duke University Press, 2002. https://doi.org/10.1215/9780822383901-007.

identification with homosexuality. These politics are most clearly articulated by cis white gay men, who are both over-represented in popular cultural representations of the LGBT community, and who have found the most acceptance into the mainstream. One of the defining moments for homonormative politics was the 2015 U.S. Supreme Court decision to legalize same-sex marriage across the country, and therefore it was declared that “love wins” and “it gets better”- inherently depoliticized cheers that ignore the unceasing murder of trans women, particularly trans women of color, not to mention U.S. imperialism around the world that continues to exploit, poison and bomb other countries while propping up regimes which are openly hostile to queer people. The divide between a queer radical politics and homonormative politics is also clear with the 2020 presidential campaign of Pete Buttigieg, the former mayor of a small city in Indiana, who was the first openly gay presidential candidate in a major political party. This was hailed as a victory by some for acceptance of LGBT people, while others pointed out his record of racism while he was mayor, as well as his work in the U.S. military and in the McKinsey consulting firm[29] as evidence of his neoliberal tendencies which were seen as yet another iteration of status quo in the United States. I bring up these particular moments in recent years to underscore the particular divides in queer vs homonomative politics that have deepened in the past 10 years at the same time as mainstream political discourse has also become increasingly polarized and queers find themselves in conflict with well-meaning “woke” liberals (in the U.S. sense) who think of themselves as allies and supporters of the LGBTQ+ community while continuing to

[29] Markovits, Daniel. “How McKinsey Destroyed the Middle Class.” The Atlantic, February 3, 2020. https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2020/02/how-mckinsey-destroyed-middle-class/605878/.

endorse policies and politicans identified by queer activists as directly in conflict with the needs of queer, immigrant, POC and otherwise oppressed communities.

Perhaps a productive way of articulating this political difference is to think in terms of intersectional and crip theory. To briefly revisit the origins of the term through Kimberle Crenshaw, intersectionality functions as a way of critiquing atomizing identity politics, which "frequently conflates or ignores intragroup differences… [a]lthough racism and sexism readily intersect in the lives of real people, they seldom do in feminist and antiracist practices," [30] and she goes on to present intersectionality as a hermeneutic that encompasses lived experience and enables more depth and complexity of analysis. This distinction between specific forms of identity politics and intersectionality is useful in thinking about the differences between queer politics as Warner defines them and homonormativity as discussed by Duggan. The list of concerns in the opening quote to this section are definitionally intersectional- "being queer means fighting about these issues all the time, locally and piecemeal but always with consequences,"[31]- in this framework, queer identity is not experienced separately from immigration status, HIV status and attendant healthcare access, race, class, gender or ability, but rather as intersecting parts of a queer existence. This is contrasted with the identity politics of homonormativity, which with a "demobilized gay constituency" that can cheer on a political candidate like Pete Buttigieg on the basis of representation for gay people or can consider the legalization of gay marriage a satisfactory

[30] Crenshaw, Kimberle. "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence Against Women of Color." *Stanford Law Review* 43, no. 6 (1991), p. 1242.
[31] Warner, Michael. "Introduction." In *Fear of a Queer Planet: Queer Politics and Social Theory*. Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 1993, Xiii.

accomplishment, and which does not conceive of other oppressions as definitionally overlapping with a homosexual identity.

Along similar lines, I find it also productive to think about the differences in queer politics and homonormativity through the lens of disability studies, and especially through the theoretical work being done in the realm of crip theory. From Alison Kafer, the use of crip, rather than a term like disabled, is partly defined by a "desire to make people wince [which] suggests an urge to shake things up, to jolt people out of their everyday understanding of bodies and minds, of normalcy and deviance. It recognizes the common response of nondisabled people to disabled people, of the normative to the deviant—furtive yet relentless staring, aggressive questioning, and/or a turning away from difference, a refusal to see. This wincing is familiar to many disabled people, but here Mairs turns it back on itself, almost wincing back. Like 'queer,' 'crip' and 'cripple' are, in Eli Clare's formulation, 'words to help forge a politics.'"[32]. As discussed in the previous chapter on defining queerness and community, part of an affiliation with queer identity is an appreciation for the radical edge of the term, and a claim to the political history of the term, which is echoed here in the practice of claiming crip. It can't be forgotten that a claim to queerness is a reclamation of a slur that not everyone is comfortable with, and which in some ways carries with it some of that wincing characteristic of claiming crip. McRuer articulates this framework and claim in these terms: "'[t]o crip,' like 'to queer,' gets at processes that unsettle, or processes that make strange or twisted. Cripping also exposes the ways in which able- bodiedness and able-mindedness get naturalized and the ways that bodies, minds, and impairments that

[32] Kafer, Alison. *Feminist, Queer, Crip*. Indiana University Press, 2013, p. 15.

should be at the absolute center of a space or issue or discussion get purged from that space or issue or discussion,"[33] which draws parallels to the movements for radical queer politics and the urgency of unsettling normative politics. The move towards exposing the centering of able-bodiedness and able-mindedness as deeply problematic being done by crip theory underscores the practical and material commitments of these politics, and does not allow us to forget the consequences of organizing and occupying spaces. One of the political commitments of Queer Pressure that I will be discussing later is specifically around deconstructing ableism in the queer subculture, and focuses on creating accessible spaces for events they host. This commitment is in response to permanent gay bars which are not accessible or inclusive of disabled bodies, to be discussed shortly. These theoretical understandings have real world impacts and take on additional significance in the racism and transphobia present within Madison, and I want here to take these terms and apply them in the real world, and to think through where these terms, particularly Warner's writings from the 1990s, but also concepts of intersectionality, have grown increasingly relevant and necessary in the way we parse the social world. Before we get to the specifics of the politics of Queer Pressure and the specifics of queer vs homonormative affilations in concrete examples, I want to first address the specifics of homonormativity in Madison

"77 square miles surrounded by reality"[34]- Madison Homonormativity

[33] McRuer, Robert. *Crip Times: Disability, Globalization, and Resistance*. NYU Press, 2018, p. 23.
[34] Madison considered choosing this phrase as the city motto in 2013, referencing a joke made by a conservative governor of Wisconsin in 1978 who felt the city was out of touch with the wider trends of the state. Mosiman, Dean. "Mayor Proposes City Motto: '77 Square Miles Surrounded by Reality.'" *Madison.Com*, July 12, 2013. https://madison.com/news/local/govt-and-politics/mayor-proposes-city-motto-77-square-miles-surrounded-by-reality/article_b47d7157-1f82-50bd-a18f-babcc4271b9f.html.

One of the things Madison residents boast about most often is the city's reputation for being a beacon of liberal politics in an otherwise largely conservative-leaning state (setting aside Milwaukee and other small left-leaning cities, as many in Madison are wont to do). Madisonites point to the recent election of Mayor Satya Rhodes-Conway, the "second female mayor and the first out LGBTQ person to serve as Mayor of Madison,"[35] popular environmentally-minded policy, and the employment of highly educated people (presumably Democrats) at the University of Wisconsin and tech companies in the area as evidence of the progressive and open-minded nature of the city. As I've mentioned elsewhere in this thesis, the city is highly rated as LGBTQ+ friendly, receiving a perfect score in the Municipal Equality Index from the Human Rights Campaign in 2016[36] and consistently named as one of the top 10 most gay-friendly cities in the U.S.- citing a series of protections for housing, employment, and public accommodations for LGBTQ+ people. Madison residents further brag about the gay nightlife scene and large annual Pride celebration as evidence of the city as a haven for LGBTQ+ people in the state.

There were, during my research period, five specifically gay bars in Madison- Sotto, Shamrock, Club Five, Prism and Woof's. These bars exhibit, in ways I will discuss below, the striking difference between queer and homonormative politics in the community. When I spoke to one of the organizers of Queer Pressure, she discussed the inciting incidents around the creation of the events series, and the underlying issues with the permanent gay-affiliated nightlife spaces:

[35] "Mayor's Office, City of Madison, Wisconsin."
[36] "Madison Municipal Equality Index." Human Rights Campaign. https://www.hrc.org/mei/search/wisconsin/madison/.

“the reason we started throwing [the event series that evolved into Queer Pressure] is Plan B had just opened maybe a year or two before that, and a number of friends who were trans had had huge issues with bouncers there, throwing them out of bathrooms, not letting people use the bathrooms of their choice. Plan B had a dress code that was really racially targeted, no timbs, no bandanas, no backpacks, no baggy clothes… They also had an anti-hip hop policy for music at that time. So, a couple friends and I were like, we want to throw our own party, we want to feature local hip hop, we want to feature politicized music, we want to have in place anti-racism, anti-transphobia practices and things like that…. Around that same time, we approached Sotto… and pitched our idea, but they said no hip hop, because they didn't want... quote, exactly from the manager at the time, "they didn't want any ghetto unsavory people in their bar"... so we were meeting within mainstream gay culture… very racist and transphobic things over and over again.”

Plan B and Sotto in this case exemplify precisely the racist and transphobic undergirding of homonormativity that is prevalent broadly in the Madison gay community, and in Madison more broadly. The racist dress code that the organizer I spoke to discussed is not unique to Plan B, as seen in image 3.1 below, which comes from a very popular and (very) straight bar in Madison called State Street Brats. There have been a series of public outcries in Madison around this issue, as these policies have been in place for several years, but the signs and policies remained in place as I was doing my research this summer. These policies are, likely unsurprisingly, *selectively* enforced, and by anecdotal evidence are used almost exclusively to bar people of color from entering. One can find signs espousing this and similar policies outside many of the largest and most popular bars in the city, including those most frequented by University of Wisconsin students.

Image 3.1: Dress Code for State Street Brats, from Reddit user "halfhalfnhalf", posed in summer 2017.

Image 3.2: Poster at Prism nightclub (formerly Plan B), June 1 2019. Image by author.

An attempt to remedy the policing of bodies that was discussed by the organizer above is seen in the poster (image 3.2) seen at Prism on the day of Fruit Fest 2019, as a sort of Pride-adjacent event, which bills itself as "an annual LGBTQI summer music festival held in Madison, Wisconsin.. [Fruit Fest] is an all-ages free event organized to celebrate Madison's gay community through a day of music, performance, art, and celebration,"[37] and was sponsored by liquor companies, banks and large local corporations. These posters were present on the day of the event, and Prism staff confirmed that the posters had been present in the club previously as well. However,

[37] "Fruit Fest Madison - About." https://www.facebook.com/pg/FruitFestMadison/about/?ref=page_internal.

these posters are clumsy at best, as seen in the use of the language “if you see something, say something” as an attempt to address harassment at the club. Unfortunately, this phrase precisely replicates the statement that came to popularity immediately after 9/11 in the United States, and which became the official slogan for a plethora of police state apparati, including the Department of Homeland Security, the Transport Security Agency (TSA) and police departments across the country. The expansion of the police state has led, clearly, to increased racial profiling, racialized violence, increased “vigilante” attacks on innocent people, and justification of increasing surveillance of marginalized communities across the country, including in Madison. Prism’s use of this phrase without any sense of recent historical context or sensitivity to People of Color and others affected more intensely by the violence this language justifies.

An additional misstep is seen in the posters related to restroom access (images 3.3 and 3.4 below), also seen at Prism during Fruit Fest. At first glance, they appear as signifiers of a progressive stance on equal all-gender restroom access, a recent battleground particularly in the U.S. and U.K.[38] along the lines of cultural and political affiliation. The ostensible purpose of the signs is to indicate inclusivity, listing the physical attributes of the restrooms (“stalls” and “urinals”) as well as text in a small font along the bottom of the poster saying “Harassment Free Zone. Please use the bathroom you’re comfortable with.” When I saw these posters, I was immediately concerned with the tone and implications they undertake, and I want to take a moment

[38] Ball, Aimee Lee. “In All-Gender Restrooms, the Signs Reflect the Times.” *The New York Times*, November 5, 2015, sec. Style. https://www.nytimes.com/2015/11/08/style/transgender-restroom-all-gender.html.

to address them here. My interpretation is open to critique, and there are, as with any text, a variety of ways to read and think through them, particularly given cultural difference, and this ambiguity is important to keep in mind.

Image 3.3 and 3.4: Posters near restrooms at Prism, June 1 2019. Images by author.

In my reading, the imagery and lingering reference to “men” and “women” are ultimately inadequate to address the underlying problems all-gender restrooms are seeking to solve. The choice to use images of dragons and unicorns as representational images of non-binary or trans people implies that they are as mythical or non-existant as these creatures, as well as having lingering gendered implications (unicorns are typically associated in popular culture with young girls, while dragons are perceived as masculine).The remaining presence of specifically binary “women” and “men” indicators, even in inverted commas, belies the club’s ongoing exclusion of nonbinary people.

In my conversations with attendees and organizers, a frequent theme that came up in nearly every conversation was the distrust of these established gay bars and groups catering to cis gay men in Madison. One trans woman I spoke to said “the queer friends that I have don't really trust any of the queer bars in town, any of the existing established queer bars, and I know that a lot of gay men seem... a little more trusting, or they make use of those spaces more, especially Woof's and Shamrock, I think are more geared towards them, but like Plan B / Prism now has been such a site of contention and pain for people, and like harassment [is an issue in these spaces]...as soon as something becomes fixed enough to have a brick and mortar address or like, a headquarters or something or a board of directors, I think we start distrusting it. Events [that I go to] come out of individual people putting them together, not the queer overlord organization instituting them, you know?” This articulated ambivalence to outright distrust of permanent gay bars and large queer organizations in the city taps into their inability or complicity in the issues I’ve mentioned above- there was no response to the rate of assault and harassment of queer women and trans people in these places, and

some of this harassment came from the employees or management. The owners and managers put in place and enforce racist dresscodes and music policies, and meet legitimate criticism from queer activits with personal attacks and mockery. Part of the suspicion my participant mentioned in her quote addresses that the permanence is part of the problem, as institutions tend to be slow to react to changing social circumstances and are obligated to consider profits and shareholders, which results in half-measures and a prioritization of capital over human experience. Additionally, as will be addressed shortly, LGBTQ+ nonprofits in the community have been criticized by queer community organizers for their relationship with the police in the city. In the context of this general apathy to open distrust of brick and mortar gay bars in the community, the queer scene was poised to embrace an agile, temporary and explicitly political group like Queer Pressure, which spoke specifically to the issues my participants raised.

"Act respectfully or get the fuck out."- The Politics and Practice of Queer Pressure

In this particular setting, where even those spaces wish to seem inclusive consistently fall short of the mark, it's not all that surprising that a decisively radical group like Queer Pressure rose to immediate popularity. As discussed above by one of the founders of Queer Pressure, the event series began in response to the problematic politics and policing of bodies that was happening in the permanent gay bars, in order to foster space for more radical queer politics and non-normative bodies. In a contrast with the signs we see above, Queer Pressure events all featured a sign proclaiming political commitments and expectations (image 3.5 and 3.6) and put it in a place of central prominence. The sign reads "As a community, we acknowledge past and present

racism, sexism, colonialism, transphobia, ableism, classism, homophobia, etc. Upon entering this space, you are expected to act respectfully or get the fuck out." This sign, and variations of it, are echoed and repeated on all of Queer Pressure's efforts to build temporary alternative safer spaces. This last line, "you are expected to act respectfully or get the fuck out," particularly sticks out to me as a point of analysis. In an attempt to fight against homonormativity and oppressive politics within the mainstream nightlife scene, Queer Pressure is establishing a new set of normativities, which have what I consider to be a much more positive set of criteria, but nonetheless prescribe a set of behaviors that people must adhere to. The notion of "act respectfully" also gestures towards respectability politics, which "can have the effect of steering "unrespectables" away from making demands on the state to intervene on their behalf and toward self-correction and the false belief that the market economy alone will lift them out of their plight,"[39] which is a very homonormative approach to politics indeed. Additionally, it's not clear what the impact of the recognition for past and current oppressions accomplishes. What is one to do when confronted with this list, and what does "respectful behavior" mean vis-à-vis colonialism and classism in a party space? The organizers spoke to me about their political goals and hopes for the Queer Pressure series, but these commitments are complicated to embody without creating new structures of normativity, or to avoid becoming an performance of solidarity without material consequence.

[39] Harris, Fredrick C. "The Rise of Respectability Politics." *Dissent* 61, no. 1 (December 20, 2013), p. 36.

Image 3.5: Image from Queer Pressure's New Year's Eve party in 2018. Image from Queer Pressure's public Facebook page.

Despite these potential pitfalls, attendees I spoke to highlighted this dedication to social justice as a contributing factor to their enthusiasm, as well as some of the inherent tensions within that commitment. One participant, speaking about the political tone of the events, said "I just remember telling people, 'it's actually queer, it's actually radical', it just definitely felt like there were more queer people there…"

Image 3.6: Close up of the text of the community norms sign, July 2018. Image by author.

"I remember there was DJs or drag queens from Minneapolis that came to one event that I went to, and I mean maybe sort of a queer politics that feels familiar, of being against the police or prison or like, solidarity with Black struggles. I mean, obviously there's queer Black people [in Madison, whose politics go underrepresented] but… Yeah, [queer politics] felt prioritized [at these events]." Another attendee I interviewed discussed some of the tensions around perpetual political engagement within the events : "There's a lot of anger, there's a lot of very justified anger in the politics, so sometimes I need a break from that. I think some queers, and I flicker on and off with this feeling, but some queers I know definitely feel like they don't feel super

comfortable in a lot of the queer spaces because they feel like there's some sort of unspoken pressure that you have to be the woke-est of the woke to be there, and you have to be super radical, you have to be a guns blazing anarcho-communist to be there or whatever, and I know that that's not true, but I know that that feeling comes through for people sometimes… I wouldn't say that it's necessarily a huge problem but it's something that can happen in a lot of social justice spaces in general, that like... if it becomes too much of a "oh do you have your social justice cred enough to be here" you know, are you committed to the struggle 24/7 sort of thing… it's difficult to navigate". This ties into the concern above about establishing a new sort of queer normativity which demands commiment to a set of politics by its constituents, and which is alienating to those who are not already politically committed to these issues, which may shut out and exclude exactly the people these events and politics seek to involve and represent. The perception of the necessity to be a "guns blazing anarcho-community" is an issue that was not addressed by the organizers- it was generally assumed that the community would be committed to their principles, or at least open to embracing them. Queer political commitments have never been cut and dry, as seen from the origins of queer identification as such in Cauncey's *Gay New York* and between queer activists in the AIDS crisis. To reiterate what Warner argued in the introduction to *Fear of a Queer Planet*, "queers do a kind of practical social reflection just in finding ways of being queer"[40]- this does not mean that queers will reach the same conclusions on this social reflection, nor will the urgencies and capacities for change be uniform across the queer subculture. What feels politically exciting and invigorating to one queer person can feel

[40] Warner, Michael. "Introduction." In *Fear of a Queer Planet: Queer Politics and Social Theory*. Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 1993, Xiii.

overwhelming and alienating to another, despite their shared identity and interest in queer liberation.

The politics of Queer Pressure went beyond signage and ideology. One of the organizers I spoke to discussed how they practiced these politics in the event planning and execution:

> "I had to have a conversation with all the bar and door staff before an event came in, for some basic things of like, don't make gendered comments about people's IDs when you're checking them, don't make jokes about their drinks being spiked when they leave them to go outside and smoke a cigarette, like really basic things that can ruin somebody's night that are sort of common in night life or were especially then. Yeah, bartenders, don't be pushy, don't make jokes about getting people to drink more than they want to. Also, don't call the police the second something gets weird. Like, trust that we can take care of things and that we need to listen to everybody involved that has a conflict… when we went around to different venues we'd sometimes have to work on that a little harder to make sure spaces were wheelchair accessible. As it developed, it became a checklist that we could use to talk through different (things) with staff, how they were going to interact with people at the end of the night. At bigger venues like Majestic [a large concert space], that was really important to get all security staff on a similar page as far as how they would handle instances that came up."

The power of these organizers to insist on these policies as they took over spaces comes from their tremendous popularity- Queer Pressure events were always immensely popular, often bringing in the highest revenue of the week for the bars they occupied, per one of the venue owners I spoke to. If a bar or venue owner didn't agree to the specific demands of Queer Pressure events, the organizers had other places they could relocate to, meaning a massive loss of potential profit for the noncompliant space. This specific leverage should be critiqued, as it relies on the participants of the queer scene's ability to consume and spend significant amounts of money at these events. This is part of Duggan's definition of homonormativity: "the possibility of a demobilized

gay constituency and a privatized, depoliticized gay culture anchored in domesticity and consumption,"[41] and although the Queer Pressure project is not depoliticized or demobilized, it is still operating within and leveraging the limited power of the capitalist, consumer-culture. I am ambivalent about this particular aspect of Queer Pressure, although the organizers framed it as largely positive, and I think that a truly liberatory queer subcultural project would have the capability to address issues of racism, transphobia, and other inequities without participating in this exploitative system. However, this capitalist structure did provide access to staff for conversations about respecting gender, avoidance of police interference, and accessibility were crucial in fostering the safer spaces that the organizers were striving towards. The same organizer said there was an event where "a bartender… threatened to call the cops on somebody right off the bat, when something got slightly elevated, and people were just yelling, like it wasn't violent, and this white woman bartender threatened to call the cops on a black masculine person, and didn't understand why that was a problem and why that further escalated the situation, and that was just really disappointing. We talked with the owner at the time… and the owner was completely understanding.. but just sort of like, 'we didn't know that person that person was going to be working and it was a last minute shift change and we hadn't gotten a chance to give her a rundown on our guidelines. That felt like a mess up". That bar only hosted a few more Queer Pressure events, and the organizers became increasingly vigilant about ensuring that they got were able to speak to all bartenders and bouncers who would be working at events, as

[41] Duggan, Lisa. "The New Homonormativity: The Sexual Politics of Neoliberalism." In *Materializing Democracy*, 175–94. Duke University Press, 2002.

well as pushing bar owners to hire more POC bartenders and to schedule them for the shifts when the events took place. The organizers also provided space for feedback from attendees, in the form of an anonymous comment box at all events, as well as soliciting comments in-person, and worked towards incorporating concerns and feedback into their event planning.

One of the biggest issues, and one that was hardest to resolve for organizers and attendees alike, was the issue of overwhelming whiteness at the events. The organizers were acutely aware of this, and tried to address it by inviting Black and other POC performers and event collaborators, using explicitly anti-racist messaging in their event promotion, and in their personal organizing work. However, as one organizer said, “I felt that as Queer Pressure grew bigger... we were losing our ability to make it as political of a space as I wanted to, and specifically addressing whiteness and how much space that takes up within the queer scene, because it became harder to set the norms for how Queer Pressure ran, and I also heard from friends who are Black that they didn't feel... that race was a much of a focus, and I think that was true… Madison is a fucked up space with racial dynamics, and I think like, all white queer people are implicit in that, and it's like, how much they're aware of that (complicity) and what they do to address it and how they respond to feedback, I think is really important.” Anti racist organizing is difficult, as we see now in June of 2020 in the United States, and as this organizer said, the deeply entrenched normative whiteness and complicity in racism of the Madison queer scene is difficult to address through nightlife or signage alone. An extension of this broader debate about queerness and racial inequity came up in the summer of 2018, with the No Cops at Pride movement and the subsequent fallout.

"No Cops at Pride"- Drawing Battle Lines between Queer and Homonormative politics

In the middle of summer 2018, a small group of queer activists formed the Community Pride Coalition (CPC), which sought to address the ongoing issue of OutReach's (the largest LGBTQ+ advocacy group in Madison) partnership with the Madison Police Department (MPD), particularly around the issue of uniformed officers being allowed to march in the annual parade. The MPD, like many police departments across the U.S., has a history of brutality against Black residents, including but not limited to the murder of an unarmed 19 year old Black man, Tony Robinson, in March 2015, which resulted in large protests across the city. Officer Matt Kenny, the police officer who killed Tony Robinson, received no disciplinary action for the shooting, and continues to work for the police department, training other officers in mindful meditation.[42] This, among a wide array of other violent incidents and over-policing of Black people in Madison by the MPD, was the impetus for the pressure for police disaffiliation from Pride.

The effort to prevent MPD Pride participation began in posts on the OutReach Facebook page, upon the announcement of the participating parade groups (including MPD). OutReach initially deleted these posts and closed down the ability for community members to post on their page.[43] This resulted, probably predictably, in outcry from

[42] Laughland, Oliver, and Zoe Sullivan. "Tony Terrell Robinson Was Shot Dead by Madison Police. This Is How It Happened." *The Guardian*, March 13, 2015, sec. US news. https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/mar/13/tony-terrell-robinson-madison-wisconsin-police-shooting-how-it-happened.
Nico Savidge "Madison Police Officer Matt Kenny Cleared in Shooting of Tony Robinson." *Wisconsin State Journal,* May 13, 2015. https://madison.com/news/local/crime_and_courts/madison-police-officer-matt-kenny-cleared-in-shooting-of-tony-robinson/article_428b0cf9-da97-5951-9936-2f699547ba3f.html.
[43] OutReach. "Police at Pride." lgbtoutreach, August 3, 2018. https://www.outreachmadisonlgbt.org/post/police-at-pride

queer Black people and their allies, who then began a full campaign to pressure OutReach to cut ties with MPD, culminating in the formation of CPC. There was a great deal of back and forth, with OutReach initially offering that the MPD contingent in the parade could march in plainclothes, rather than in uniform, although still under the banner of the department and carrying their weapons, and the officers would be paid by the department for their time.[44] CPC organizers responded by planning a counter-rally adjacent to the OutReach-planned event. With this pressure, OutReach announced that "[t]he OutReach Board of Directors have unanimously decided to withdraw the Pride Parade applications from the Madison Police Department… University of Wisconsin Police Department … and Dane County Sheriff Dave Mahoney. These contingents will not march in the 2018 OutReach Pride Parade and we will be refunding all monies collected from the contingents."[45] After this announcement, CPC was invited to march as a contingent as part of the official OutReach Pride event.

An account from one of the organizers of the CPC counter-rally articulates the radical nature of this group, with members from different socialist groups, anti-racist groups, and trans collectives. The organizer said "many queer youth and unaffiliated individuals joined the contingent. Many of them had found out about Community Pride through social media or contentious articles in the local press… [and we] provid[ed] an independent radical political group with clear messages against police brutality, racism,

[44] Mesch, Shelley K. "Law Enforcement Agencies Won't March at Madison Pride Parade, Organizers Say." *Wisconsin State Journal,* August 13, 2018. https://madison.com/news/local/crime/law-enforcement-agencies-wont-march-at-madison-pride-parade-organizers-say/article_15c97e85-f892-5f9a-b7c9-a876ae7be29f.html.

[45] Elliott, Tim. "Local Law Enforcement Banned from Participating in Pride March." *NBC 15,* August 14, 2018. https://www.nbc15.com/content/news/Local-law-enforcement-banned-from-pride-march-490821271.html.

transphobia, borders and seeking LGBTQ liberation for all."[46] Groups marching with the CPC including the TransLiberation Art Coalition, No Cops in Schools, the International Socialist Alternative, and others, as seen in images 3.7 and 3.8 below. It's notable that this coalition identifies as radical and in other communications tapped into the historical legacy of Stonewall. "The first pride was a riot against police violence", "Black Trans Lives Matter", and "We Bash Back" were among the many signs carried by the CPC cohort.

The tone of the organizers was victorious, although the feeling was not shared by everyone in the LGBTQ community in Madison. One of the people I spoke to in the course of my research said "I don't disagree with the decision because I think at the end of the day you have to do what's best for the queer community and not the police community, it just personally makes me a little sad knowing there are people in the queer community who also identify as police officers, and having several of those people in my life… it kind of breaks my heart". This participant's perspective is quite interesting, and hits on the tensions present here around queer and homonormative politics. Clearly, Madison queer people are not homogenous, and their politics and relationships are not necessarily reconciable. In this particular quote, it's clear to me that homonormative politics are at play, which are less politicized and more interested in the maintenance of individual relationships than insisting on radical change and critique of the police state. Her phrasing of "identify as police officers" is particularly interesting to me, and indicates a sort of neolibera turn of understanding the workplace as a form of

[46] Patterson, Brianna, and Sylvia Johnson. "We Got the Cops out of Madison Pride." *SocialistWorker.org,* August 24, 2014 http://socialistworker.org/2018/08/24/we-got-the-cops-out-of-madison-pride.

identity, while keeping out of mind the violence that the police state, embodied by individual police officers, some of whom may be her friends, inflicts on marginalized groups, including queer people.

Image 3.7 and 3.8: Members of the CDC contingent at the 2018 Pride parade. Photo courtesy of New Normal Photography.

The debate online and in local newspapers at the time at the time about the inclusion of police fractured the LGBTQ community, including John Quinlan, one of the organizers of the first Pride Parade in Madison in 1989- ""The only conclusion being that police are bad and they can never be worked with, discounted all the work that's been done over the years… [w]ith the police department, I think arguably, saw the most groundbreaking work that's been done anywhere in the country. That's everything that (former Police Chief) David Couper did that included women, people of color, and LGBT people."[47] The

[47] Chappell, Robert. "'We Understand:' Police Stand Down from Pride Parade, Encourage Citizen Participation." *Madison365,* August 14, 2018. https://madison365.com/we-understand-police-stand-down-from-pride-parade-encourage-citizen-participation/.

debate continued in the weeks after Pride 2018, with mostly white people posting and commenting in complaint to OutReach about the exclusion of police.

The following year, for Pride 2019, the police and city government took drastic steps that appear to be retaliatory against OutReach's usual Pride activities. Although the newly-passed city ordinance was ostensibly applicable to all events, parades and marches downtown, they seemed particularly targeted towards the OutReach Pride parade. This new policy addressed street use for parades and marches, requiring the parade to be significantly downsized, demanding that the organization move the annual festivities a week earlier, and most egregiously tripling armed and uniformed police presence for "security" and that OutReach pay those officers double the usual cost.[48] In light of this, OutReach announced it would cancel the annual parade and instead hold a community picnic on the far east side of the city, the Magic Festival (a nod to one of the original Pride events in Madison, the Magic Picnic, which began in the 1970s and went on for several years afterwards). The Magic Festival was ultimately successful, but many in the LGBTQ community felt the absence of the usual annual parade, and attendees at the Magic Festival I spoke to articulated disappointment about not being able to celebrate in the middle of downtown Madison as they usually would. All 2020 Pride festivities have been canceled in the midst of the Covid-19 pandemic, and it is unclear what the future holds for OutReach parades and festivals moving forward.

Conclusion

[48] OutReach. "Police at Pride." lgbtoutreach, August 3, 2018. https://www.outreachmadisonlgbt.org/post/police-at-pride.
Garton, Nicholas. "Madison Passed Ordinance That Would Have Allowed Pride Parade a Week Before It Was Cancelled." *Madison365*, April 10, 2019. https://madison365.com/madison-passed-ordinance-that-would-have-allowed-pride-parade-a-week-before-it-was-cancelled/.

The manifestations of the distinction between radical queer politics and homonormative politics in Madison have, I hope, been illuminated a bit over the course of this chapter. From the origins of a politically queer identification in the 1980s and 90s to the present struggle on many fronts for radical liberation, lines have been drawn between social assimilation and transformation. The queer politics I discuss in this chapter are closely tied to intersectionality and crip theory, and inform the work being done by queer organizers in the city. In Madison, the divide between homonormative and queer politics has manifested in several ways. From the spatial politics and affiliation with either the brick and mortar permanent gay bars or the ephemeral spaces created by Queer Pressure organizers, to the fight for preventing cops from marching in the annual Pride parade, it becomes clear that there is not one unified "LGBTQ community" in Madison with similar goals, and that intersectional political model of groups like ACT UP live on today. Although Queer Pressure has ceased to exist under that name, the organizers have gone on to work on other events and temporary spaces, including Queer IRL, Hot Summer Gays, a series of queer astrological themed parties, and other one-off events or festivals, all with the same ethos and political dedication of Queer Pressure. There is also no clear resolution to the issues of racism in the queer scene in Madison, particularly relating to police brutality. As I'm finishing this thesis, there are a massive uprising across the United States, including in Madison, against police brutality and systemic racism, and many of the queer people I spoke to, both organizers and party attendees, have gone on to work on these anti-racist efforts in various capacities. With both the Covid-19 pandemic and a mass reckoning around anti-Black racism in its various forms, and the endless making and remaking of queer

political and social organizing, the future manifestations of radical queer politics and identification are yet to be articulated. However, I know that no matter what happens, there will be queers ready to organize and fight for a better world, just as there will be liberal homonormative efforts to meet the demands of radical queers with moderate half-measures and criticism, every step of the way.

Conclusion

The initial idea for what eventually became this thesis came from a place of personal frustration. I think part of what has always drawn me to queer and feminist texts is an impulse to somehow make sense of myself and my experiences, hoping that I find the perfect text or theorist that makes me feel seen and understood. Moving to Hungary caused me to reflect more than I previously had on the particularities of the place I was so deeply homesick for. The move created necessary distance for me to contemplate the idiosycracies of the Madison queer scene and felt a need to understand that city and those people, and my own place in that system. As I often do, I turned to theoretical works for guidance and clarity. I read texts from U.S. theorists that wrote about urban queer life, and felt some aspects of this work resonated with some of what I had experienced, especially around nightlife scenes and youth subcultures, but the places these theorists talked about- New York, San Francisco, Los Angeles- have obvious, significant differences from Madison. As I mentioned in my introduction, the queer scene in Madison is comparatively tiny, and it often feels as though everyone knows everyone else, and massive parts of what defined my sense of belonging there could disappear almost overnight, like Queer Pressure did. I turned to texts about rural queerness, and also found some resonances in those analyses, especially since I had spent my adolescence in a very small town in northeastern Wisconsin- I experienced overt homophobia, incredible loneliness and confusion, and found queer belonging primarily in online spaces. I did not come out until I had several hundred miles and a few years of distance from where I grew up. The theory I read about rural spaces also didn't quite fit with Madison, either. Although it is not large, there is a queer scene in

Madison, and the overt homophobia and isolation of my rural adolescence was not felt with the same intensity while I lived in Madison. Many Madison queers grew up in towns similar to mine, and a frequent topic of conversation was our earliest queer identifications and experiences, but the tone of these discussions was mostly one of relief - more “thank God we got out” than “it still feels like this”. All of this is to say that I felt a clear absence in the literature about places that are in between the rural and the urban, and I desired, and still desire, texts that take places like Madison, Wisconsin as complex and deserving of their own analysis and theory in their own right.I have not found these texts so far in my search, so this thesis is my small contribution, in the hopes that it might help someone understand their own experience in an in between place, or perhaps encourage them to write their own account of those places.

Along the same lines, I also sought out theory specifically addressing queer people who identified *as queer people,* rather than as a way to address a loose coalition of people who fall under the LGBTQ+ umbrella. I identify as queer, rather than as bi- or pansexual, for many of the same reasons my participants did, and I did not see this reflected in the canon of queer theory, which still feels overwhelmingly centered on cis gay men, and to a lesser extent, lesbians. This use of queer as an identity category is a fairly new one, and given the time it takes for theory to catch up to lived experience, I can’t fault all the theorists for this (after all, who am I to demand that Foucault or Butler speak directly and specifically to my life- they were working on much bigger things than solving the problems of one girl from Wisconsin). The section on this thesis wrangling with this particular topic is necessarily incomplete, and I look forward to other people articulating and understanding this much more coherently than I can.

Throughout the writing process, I have gotten feedback from just about everyone that the general themes of my chapters should hang together more coherently. This is the part of this thesis where I'm supposed to explain how it all ties together, and I'm afraid that I can't do that meaningfully. What I want readers to take away here is not a firm conclusion about what the queer scene in Madison is like, but rather a sense of some of the things that were happening there when I was doing fieldwork, and perhaps some connection to the joys and concerns ofthe people who live there. As I was doing fieldwork, these were the areas that came up again and again in my interviews and in my notes, and I found each of them rich enough to spend a chapter analyzing. Underlying all of them is that these themes- the struggle of defining queerness and community, temporality and spatiality, and queer politics- have an enormous impact on the lives of Madison queers, and ultimately, that's who I really wrote this for. There are enormous topics I wish I could have covered; I could write a whole chapter on outness at work, or on queer aesthetics, or about the incredibly weird dynamic of being a white person looking around mostly white spaces, talking to mostly white people, about how racist white queers can be. There are, as with every ethnographic project, hours and hours of interview material that is left completely unreferenced in my writing. If not given a deadline, I would probably be working on this project for the next decade.

When I was in the field, racial tensions in Madison and across the U.S. were rising, and at the time that I'm writing this conclusion, in late June of 2020, they have boiled over. Outrage over police brutality and murder, which I wrote about briefly in the chapter on queer politics regarding the shooting of Tony Robinson by a Madison police officer, has lead to mass protests and mobilization for calls of disarming, defunding and

ultimately abolishing the police. The work and demands of the Community Pride Coalition, LGBT Books to Prisoners, and Freedom Inc have been taken up by incredible numbers of people across class, race, age and sexual identities, in a truly intersectional and unprecedented moment of collective solidarity. This movement is still ongoing, and I cannot predict what will happen in the next week, certainly not the next year, but I believe that this is an incredibly important moment in U.S. history which will have reverberations in all aspects of politics, media and culture for decades to come.

Finally, I cannot conclude this thesis without mentioning the enormous impact of the Covid-19 pandemic. All of the queer pop-ups and permanent gay bars have been suspended indefinitely as physical closeness, shared social spaces and intimacy with strangers is dangerous for the health of individual people and entire communities. I did most of the writing for this work in the midst of this pandemic, and I have felt sometimes like I'm writing a love letter to something that no longer exists. I want to believe that someday soon I will be at a very glittery queer party, dancing with strangers and collectively singing along to a pop song we all know, but I don't know when that will be possible. Until then, I will be dancing on my own in my room, remembering with great warmth and gratitude the incredible queers who made this project possible through their continuing work to imagine otherwise, pressing for engagement in radical liberatory politics, and making queer life more joyful.

Appendix

CONSENT FORM FOR RESEARCH PARTICIPATION

Study Title: Queer(ing) Community: Queer Community, Temporality, and Spatiality in Madison, Wisconsin USA

Student Researcher: Jennifer Edwards

I am an MA student at Central European University, in the Department of Gender Studies in Budapest, Hungary. I am planning to conduct a research study, which I invite you to take part in. This form has important information about the reason for doing this study, what I will ask you to do if you decide to be in this study, and the way I would like to use information about you if you choose to be in the study.

Why am I asking you to be in this project?

You are being asked to participate in a research study about queer community formation in Madison, Wisconsin. I am focusing on impermanent spaces, including pop ups and temporary events/festivals. The purpose of the study is to create an ethnographic study about how community, inclusion, and belonging function in the specific context of the Madison queer scene. I'm interested specifically in discussing your individual experiences and thoughts on these topics.

What will I do if I choose to be in this project?

You will be asked to participate in a one-on-one interview with me, discussing a variety of topics relevant to the research. The interview will be roughly 1.5-2 hours, and might involve a follow-up interview if necessary and agreed upon by both of us. Interviews will take place in locations decided upon by both of us, and could include coffee shops, my home, your homes, or other relatively quiet and comfortable locations.

Recording: I would like to audio-record this interview to make sure that I remember accurately all the information you provide. I will keep these recordings in an encrypted folder on Google Drive, and they will only be used by myself. After the interview, I will transcribe the interview, which will be similarly encrypted. If you prefer not to be audio-recorded, I will take notes instead.

I may quote your remarks in presentations or articles resulting from this work. A pseudonym will be used to protect your identity, and all identifying information (workplace, hometown, etc) will be disguised unless you specifically request that you be identified by your true name.

How will you protect the information you collect about me, and how will that information be shared?

Results of this study may be used in publications and presentations. I will be using information collected in my MA thesis, which will be published online in English. Your study data will be handled as confidentially as possible. If results of this study are published or presented, individual names and other personally identifiable information will not be used.
To minimize the risks to confidentiality, I will encrypt all recordings, transcripts, and analysis from the research. All identifying data will be removed from the documentation in future publication. Excerpts of interviews may be quoted in my thesis, or in future articles, but will be anonymized.

What are my rights as a research participant?

Participation in this study is voluntary. You do not have to answer any question you do not want to answer. If at any time and for any reason, you would prefer not to participate in this study, please feel free not to. If at any time you would like to stop participating, please tell me. We can take a break, stop and continue at a later date, or stop altogether. You may withdraw from this study at any time, and you will not be penalized in any way for deciding to stop participation.
If you decide to withdraw from this study, I will ask you if the information already collected from you can be used.

Who can I contact if I have questions or concerns about this research study?

If you have questions, you are free to ask them now. If you have questions later, you may contact me:
Jennifer Edwards
edwards.jennifer.research@gmail.com

Project updates and my biography can be found at
https://jenniferedwards102.wixsite.com/madison-ethnography

Consent

I have read this form and the research study has been explained to me. I have been given the opportunity to ask questions and my questions have been answered. If I have additional questions, I have been told whom to contact. I agree to participate in the research study described above and will receive a copy of this consent form.

_____

Participant's Name (printed)

Participant's Signature Date

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