“Don’t Throw Glitter on our Carpet”: Cultivating Queer Safe Space(s) in Halifax

by

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Abstract

This project examines 2SLGBTQ+ safe spaces in Halifax to understand the experiences people have in these spaces and the cultivation work involved in maintaining them. Informed by queer and intersectional theories, the project asks: *How do queer safe spaces in Halifax operate? Why? What successes and challenges do they face in their day-to-day maintenance?* I interviewed individuals who operate and use queer spaces in Halifax to focus on the relational work necessary for maintaining them and use literature to situate the analysis in the city's particular social and political context. Participants' narratives demonstrate that: queer safe spaces are cultivated (and re-cultivated) through an ongoing and relational process; intentionality is integral to achieving goals; active transgression of heteronormativity through continued acts of 'queering' space is vital; and cultivating safe space is a complex process and cannot be understood with a singular, static concept of 'safety.'

List of Abbreviations

2SLGBTQ+	Two-spirit, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and other sexual/gender minority
LGBT	Lesbian, gay, bisexual, and/or transgender
LGBTQ	Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and/or queer
BIPOC	Black, Indigenous, and people of colour

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Over the last few decades, a popular discourse has emerged regarding safe spaces for marginalized groups and what these spaces represent in relation to freedom of speech, inclusion, and political correctness. On one side of the debate, safe spaces are seen as a necessary emancipatory provision for those in society who are most marginalized. Meanwhile, others are concerned with the consequences safe spaces may have for limiting critical discussion. Overall, it seems the conversation often represents a general misunderstanding of the history and purposes of safe spaces. This project's findings support the notion that, for the participants (as for many marginalized groups), safe spaces are positive, necessary, and not limiting or challenging to issues of free speech nor are they indicative of an over-sensitivity or weakness on behalf of the groups who create and use them. Safe spaces have been a significant feature of activist communities for decades, yet the concept still evokes confusion and conflict in scholarly, pedagogical, and regular, everyday contexts. While critics take issue with a lack of clear definition for the concept, space and place scholars across social science disciplines as well as activists on behalf of marginalized communities find value in safe space as an exercise of claiming territory in a world of uneasy spatial politics. Regardless of the controversy, empirical accounts of safe spaces and first-hand testimonies of safe-space users show that these spaces are beneficial for marginalized groups (Browne, 2011; Clark-Parsons et al., 2018; Eves, 2004; Goh, 2018; Hartal 2008, Podmore, 2006; Roestone Collective, 2014). With the significance of safe spaces in mind, I endeavored to uncover an inside perspective on safe spaces through an investigation of their everyday operations and the intimate understandings of those who cultivate and use them. This inquiry arose from a desire to understand safe spaces better—conceptually and empirically—and to get a sense of the ways spatial politics are playing out in Halifax, a city where rights and visibility for 2SLGBTQ+ (two-spirit, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and other sexual/gender minority) communities seem to be advancing.

Space and place have a capacity to hold and embody power and, as such, claims to space—particularly for marginalized groups—are politicized and significant. Along with increasing awareness of queer issues and efforts for equality as well as visible, ever-developing gay enclaves in urban places, there tends to be an idea in media and general Canadian discourse that queer folks are accepted and included in society now more than ever before. Despite this widespread notion of progress, investigation into queer groups' spatial experiences reveal that they align neither with the increasing tolerance of non-normative sexual and gender identities seen in contemporary Western societies nor with many of our assumptions about queer spatial politics (Bell & Binnie, 2004; Brown, 2006; Browne, 2011; Casey, 2004; Doan, 2007; Eves, 2004; Hartal, 2018; Podmore, 2006). Empirical research shows that queerness is largely and detrimentally 'othered' through contemporary Western spatial arrangements (Bell & Binnie, 2004; Brown, 2006; Browne, 2011; Casey, 2004; Doan, 2007; Eves, 2004; Goh, 2018; Hartal, 2018; Podmore, 2006). Arguably, explicitly-queer spaces are more necessary than ever.

The current study responds to scholars' calls (particularly from Heather Rosenfeld and Elsa Noterman of the Roestone Collective) for research to situate analyses of safe spaces in their particular social and political contexts and to focus on the relational work necessary for creating and maintaining them. Importantly, the investigation addresses a gap in the literature stemming from a lack of intersectional analysis. Few scholars address the issue of intersectionality theoretically (Roestone Collective, 2014) or empirically (Goh, 2018; McConnell et al., 2016). I address this gap empirically by examining the interactions of different intersecting identities and marginalities in participants' stories and experiences. In analyzing first-hand narratives about queer spaces and the people who use and operate them, I was able to consider multiple meanings of safety and claiming space.

With all this in mind, my research questions are as follows: *How do queer safe spaces in Halifax operate? Why? What successes and challenges do they face in their day-to-day maintenance?*

In order to address the research questions, I conducted interviews with seven individuals who operate and/or use queer safe spaces in Halifax to gain a sense of the everyday experiences people have in these spaces, the successes and challenges associated with achieving safety, and the cultivation work that goes into maintaining these spaces. In this way, participants have provided insight into the ways that spaces and their associated organizations or communities are meeting their goals of providing safety for queer folks in Halifax, what obstacles they encounter, and how the spaces fit into the wider context of safe and queer space through history. Regarding terminology, while I recognize that not everyone in the 2SLGBTQ+ community identifies as "queer," in the spirit of queer theory and brevity, I utilize the word "queer" as an umbrella term in referring to all non-normative sexualities and gender identities. When referring to particular people in my interactions with participants, I utilize the specific terms participants offer to describe themselves. Otherwise, in writing, I will use 2SLGBTQ+ and "queer" interchangeably as all-encompassing terms for the people by and for whom the sites of study are created and maintained. Likewise, when discussing the cited literature, I will use the authors' terminology to reflect the particular identities of participants in each instance, as some studies refer to some but not all members of 2SLGBTQ+ communities.

The quote in the title of this work represents the complexities involved in cultivating queer safe space(s). The quote is from Blake, a participant who plans queer-centred events throughout Halifax, and speaks specifically to the difficulties of creating queer space in a heteronormative city. When asked what needs to be considered when hosting events, Blake's list of factors included venue owners' requests: "Don't throw glitter on our carpet." His response was both witty and revealing, as it signifies the difficulty of creating a queer-centred event within a non-queer venue, balancing the creation of queer safe space with the demands of non-queer space owners. This kind of struggle is just one obstacle within what participants' narratives painted as a complex process of cultivating queer safe space. In the thesis' latter chapters, the findings examine Blake and other participants' stories as portraits of possibilities for queer-centred space in Halifax and beyond.

Findings are consistent with scholarly accounts of safe space that emphasize the relational and dynamic quality of these sites. Significant themes that emerge from participants' accounts include the ongoing and collaborative nature of cultivating safe space; the significance of shared intentions and actively transgressing heteronormativity in creating safe environments, and the limitations of 'safety' in describing the complex process of cultivating space, which involves a multitude of victories and obstacles in everyday maintenance. I also use participants' narratives to confront misinformation and misinterpretation of safe space in concept and practice found in some media discussions of safe space. Shared but multifaceted meanings of safety, community, and success are central to participants' narratives as they engage in the ongoing process of meeting the spatial needs of Halifax's queer community.

This inquiry extends the knowledge of queer space and safe spaces to discover how queer groups and allies are creating and maintaining spaces of safety that recognize and respond to obstacles and challenges. I address the gaps in the literature by launching an investigation that is intersectional, contextual, relational, and specific (acknowledging the similarities and differences across different kinds of spaces). Queer groups in Halifax and elsewhere may find that the results are useful for constructive reflection about the functioning of their safe spaces, as the discussion identifies significant elements for cultivating safe space from participants' perspectives. As someone who does not identify as queer but as an ally, I find value in the project as a contribution to broader discourse concerning safe spaces.

Methods

To examine the everyday cultivation and maintenance of queer safe spaces in Halifax, I conducted semi-structured interviews with participants affiliated with one or more self-described safe spaces for 2SLGBTQ+ folks. I recruited participants through two channels. First, I contacted representatives from queer-centred spaces and/or their affiliated organizations within Halifax, including community/non-profit sites, spaces on university/college campuses, and queer businesses to request that they distribute the study information in their spaces and to their networks. Sites and organizations for recruiting participants were either clearly identified as a "safe space" or indicated some degree of queer-friendliness as a central purpose in promotional and educational materials (e.g. websites, Facebook pages, posters, on-site materials). For example, spaces might have a mission that includes ideas of protection, inclusion, safety, acceptance, or related themes, and specifically cater to queer-identifying people. I have made this clarification in light of the controversial nature of the term "safe space" and the potential for space operators to want to avoid using it to protect themselves from harassment or backlash from safe-space opposers. I contacted representatives by email (or Facebook messenger, when email was unavailable or unsuccessful) and included information about the project, participation, and a copy of the recruitment poster. Those representatives who agreed to assist with recruitment primarily shared information about the study using social media platforms Instagram and

Facebook, including my contact information in posts. Secondly, I hung up posters at select locations on Dalhousie University campus, University of King's College campus, and the Halifax Central Library.

I held interviews with seven knowledgeable operators and/or users in total: three interviews were conducted individually, and two interviews involved a joint interview with two participants. Interviews ranged from forty-five minutes to one and a half hours in length and were semi-structured to leave space for exploring new topics and inquiring further when themes emerged. Open-ended questions allowed participants to discuss the information they felt was most significant in their spaces and to prompt elaboration where appropriate.

Participants were individuals who operated and/or used one or more queer safe spaces in Halifax and included volunteers (at community/non-profit/advocacy spaces), employees (at business spaces), and patrons. Some of the spaces discussed were permanent physical spaces such as businesses while others were event-based, created by hosting queer-centred events in non-queer spaces like bars or restaurants. Participants were all over the age of eighteen, ranging from early twenties to mid-thirties and each identified with one or more non-normative sexual or gender identities (not heterosexual and/or cisgender). The majority of respondents were white, five men and two women were included, and all but one were cisgender. In order to collect an even amount of information from across the different types of spaces, I spoke with participants in five different organizations and their associated spaces within Halifax. Interviewees had all been involved with their discussed space for a significant amount of time: the shortest association was six months and the longest was four years. Each participant fulfilled a unique role within their respective space, with six individuals acting in a leadership capacity and one exclusively being a patron. Regardless of their role, all participants have frequently utilized the space and/or attended associated events. Data consist of interview transcripts (transcribed from audio recordings) which I analyzed using thematic analysis, searching for themes related to the use and maintenance of each space using open and axial coding. The coding process involved reading through the interview transcripts several times, first assigning tentative labels to sections of data (open codes). Then, I identified relationships between the open-coded sections of data and grouped them together with new labels (axial codes), resulting in the final themes presented in the findings.

Pseudonyms are used in presenting the findings in order to protect the confidentiality of those who contributed to the project. Additionally, the names of participants' spaces are not mentioned nor are the particulars of the spaces discussed. Instead, the type of space/event (i.e. business, non-profit, or community space/event) is indicated and relevant activities are discussed in broad terms. Working alongside queer communities in the small city of Halifax requires careful consideration of the privacy needs of participants and respect for the integrity of their spaces, so it is from this perspective that I approach the discussion about the participants who contributed to the research and their spaces. In the following chapters, quotes from participants are followed by a short description in parenthesis including the participant's pseudonym, their gender identity or sexual orientation, their status as either operator or user of their space, and the particular kind of space they are involved with. This method will help lend context to participants' words while respecting confidentiality.

The chosen methods are informed by the literature as most previous research on queer spaces and safe spaces have involved interviews. I chose interviews in response to scholars' calls for analyses of safe spaces that are relational, contextual, and intersectional. Interviews allowed participants to discuss the particularities of each space and the relational work that goes into maintaining them and for us to consider the social and political contexts in which the spaces are embedded and the role of intersecting identities in users' experiences of each site. The number of interviews is informed by the approximate number of interviews conducted in previous empirical research on queer space and safe space and is also influenced by the scope and location of the project. As Halifax is a relatively small city, the 2SLGBTQ+ communities within it—while rich and active—are limited and, consequently, so too is the pool of available participants. While seven contributors make up a limited sample, their diversity of experience in identities and the spaces with which they associate make them a valuable source of insight into Halifax's growing queer community and the particular relationship between queerness and space in the city.

Methodology

Adopting a critical, intersectional lens, the project is informed by queer and intersectionality theories. Queer theory is useful as a result of its tactic of disrupting traditional, normative understandings of sex, gender, sexuality, and other identities and recognizing the socially- constructed and contextual nature of these categories (Sullivan, 2003). Keeping in mind the "discursive construction" (Sullivan, 2003, p. 412) of sex, gender, and sexuality prompts me to question hegemonic understandings of these identity markers and focus on understanding participants' unique experiences in space. With an intersectional lens, I am able to consider the comingling effects of multiple intersecting identities as they impact an individual's experience in space and respond to scholars' calls for intersectionality in empirical work. With their embeddedness in critical theory, both foundations allow me to consider the successes and shortcomings of each space, and to understand them in relation to structural obstacles.

Working from an intersectional perspective involves recognizing that overlapping systems of power simultaneously impact marginalized individuals in complex ways such that a single particular aspect of one's identity cannot be understood as separate from others (Crenshaw, 1991). So, for instance, I acknowledge that a queer person who is white, educated, and able-bodied will experience both broader public space and safe spaces differently than a queer person of colour or a queer person with a disability, even if they seem to be similar in other ways. By prompting participants to think about the people who use their space(s), interview questions addressed the notion of intersecting identities to uncover their role in shaping experiences of safety in space and the possibility for safe spaces to address these issues. The interview schedule can be found in Appendix A.

Limitations

While the project addresses a gap in knowledge through examining different types of queer safe spaces, I sought out formal, established spaces in recruitment, which presents limitations in the diversity of participants as well as in the ability to analyze the full breadth of safe space experiences in Halifax. Existing research shows that safe spaces and queer spaces can exclude some kinds of people even when they strive for inclusion (Doan, 2007; Roestone Collective, 2014). Since participants include those who manage and utilize particular safe spaces, I missed the perspectives of those individuals who may feel excluded from the selected sites. Additionally, as the topics discussed were established formal or semi-formal spaces and organizations it was not within the scope of the project to examine informal queer safe spaces formed by friend groups or queer networks whose meeting times/spaces may fulfill the purpose of a safe space but are not formalized. As such, the data does not account for the various ways besides formal safe spaces that queer folks engage in spatial justice.

Additionally, it is important to recognize that there is not one overarching queer community, but rather a great number of queer communities with different geographical and social contexts. Halifax's queer population is heterogenous, encompassing numerous people with different lifestyles, identities, and values, including variances in how they view queer safe spaces. Participants are largely those who discuss spaces they offer themselves and, while they were reflexive and balanced in their narratives, they offer a particularly positive view of queer safe spaces. There are likely to be queer people in Halifax and elsewhere who feel differently about such spaces whose perspectives are outside of the scope of this project. As such, the findings cannot be assumed to represent the feelings of the entirety of Halifax's queer community or of queer communities more generally.

Halifax's small size and the specificity of criteria for participants reduced the pool of possible respondents for the study to a relatively small group. As such, while participants represent an array of distinct and valuable identities and life experiences, the small sample limits my ability to discuss the intersectional elements of experiencing queer safe spaces in the city. It would be useful for future research to involve interviews a greater number of participants who operate and/or utilize a wider range of queer safe spaces, allowing for a greater diversity of participant identities. It would be particularly valuable to engage with members of queer communities who are Black, Indigenous, and other people of colour (BIPOC), as well as gender-diverse participants, as these are the voices frequently not encompassed in safe space research, including this project due to time and sample limitations.

Thesis Organization

This project engages with a range of cross-disciplinary literatures and public conversations about the political reasons for and ramifications of safe spaces. The following chapters explain how the work emerged from that context, as well as the role of the findings within that context. In Chapter 2, I discuss the relevant theoretical and empirical research that forms the basis for this project, including broader place and space theory, accounts of queer space, and safe space research. Next, it includes a discussion of safe space in recent news articles. Chapter 2 also includes a description of the historical and current spatial dynamics of Halifax, including an overview of scholarly literature regarding the city as a site of queer research. What follows is a series of chapters which describe the multiple and complex mechanisms at play in some of Halifax's queer safe spaces through the lens of their knowledgeable operators and/or users. Chapter 3 introduces the participants and the spaces they cultivate in more detail with emphasis on their purposes, what safety means within them, and what goes into generating a sense of safety. Chapter 4 delves into the relational and ongoing nature of participants' spaces as an essential feature and source of generating safety. In the fourth chapter and throughout the findings sections, I utilize and extend the concepts of safe space offered by Roestone Collective (2014) and Clark-Parsons et al. (2018) by examining the spaces through the relational work essential for their creation. In Chapter 5, I address the intentionality inherent within these spaces in all steps of cultivation and its importance in working towards collective goals. Further, Chapter 5 examines the important acts of transgressing heteronormativity that cultivators engage in and the impact this ongoing 'queering' process has within the space. Chapter 6 draws attention back to the literature to analyze the limitations of 'safety' as a concept for understanding the complex, multidimensional everyday processes in participants' spaces, as well as obstacles cultivators encounter in their efforts. Finally, Chapter 7 offers discussion and concluding remarks along with limitations and suggestions for future research.

In discussing the everyday cultivation of their spaces, participants describe a process that is ongoing and relational and in which acting with intention is integral to achieving goals. The cultivating process involves active transgressing of the heteronormativity inherent in public space; plus, the process embodies multiple complex mechanisms, is not straightforward, and is not encompassed by a singular notion of 'safety.' The participants divulge the everyday work—by both operators and users of space in concert—that goes into offering a space of reprieve for themselves and their community. Participants' narratives demonstrate that: queer safe spaces are cultivated (and re-cultivated) through a process that is ongoing and relational; intentionality is integral to achieving goals and maintaining efficacy; the active transgressing of heteronormativity through continued acts of 'queering' space is vital; and that cultivating safe space is a complex process that involves successes and challenges and cannot be fully captured by a singular, static concept of 'safety.'

Chapter 2: Literature Review & Theoretical Framework

In this chapter, I outline the scholarly context for the work as it lies within broader space and place theory, empirical and conceptual accounts of safe space, and queer space literature. This chapter also discusses the concept of safe space as it appears in a selection of recent news articles to illustrate a broader understanding of the meanings associated with the term. The chapter concludes with a brief introduction to the Halifax's spatial landscape and the city as a site of queer research.

Space & Place Theory

Useful insights for imagining safe space emerge from theories of social construction, social production, and embodied space. These frameworks come together to consider space as (1) produced socially; (2) intimately linked with struggles of power and domination; and (3) continually in the process of being created. The view of space as necessarily social includes the understanding that spaces and places are produced through social relationships and bound by historical and political forces. Emphasizing the social nature of space, Henri Lefebvre (1991) created the social production of space model within which he imagines space to be simultaneously a vehicle for social interactions and a concrete form which influences these interactions, "[manifesting] as perceived, conceived, and lived" by social actors (Gottdiener, 1993, p. 131). More recently, Massey (2005) asserts that space "is the product of interrelations; as constituted through interactions" (p. 9). Massey (2005) also suggests that space is heterogenous, hosting people with many different identities and life stories, describing "the spatial as the sphere of the juxtaposition, or co-existence, of distinct narratives" (quoted in Escobar, 2001, p. 164). Similarly, Casey (1996) claims that "*lived bodies belong to places* and help to constitute them," (p. 24, emphasis original), emphasizing the relationality of place as it is “permeated with culturally constituted institutions and practices” (p. 46).

Theorists also describe space as it relates to forces of domination and power. Lefebvre is particularly concerned with capitalist appropriation of space and argues that “social space is consumed and yet also politically instrumental in the control of society and the reproduction of property relations” (Low, 2016, p. 40). Lefebvre’s proposed notion of abstract space refers to “the hierarchical space that is pertinent to those who wish to control social organization, such as political rulers, economic interests, and planners” (Gottdiener, 1993, p. 131) and is opposed to social space, that which is produced through people’s everyday actions and life experiences. In his *The Production of Space* (1991), Lefebvre argues that, “The spatial practice of a society secretes that society’s space; it propounds and presupposes it, in a dialectical interaction” (p. 38). This point emphasizes the significance of spatial practice on behalf of people and institutions as forming space, reinforcing the notion that space is not acontextual nor static.

Similarly, Michel Foucault’s 1975 *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of Prison* argues that architecture is a means through which the state exerts power and control over its citizens “through enclosure and the organization of individuals in space” (Low, 2016, p. 18). As elaborated by Low (2016), architecture enables powerful groups to assert and sustain dominance over others through “both the control of the movement and the surveillance of the body in space” (p. 19). Massey (2005) highlights the prevalence of power relationships in the negotiation of space – what she terms “spatial politics” (p. 151). Public space, she suggests, is “necessarily negotiated, sometimes riven with antagonism, always contoured through the playing out of unequal social relations” (Massey, 2005, p. 153). For Michel de Certeau, the struggle for space between dominating and subordinate groups is fraught with demonstrations of power in the form of "classification, delineation and division—what he calls 'strategies'" (Low, 2016, p. 19) from the powerholders (de Certeau, 1984, p. 37, 40). Meanwhile, members of the subordinate group develop "tactics" (de Certeau, 1984, p. 37) of traversing through space to resist powerful actors' control of space. Those with physical space have power and can enact strategies. Those without physical space use time, instead, through tactics. In *The Practice of Everyday Life*, de Certeau (1984) explains:

> a *tactic* is a calculated action determined by the absence of a proper locus. No delimitation of an exteriority, then, provides it with the condition necessary for autonomy. The space of a tactic is the space of the other. Thus it must play on and with a terrain imposed on it and organized by the law of a foreign power. (p. 36-37)

In this sense, space is not merely a physical or geographical phenomenon, but is created with and through time, as well. According to de Certeau, subordinate groups do not have access to physical space, but can use time as a tactic for resistance. Yilmaz (2013) further explains:

> Tactics, *which depend on reasonable utilization of time*, are practices that come together and disrupt rapidly. Resistance acts that are developed against strategies of the power lack permanent positions. When circumstances require, tactics develop as crucial practices that are interferences to strategies or power mechanisms. (p. 67, emphasis mine)

For those without institutional power and therefore without physical space of their own, time is an invaluable resource in challenging subordination. However, temporal actions that occur in space are subject to the structural influences of that space and, as such, subordinate groups must work within its boundaries. The idea of time as resistance will become clearer when exemplified by participants' narratives in later chapters.

Moreover, the notion of space as dynamic and continually created and recreated appears throughout social science literature. Massey (2005), for instance, reports that space is "always in the process of being made. It is never finished; never closed" (p. 9). In agreement, Low (2016) "[views] space and place as always under construction" (p. 211). As a result of their relational nature, spaces and places are not static or absolute. Rather, they are continually produced and reproduced through interactions among social actors, change over time, and are subject to the fluctuating ideologies of the institutions to which they are bound.

Defining Safe Space

As mentioned above, the term "safe space(s)" remains without a clear, agreed-upon definition. However, theory and empirical research reveal common attributes of safe spaces that help to specify the concept. The term 'safe space(s)' can be traced back to the United States' women's liberation movement in the latter portion of the twentieth century; however—in concept and practice—spaces of refuge for marginalized groups have existed historically in the context of struggles for feminist, queer, racial, and class justice (Clark-Parsons et al., 2018; Roestone Collective, 2014). For example, bell hooks (1990, p. 42, 47; also cited in Roestone Collective, 2014, p. 1352-1353) describes the safe space of the "homeplace"—sites historically cultivated by black women that served as a base for developing political resistance, nurturing solidarity, and "[healing] many of the wounds inflicted by racist domination." hooks (1990) describes that, "Historically, African-American people believed that the construction of a homeplace, however fragile and tenuous (the slave hut, the wooden shack), had a radical political dimension" (p. 47), indicating that places which served to protect and uplift marginalized communities existed for centuries before the current popular term existed. For activist communities, the concept "is associated with keeping marginalized groups free from violence and harassment" (Roestone Collective, 2014, p. 1346) and the opportunity to enact one's identity genuinely (Roestone Collective, 2014; Hartal, 2017), share experiences with similar peers (Clark-Parsons et al., 2018), and "generate strategies for resistance" (Kenney, 2001, p. 24; cited in Roestone Collective, 2014, p. 1346). Hartal (2017) offers a similar understanding of safe space as a "protected place, facilitating a sense of security and recreating discourses of inclusion and diversity" (p. 1056). She notes that such spaces are intended to provide a sense of safety that "is not merely physical safety but psychological, social, and emotional safety as well" (Hartal, 2017, p. 1056). In sum, safe spaces shoulder the significant task of allowing marginalized groups respite and protection from targeted and institutionalized harm, providing opportunities to be one's true self, and fostering a sense of belonging, solidarity, and collective resistance.

For example, Hartal (2017) describes the Jerusalem Open House which acts as a safe space for Jerusalem's lesbian, gay, bisexual, and/or transgender (LGBT) population, providing a sense of belonging, control, pride, and anonymity regarding testing for sexually-transmitted infections in a city that sees high rates of homophobic discrimination and violence (Hartal, 2017). In New York City, queer advocacy groups aim to create safe space to address the issues of violence and police surveillance experienced by queer youth of colour and organize for "transformative political change and social and economic justice" (Goh, 2018, p. 469). Doan (2007) examines conferences and conventions held by and for transgender communities, which create temporary safe spaces for collective identity-formation, learning and empowerment that transgender individuals rarely find elsewhere. Doan (2007) suggests that, "[w]hile the safety created in these urban spaces is temporary, the effect of the opportunity for convention attendees to express openly what have previously been only private gender identity positions is quite powerful" (p. 68). Although the queer spaces generated by these events are short-lived and, therefore, imperfect, they nonetheless meet the spatial needs of communities that are so frequently left out-of-place even if only temporarily.

Furthermore, the concept of counterspaces that appears both in community psychology and sociological research resonates closely with the proposed functions of safe spaces. McConnell et al. (2016) describe counterspaces as sites which "facilitate a specific set of processes that promote the well-being of marginalized groups" (p. 473). These spaces function to help members of marginalized groups resist the damaging effects of oppression through "(a) narrative identity work, (b) acts of resistance, and (c) direct relational transactions" (McConnell et al., 2016, p. 473). The authors offer the Michigan Womyn's Music Festival, established in 1976 and running until 2015, as an example of the potentially beneficial effects of counterspaces (McConnell et al., 2016). As attendees learned from one another and discovered shared experiences of womanhood, the festival counterspace instilled in them a sense of growth and feminist strength that they carried with them to their everyday lives. The festival presented opportunities for what authors describe as relational acts of resistance, such as working together to perform difficult manual labour and discussing patriarchal oppression with other women. The event also allowed for re-configuring identities through unpacking patriarchal oppression and feminist empowerment and how they may appear in one's life. Each of these experiences of relational resistance and identity reformation were connected to a sense of empowerment generated within the festival counterspace (McConnell et al., 2016).

Importantly, when examining safe spaces, it is useful to frame space and place as products of social relations, immutably linked to struggles of domination and resistance, and perpetually in the process of being made. Clark-Parsons et al. (2018), for instance, describe participants' efforts at creating and maintaining Girl Army, an online platform with the goal of protecting women from online misogyny and acting as a base from which to tackle instances of social media sexism. Girl Army operates as a secret Facebook group with a small number of moderators who control membership in order to reflect the intentions of the online space as a decidedly feminist on one in which "members discuss current events, share resources, call for backup against online harassment, ask for advice, tell deeply personal stories, post feminist memes, support causes through online petitions and fundraisers, and organize offline meetups" (Clark-Parsons et al., 2018, p. 2126). The authors note that membership is not just available to cisgender women, but to users who identify themselves as women—either cis or transgender—or gender-nonconforming. Nonetheless, cisgender subjectivities are privileged within the space as, "the vast majority of the discourse that unfolds within Girl Army revolves around experiences rooted in cisgender womanhood (Clark-Parsons et al., 2018, p. 2133) and moderators admit only those who they perceive as women or gender-nonconforming people by viewing their profile. Despite attempts to remain inclusive of and accommodate for various non-male subjectivities, Girl Army struggles with the pre-defined boundaries it set in its creation as cisgender space. The creation of space with heterosexual and cisgender subjectivities in mind leads to experiences of marginalization for the groups for whom space fails to accommodate. The work and consequences of sustaining this online space, they suggest, reveal the "relational, fluid, partial, and imperfect nature of safe spaces" (Clark-Parsons et al., 2018, p. 2128) as the sense of safety both relies on and is hindered by interaction between members and the boundaries of the group are constantly reconsidered. Likewise, in an analysis of butch/femme lesbian identities in the UK, Eves (2004) reveals that safe spaces both allow for and are produced by the enactment of various (queer) identities, reflecting the notion of space as "multiple, fragmented and contested in character" (p. 482). Safe spaces are no exception to the social nature of place and, as such, analyses of such spaces should begin with a focus on the interrelations that instigate their production.

In addition, analyses of various marginalized groups' safe spaces emphasize the need for understanding these places in context. In creating a reconceptualization of safe space, the Roestone Collective (2014) assert that "[b]y focusing on [the work that goes into producing and maintaining safe spaces], we are able to treat safe space as a living concept, identifying tendencies and variations in its use, and recognizing its situatedness in multiple contexts" (p. 1347). To understand and study safe spaces effectively, they suggest, it is necessary to focus on the relational labour that creates and sustains a particular safe space, as it is intricately embedded in its social surroundings. The Roestone Collective (2014) examine already existing empirical accounts of so-described safe spaces in an effort to reframe analysis of these kinds of spaces "as something more than simply a response to a static and predefined category of 'unsafe' (p. 1347). As they argue that safe spaces should be understood socially, they use the term "relational work" to describe the interpersonal efforts and obstacles that the people who create, operate, and use safe spaces navigate in the mutual cultivation of space (Roestone Collective, 2014). As you will see, the project builds on their reconceptualization by examining similar spaces through the lenses of the people who operate and use them.

Hartal (2017), too, asserts that "creating a safe space, even if only temporarily, requires a deep understanding of the context and subjectivities of individuals" (p. 1056). In order to produce safe space, Hartal (2017) continues, "a more nuanced analysis of power and its manifestations is needed, as well as a discussion of the intertwining of power, relationality, and subjectivity" (p. 1056). Hartal's (2017) suggestions arise from research with the Jerusalem Open House (JOH), a multi-use location "with the aim of [being] a safe, empowering, and high-profile space for the LGBT community in Jerusalem" (p. 1059) among anti-gay religious and political tensions. While many users of the space benefit from its existence and the services offered there, different subgroups within Jerusalem's queer community struggle to adapt the space to meet their needs. The limited resources at the JOH's disposal and the need for constant renegotiation of policies to maintain safety in the space speaks to the necessity of situating safe spaces and their analysis within their broader social and political contexts.

Empirical research examines modern-day safe spaces for marginalized communities including queer people, women, at-risk youth, racialized people, and people with disabilities. Existing literature outlines the multiple meanings of safe space(s) noting that they are primarily concerned with: protecting marginalized groups from violence, harassment, and discrimination; providing a place to embrace one's (generally marginalized) identity; allowing people to be among others with similar experiences; and serving as base for political organizing (Clark-Parsons et al., 2018; Eves, 2004; Hartal, 2017; hooks, 1990; McConnell et al., 2016; Roestone Collective, 2014). In these spaces, safety is conceptualized as physical in providing protection from violence, psychological through resisting stigma, emotional in allowing freedom from discrimination, and social through a sense of belonging and acceptance (Hartal, 2017). Safe spaces work to resist harm at both interpersonal and structural levels through protecting individuals from harassment they may face outside of its boundaries and challenging hegemonic values that marginalize them. Importantly, knowledge of the sociopolitical context in which a safe space exists is necessary for understanding it (Hartal, 2017; Roestone Collective, 2014). A safe space for the queer community in Israel will look and function differently than a women's safe space in the United States. As a concept, safe space is subject to multiple interpretations. For some, it could mean a space that is exclusive to people with a particular marginalized identity that allows for solidarity along a specific metric. For others, safe space might mean broadly-inclusive space that celebrates and accommodates for a diversity of identities. Others imagine sites in between as they aim to cater to people with a particular social location, but are also inclusive of others who have different lived realities. Some safe spaces are formal while others are informal;

some occupy permanent physical space while others are created by time-based events. Some safe spaces exist for the sole purpose of providing people with a space they can occupy where there is not one already, while others have multiple goals, like those that exist as businesses, advocacy spaces, or places for leisure. While safe spaces can take various forms, their basic functions revolve around making space for and meeting the context-specific needs of marginalized groups, including protection from violence, social belonging, and physical and emotional wellbeing (Clark-Parsons et al., 2018; Eves, 2004; Hartal, 2017; hooks, 1990; McConnell et al., 2016; Roestone Collective, 2014).

It is difficult to map a trajectory of marginalized groups' claims to space through history that clearly outlines how safe space as a concept and term came to be what it is today. However, existing literature seems to delineate a blurry but notable transition from marginalized groups' spaces of the past to safe spaces seen today. Literature shows that marginalized groups' spaces in the past were largely formed on the basis of exclusivity (Clark-Parsons et al., 2018; McConnell et al., 2016; Roestone Collective, 2014). These spaces were accessible only to members of a particular marginalized group in order to keep their oppressors out and create a space of escape, solidarity, and collective organizing in the face of individual and structural oppression (Clark-Parsons et al., 2018; McConnell et al., 2016; Roestone Collective, 2014). This kind of space is exemplified by the homeplace (hooks, 1990) and the Michigan Womyn's Music Festival (McConnell et al., 2016; Browne, 2011). Literature on more recent spaces and events illustrate a shift towards broadly-inclusive spaces that cater to a particular population, but remain accessible to others and involve allies in their cultivation (Fetner et al., 2012; McConnell et al., 2016; Roestone Collective, 2014). These kinds of inclusive spaces—such as gay-straight alliance spaces in schools—are those now popularly called safe spaces.

While the transition from exclusive or separatist spaces to inclusive ones is likely the product of many intermingling factors, Hartal's (2018) description of safe spaces as rooted in the core values of liberalism provides insight into what I argue is a significant factor in the shifting landscape of marginalized groups' spaces towards 'safe space'. As mentioned above, Hartal (2018) analyzes the operations of a safe space for Jerusalem's LGBT population and argues that the space's goals and functions are "anchored in liberal logics" (p. 1053). She suggests:

> LGBT preoccupation and even obsession with safe spaces is unfolding within a context of (Westernized) LGBT politics bolstering LGBT public visibility and advocating for it. Visibility, as a political goal, is part of a wide understanding of individual liberty, anchored in identity politics as a means to attain rights (read: normalization) for LGBT subjects. (Hartal, 2018, p. 1054)

The implication here is that the concept of safe space(s) is a product of social liberalism, demonstrated in goals of representation for the groups who create and use them as part of wider efforts for gender- and sexuality-based equity. Hartal discusses this idea in reference to separatist spaces, but I suggest that the liberalist roots of safe space in concept can, in part, explain the shift from exclusive to inclusive spaces. Whereas, historically, marginalized folks designed their spaces for respite and resistance first and foremost, today's safe space operators value the visibility that comes from centering the realities of marginalized people while welcoming and involving non-marginalized people in space cultivation. For example, queer-centred spaces on university campuses that offer programming and resources for all (not just queer) students see value in making queer realities visible and promoting positive interactions between queer and non-queer members of the community. The idea of visibility that came along with a shift towards modern social liberalism seems to be an underlying factor in the shift towards today's popular concept of inclusive safe spaces. As the Canadian political landscape has changed over time, spaces of urgent respite from oppression have been largely replaced by spaces that encourage visibility through centering marginalized groups' experiences within spaces that include others along with the people directly affected.

Although safe spaces have transformed over time, they remain imperfect. Scholars offer several critiques of safe space that point out the issues that separatist or exclusive spaces have encountered that I suggest is also a factor in the shift towards more inclusive spaces. For example, through history, some women's/feminist safe spaces have excluded women of colour, trans women, and non-binary folks. So, while they attempted to challenge patriarchal oppression, they excluded other marginalized groups and reinforced the very binaries feminism seeks to upend (Roestone Collective, 2014). I suggest that these issues, discussed in detail below, are another reason that marginalized groups' spaces moved away from exclusivity towards the inclusive safe spaces of today as a strategy in mitigating some of the issues that exclusivity presented.

Safe Space Critiques

Empirical analyses of safe spaces illustrate the empowering potential of safe spaces for marginalized groups. Nonetheless, these same explorations have revealed possibilities for safe space to produce damaging outcomes for some users. Critiques of safe space largely derive from or relate to Rose's (1993; cited in Roestone Collective, 2014) concept of paradoxical space. The term describes spaces in which "multiple overlapping and different identities can come together...where traditional (sometimes patriarchal or masculinist) mappings of social norms are challenged [and]...marginalized identities are both embraced and destabilized" (Roestone Collective, 2014, p. 1355-1356). Using Rose's principle, the Roestone Collective argue that all safe spaces—in theory and in practice—are paradoxical by nature. They suggest that, in creating and utilizing safe spaces, groups both assert the legitimacy of social differences (such as sex, gender, race/ethnicity) and, contrarily, affirm the contestability of related binaries (such as female/male, heterosexual/homosexual). Girl Army's online space, described by Clark-Parsons et al. (2018), exemplifies this notion through the ongoing efforts of members and moderators to reconfigure boundaries to sustain a sense of safety. Girl Army is a Facebook group that is separatist in that it excludes men in an effort to give women and non-binary users an online space free from misogyny (Clark-Parsons et al., 2018). Operating with a set of assumed yet unspoken shared expectations for conduct within the space, intergroup conflicts arise from a lack of agreed-upon guidelines for interacting within the space. For example, while the group strives to be inclusive of transgender women and non-binary members, the conversation tends to revolve around topics of cisgender womanhood such as menstruation and reproductive justice (Clark-Parsons et al., 2018). As a result, activity tends to "center white, cisgender, female experiences, excluding marginalized voices and reifying the very binaries feminism seeks to upend" (Clark-Parsons et al., 2018, p. 2128). At the same time that it provides feminist learning opportunities and a sense of protection from online misogyny, Girl Army reproduces exclusions and reifies the binaries they set out to disturb.

Another unintended, yet problematic paradoxical consequence of safe space cultivation relates to separatist spaces that "inadvertently [support] the relegation of certain voices to the margins by carving out a specific space for those voices" (Clark-Parsons et al., 2018, p. 2135). Hartal (2017) argues that conceptions of safety and relational actions involved in creating and maintaining safe spaces unintentionally essentialize a view of marginalized (in this case, specifically queer) groups as "fragile subjects, in need of protection from unsafety that may emerge at any time" (p. 1069), potentially obscuring the resilience of these groups and undermining political efforts. The Roestone Collective (2014) sums up this phenomenon well, describing "the paradoxical nature of safe space— as simultaneously safe and unsafe, inclusive and exclusive, separatist and integrated" (p. 1352). Inclusive spaces, too, can encounter pitfalls when ensuring safety is confused with minimizing discomfort—an emotional experience that can be valuable for learning and is often necessary when engaging in productive discourse about privilege and inequality (McConnell et al., 2016; Roestone Collective, 2014). To provide a more thorough understanding of "safe space" as a term and concept, the next section engages with its application outside of academia.

Safe Space News

In addition to the scholarly literature, news articles offer an opportunity to examine multiple meanings of safe space in concept and practice. In order to understand how news articles employed the concept, I read various news articles that discuss the subject of safe spaces in North America. In this section, I discuss how some news articles demonstrate a sense of ambiguity and misunderstanding of safe space much like that discussed in the literature. It is important to note that the articles mentioned are not necessarily representative of news media in general or a wider discourse regarding safe or queer spaces.

For years, safe space has been the focus of many news articles, podcasts, and Facebook posts as part of a wide, divisive public debate relating to equality, free speech, and marginalization. In looking at news articles from 2019 and 2020, the use of the term reflects its controversy and, more strongly, its evasiveness. I examined online news media that engaged with the term "safe space(s)" to understand how the term was being used outside of scholarly literature during the time I conducted my research. I used a search engine and an email news alert to collect news articles that focus primarily on safe space(s) in Canada and the United States, both with and without a 2SLGBTQ+ focus. I read and examined news articles published between the dates of September 2015 and February 2020, most published between April 2019 and December 2019. The bulk of the articles came from a Google news alert set in April 2019 and ended in January 2020, as I wanted to understand how the term was being applied during the time I gathered and analyzed data. I created the news alert for the term “safe space,” and set it to alert me of sources in English once a day. I set sources to ‘automatic’ (includes news, blogs, etc.) and ‘only best results’ to ensure it used the whole term (rather than just “safe” or “space”). I also used a broader Google search to find news that spoke to the controversy around safe spaces, which lead primarily to earlier articles. I began the broader search with just the term “safe space,” which lead to a multitude of relevant articles and blog posts. When articles referred to others of a similar theme, I searched for those particular sources using Google, as well. I made note of main points, themes, and any underlying attitudes in the articles, looking for trends and common threads in the way they used the term or discussed the concept. The search concluded after reading approximately one hundred articles when common uses of the term had been identified and additional articles no longer offered new insight.

Each article embodied one of two perspectives, either loosely following the emancipatory rhetoric found in scholarly literature or critiquing safe spaces as a destructive practice instigated by liberalism gone awry. I suggest that both of these uses indicate a lack of understanding of safe space in popular use. The first perspective, seen in several articles, resembles scholarly conceptualizations of safe spaces as places of refuge, solidarity, and joy for marginalized groups, but does so in a haphazard, unspecific way. Many articles mention spaces designed to serve a need for a particular population. For example, one article describes plans to host an LGBTQ prom at a high school in North Carolina to provide a safe, enjoyable event for queer students to be with other students like them (Hui, 2019). The prom is important to students because, in the area “proms have become more open, but some LGBTQ students don't feel like they can be who they are at them" (Hui, 2019, para. 5). Many of the spaces described are centred around the needs of a particular population, but remain inclusive of others outside of that group. An article about the University Women's Centre at the University of New Brunswick, for example, describes it as a space open to all students from across several of New Brunswick's post-secondary institutions (Martin, 2019). The centre's sense of safety appears to stem from stigma-free conversations about feminism and the provision of resources such as menstrual products and condoms (Martin, 2019). The author notes that "The Centre aims to provide a safe and comfortable space on campus, focusing on women's issues while remaining accessible to all students" (Martin, 2019, para. 5). Reflecting similar ideas of safe space discussed in the literature—that they serve marginalized groups through protection from harm, a sense of belonging, and solidarity—these articles represent one perspective about safe spaces found in news media. Although these articles discuss safe spaces in a positive light, their use of the term depicts the lack of understanding the term carries by using it without context or explanation. For example, an article on VegNews' website introduces a new restaurant, opening the article stating, "New vegan eatery Gay4U—designed as a safe space for the queer community—recently opened in Oakland, CA" (Axworthy, 2019). The term is used once more in the subhead, yet the author does not engage with the term or discuss its meaning, origins, or explain what it is about the new restaurant that qualifies it as a safe space. In my search, few articles discussed the meaning or of the term or its relevance to the particular space(s) they used it to describe, both demonstrating and reinforcing its ambiguity. In some cases, it is unclear whether the interviewed representatives of the space utilize the term "safe space" as a descriptor of these spaces or the journalists apply the term to the spaces they write about. This distinction is significant and speaks to an interesting reflection that came up in an interview for this project. Jesse (who we meet again below), a participant who operates a queer business space in Halifax describes, "…we're gonna try to be a safer space, so not necessarily a safe space, but the newspapers always put 'safe space' right on the front even though we explicitly were like 'well we can't actually cater to everybody.'" In Jesse's case, reporters describe the business she co-owns as a safe space, seemingly disregarding her own nuanced description in favor of the popular albeit misunderstood term. It is interesting that the term, although vague and subject to multiple interpretations, is used so frequently and casually in news articles—to describe a wide range of spaces from an 2SLGBTQ+ high school prom to a polygamist gathering in a secluded corner of Utah. This vague use of the term leaves readers unclear about what makes the spaces in question safe or why safety is meaningful in particular contexts. Without explanation or reference to meaning, significance, or history, these news articles offer a clear representation of the uncertainty around safe space as a term and concept.

Conversely, a second perspective found in a few articles discussed the concept of safe space in a critical light, invoking issues of free speech and critical thinking. Bear in mind that, while this critical perspective is important to consider, this particular use of the term represents a small subset of articles. These were generally opinion pieces focusing on a what the authors see as a movement of post-secondary students rallying to make university and college campuses safe spaces, with particular concern for avoiding conversations that might cause them emotional discomfort or even trauma. Authors draw on instances of student actions, such as at Northwestern University where students filed complaints against a professor whose essay critiquing a new university policy about student-professor sexual relationships was featured in The Chronicle of Higher Education in 2015 (Isaacs, 2017; Lukianoff & Haidt, 2015; Shulevitz, 2015). In particular, critics take issue with what they see as a sense of fragility among students and the precarious minefield that professor-student interactions have reportedly become as a result of safe spaces becoming popularized. Lukianoff and Haidt (2015) tackle this perspective in an article in *The Atlantic*, arguing that "The ultimate aim, it seems, is to turn campuses into 'safe spaces' where young adults are shielded from words and ideas that make some uncomfortable…this movement seeks to punish anyone who interferes with that aim, even accidentally" (para. 5). Lukianoff and Haidt (2015) even suggest a link between so-called safe space culture on campuses and growing rates of student mental illness. They draw a connection between the skills used in Cognitive Behavioural Therapy, a counselling method and series of tools aimed at reducing anxiety and other symptoms of mental illness, and the kinds of skills traditionally developed in university (e.g. critical thinking). Pointing out the rising rates of reported mental illness at universities, Lukianoff and Haidt (2015) suggest that students and university administration who strive for safe campuses are creating an environment that devalues critical thinking and other helpful thinking styles, leaving students without the skills to care for their mental wellbeing. Students' fragility, critics argue, is harmful as it prevents them from learning about different viewpoints and engaging in critical conversations that will help prepare them for life outside of university. Shulevitz (2015) argues:

> People ought to go to college to sharpen their wits and broaden their field of vision. Shield them from unfamiliar ideas, and they'll never learn the discipline of seeing the world as other people see it. They'll be unprepared for the social and intellectual headwinds that will hit them as soon as they step off the campuses whose climates they have so carefully controlled. What will they do when they hear opinions they've learned to shrink from? (para. 16)

Critics suggest that the push for campuses to be safe results in students not learning important lessons or skills because they refuse to be subjected to them since they may be harmful. The topics they refer to include those like professor Laura Kipnis' abovementioned critical perspective on university sexual misconduct policies. This same refusal to cover important skills and topics is behind the fear of repercussions for professors. Many articles mention a concern that well-intentioned (or, often, innocent) professors face undue consequences when students complain to administration about their teaching being insensitive or oppressive. One piece written by a professor reports that he is scared that any number of imminent unfair complaints from a student about his teaching will be detrimental to his career:

> it would be a student accusing me not of saying something too ideologically extreme — be it communism or racism or whatever — but of not being sensitive enough toward his feelings, of some simple act of indelicacy that's considered tantamount to physical assault. (Schlosser, 2015, para. 15)

He reports that he and many of his colleagues have revised their teaching material to minimize the risk of being unfairly reported to administration. To summarize, this critical perspective analyzes a supposed safe space culture at post-secondary institutions (rather than particular marginalized groups' spaces) to suggest that the concept of safe space reflects students' fragility and has harmful implications for students and faculty.

These articles, through a direct critique of safe space in practice and conceptualization, demonstrate the concept's ambiguity. Lukianoff and Haidt (2015) are certainly not the first scholars or citizens to critique the idea of safe space, especially pertaining to higher education. There is merit to the claims that North American colleges and universities have, in recent years, made moves towards adapting to an increasingly diverse student and faculty population through efforts such as providing content warnings in lectures that include sensitive material and offering culturally-conscious services. Nonetheless, their arguments overlook the historical context of safe spaces, ignoring the long-standing practice of creating small-scale grassroots spaces by and for marginalized groups. They seem to mistakenly generalize the concept of safe spaces and use the term where it does not really belong and in doing so, disparage sites of community, strength, and protection. While their intentions of preserving critical thinking may be admirable, critics like Lukianoff and Haidt (2015) seem to disregard the history and twist the meaning of safe space in favour of promoting a harmful rhetoric about free speech, mental health, and learning opportunities that contests recent strides towards equity in higher education.

It is clear that the definition, history, roles, and purposes of safe space are lost in the wider debate as it becomes subjected to multiple interpretations. Both in casual use of the term to describe any number of spaces without explanation of its meaning in context and in indignant critiques of the concept of safe space, some discussions around safe spaces show a similar misunderstanding of the term and concept that is consistent with its ambiguous use in scholarship, as described by the Roestone Collective (2014). As discussed in future chapters, the spaces described by participants are sites of critical emancipatory discussion, collective organizing, and joy—not at all the sites described by critics like Lukianoff and Haidt. These spaces are also not static, defined by a singular predetermined notion of safety. Rather, they are formed with the protection of marginalized groups in mind, reflective of the wider history of safe space, and their operators are engaged in ongoing processes of learning, both from their own experience and that of similar spaces. It is important to reiterate that I have described a small proportion of news articles about safe spaces and the critical articles, in particular, represent a minority of news regarding safe spaces. Nonetheless, I suggest that the articles indicate that the ambiguity and confusion around safe space as a term and concept seen in scholarly literature extends to other, more colloquial uses as well. It is this widespread ambiguity that I intend to address with the analysis by investigating specific examples of safe space in practice and situating these cases in Halifax's sociopolitical context. The next section moves beyond understanding safe space to examine literature about queer space more generally, some examples of which constitute safe spaces while others do not.

Queer Space Context

In order to situate the research in the context of wider queer space literature, it is important to consider the existence and function of queer space(s) through history. To begin, the very reason for identifying queer space as a concept in itself is due to the heterosexual production of space in Western societies. Hartal (2017) draws on queer space scholarship to remind us that "[t]he function of diverse overt and covert mechanisms of spatial control indicates ongoing suppression of non-normative sexualities, governing and silencing LGBT desires and embodiments in space (Valentine, 2000, cited in Hartal, 2017, p. 1055). Casey (2004) confirms this phenomenon, noting that "[queer] sites have to be reinscribed with a gay and/or lesbian visibility and identity, if not, they risk being (re)claimed by heterosexual bodies and the continual normalization of space as 'naturally' heterosexual" (Valentine, 1996, 2002, cited in Casey, 2004, p. 448).

Moreover, Bell and Binnie (2004) outline a process by which cities take advantage of the presence of queer urban spaces to promote regional cosmopolitanism. In efforts to attract revenue, cities promote what has been termed "'the new homonormativity'" (Duggan, 2002; cited in Bell & Binnie, 2004, p. 1811) or a marketable image of gayness in line with hegemonically-valued white cisgender male middle-to-high-income-earning identities. This homonormativity attracts consumers with non-marginalized sexual identities into queer spaces and works to exclude "'undesirable' forms of sexual expression, including their expression in space" (Bell & Binnie, 2004, p. 1811), effectively de-queering and depoliticizing once-queer settings. For example, Casey (2004) details the impacts of cosmopolitan intervention for queer spatial politics in Newcastle-upon-Tyne. As the city set out to develop a gay village as part of gentrification and cosmopolitan rebranding efforts, the Pink Triangle (a historically-queer haven) became populated by non- marginalized consumers—

heterosexual women, in particular. The city's exploitation of queer space caused a de-queering of the Pink Triangle as claims to space by non-marginalized users displaced those whose sexual identities did not reflect the promoted notion of homonormativity. As a result, this historically queer territory lost its sense of queerness as the presence of heterosexual women in gay space reduced visibility and a sense of safety for lesbian women. This phenomenon has been observed in gay urban spaces across Western countries, effectively displacing those who are 'too queer' to conform to the acceptable, commodified version of gayness (Bell & Binnie, 2004; Brown, 2006; Casey, 2004; Goh, 2018; Podmore, 2006).

Comparably, Doan (2007) asserts that gay spaces often reflect the gender dichotomy and power divisions of the wider heterosexual society. Hegemonic ideologies related to misogyny, cissexism, and homonormativity in these spaces render them unsafe for people with non-normative sexual and gender identities including bisexual, non-binary, and transgender individuals (Doan, 2007). For example, gay bars and villages tend to be masculinized and embody patriarchal values, privileging gay male identities over queer women's (Casey, 2004; Doan, 2007). Moreover, Doan's (2007) investigation of transgender participants' perceptions of urban space in the United States "indicate[s] that although queer spaces provide a measure of protection for gender variant people, the gendered nature of these spaces results in continued high levels of harassment and violence for this population" (Doan, 2007, p. 57). In addition, since so much of the limited queer space is commodified, individuals who have difficulty finding employment, are without permanent housing, or are otherwise socioeconomically constrained may find they are unable to utilize queer spaces. The pervasiveness of heteronormativity and state-promoted homonormativity is such that, even within 2SLGBTQ+ communities and so-called queer spaces like gay bars and villages, non-mainstream queerness provokes marginalization.

Ghaziani (2014) writes about gay neighbourhoods in the context of the supposed "post-gay era…characterized by a dramatic acceptance of homosexuality and a corresponding assimilation of gays and lesbians into the mainstream" (p. 9). In interviews with gay and straight participants living in Chicago's gay neighbourhoods, he examines ideas about the future of gay enclaves and the overwhelming discourse that they are disappearing. Ghaziani (2014) describes gay neighbourhoods as "a type of 'free space' or 'safe space'" (p. 19) within which gays and lesbians can embrace and accept their whole selves—something they historically have not been able to do outside of their designated enclave. Referencing a growing acceptance for gays and lesbians and strides towards legislative equality, he describes a notable shift in which queer folks are choosing to live outside of gay neighbourhoods and heterosexuals are moving in. He argues that, although queer folks have a growing number of spaces in the city where they feel able to live, gay enclaves remain meaningful in that they "still offer the strongest sense of social acceptance, personal safety, community support, and freedom" (Ghaziani, 2014, p. 75). Additionally, he notes, the expanding "residential possibilities" (p. 75) are not necessarily a reality for queer people of colour, queer youth, and trans individuals who do not experience the same increasing assimilation that (particularly white) gay, lesbian, and bisexual people have been (Ghaziani, 2014). Ghaziani argues that gayborhoods are also "places to access anchors of queer culture, community, and commerce" (2014, p. 210). Through making a case for the enduring relevance of and necessity for gay neighbourhoods, Ghaziani (2014) sheds light on the importance of queer safe spaces as safe havens from anti-gay discrimination (in micro and macro forms) and sites of community and cultural preservation.

Spatial History of Halifax

Before examining particular facets of queer spaces in Halifax, it is necessary to describe the city's spatial landscape more broadly. Halifax is relatively small in comparison to other Canadian metropolitan areas and is generally regarded to embody an affective character of conservatism. Ongoing issues such as a low minimum wage (Rutgers, 2020), higher poverty rates than elsewhere in Canada (Campbell, 2018), racial profiling by law enforcement (Chater, 2019), and lack of support for people with disabilities (Walton, 2019) are part of Halifax's and the province's non-progressive reputations. Through its history, marginalized groups in Halifax have struggled for social justice, including long-term battles for space. The city is infamous, for example, for the displacing of African Nova Scotians and destruction of their homes and community in Africville as part of city improvement efforts in the late 1960s and 1970s (Gregory & Grant, 2014; Roth et al., 2015). The experience of queer folks in the city is no exception to the exclusionary history of space in Halifax; but over time, the city has seen growing resistance on behalf of queer folks. It is important to situate the analysis of participants' particular spaces within their wider sociopolitical context to more readily understand the meaning and significance that queer folks' claiming of space has within Halifax. While scholars have noted the relative lack of empirical accounts of Halifax's spatial politics (as opposed to larger places such as Toronto, Vancouver, or American cities), the available research from disciplines including planning, sociology, and anthropology provide an important context nonetheless. As follows, I will use literature and more widely available news media sources to briefly discuss Halifax spatial history more broadly, the heteronormative displacing of queer people in the city, and accounts of queer resistance and space-making.

Looking to the past, Halifax's history reflects that of wider Canada in terms of colonial beginnings and ongoing domination of marginalized people, as its municipal and provincial governments have continued to displace racialized, low-income, and non-heterosexual people through the centuries. At its inception, Halifax was as a result of colonialism, the land settled to serve French and then British interests (Hiller, 2005). As a port city, Halifax has been important for defence and a major immigration point, though few have historically stayed in the area (Hiller, 2005). Hiller (2005) notes that, "As the Canadian economy became more directed toward the North American continental economy, a location on the margin became a disadvantage" (p. 38). As industries largely moved to Central and Western Canada to access larger consumer bases, Nova Scotians followed. Today, Halifax is the "unofficial business capital of Atlantic Canada" (Hiller, 2005, p. 38) hosting the majority of the region's business and governmental headquarters. At multiple turns, marginalized groups have seen themselves displaced as a result of conservative policy and in favor of reaching economic goals. The destruction of Africville in pursuit of city improvement is a clear example of this damaging history. In the late 1960s and through 1970, an entire community of African Nova Scotians were forced out of their homes, which were soon destroyed, and given inadequate compensation for the loss of their homes and community (Gregory & Grant, 2014; Roth et al., 2015). Gregory and Grant (2014) show that Africville is one instance in Halifax's history of displacing an already-marginalized community, noting, "Government authorities ignored evidence of emotional pain and dismissed community protests about loss of valued places and features as they applied their plans" (p. 46).

Similarly, Roth et al. (2015) describe an ongoing process of spatial neglect faced by marginalized citizens as they examine the history of Gottingen Street in Halifax before, through, and after a period of urban renewal practices by the government. During the late 1960s through until the early 2000s when suburban areas of Halifax flourished, central areas of Halifax, including Gottingen street which was home to a large proportion of racialized and low-income residents, faced hardships and neglect from the government (Roth et al., 2015). Following the urban renewal program (of which the destruction of Africville was a part), population declined rapidly, businesses closed, and social/community services moved in to serve the community as best they could (Roth et al., 2015). Roth et al. (2015) describe the aftermath of the government's actions, noting:

> The presence of the large low-income population housed in Uniacke Square and nearby co-op and non-profit housing affected the perception of Gottingen Street throughout the 1970s and 1980s. A growing drug culture and associated criminality left impoverished neighbourhoods increasingly stigmatized. The 1980s brought neoliberal policies to federal and provincial governments, leading to straightened circumstances for those living with poverty. Community and church groups struggled to fill the gaps in social services, while politicians turned to other issues. (p. 47)

The destruction of Africville and neglect of Gottingen Street in the past demonstrate a history of spatial injustice experienced by marginalized groups in Halifax. These struggles are echoed in the current ongoing housing crisis (Donovan, 2019) and indigenous groups' battle for land rights (McSheffrey, 2019) taking place in and around Halifax in the 21st century.

Halifax's Queer Spatial History

Moreover, the city's general sense of conservatism is seen in the spatial struggles of the queer community, both historically and at the present moment. Empirical accounts of queer lives in Halifax describe queer people being displaced across a variety of spaces. For instance, queer folks in Halifax have experienced spatial injustice in education settings both in the past and present. In a history of Halifax's queer activism in the 1970s and 1980s, Rose (2019) describes an issue activists came across in the sixth annual Conference for Lesbians and Gay Men. Saint Mary's University in Halifax was set to be the location for the conference, but cancelled the booking two weeks before the conference when administration realized the event's emphasis on gay, lesbian, and bisexual topics, forcing the organizers to find a new location (Rose, 2019, p. 68-71).

Demonstrating that the fight for spatial justice in educational institutions in Halifax is still relevant today, students at Dalhousie University have recently drawn attention to an event hosted on the campus that invited Laura-Lynn Tyler Thompson, "a speaker widely known for her homophobic and transphobic views" (Maclean, 2019). Students and supporters describe the detrimental effects of providing a platform for someone who actively promotes anti-queer ideologies on campus, as it actively goes against stated university commitments to equality and creates an unsafe environment for 2SLGBTQ+ students (Maclean, 2019). For students and faculty, the institution's apathy towards giving homophobic speakers a platform diminishes a sense of safety as it promotes anti-queer sentiments, which threaten to normalize sexuality-based discrimination and violence and create a hostile environment for queer folks. Through time, access to essential public space and services has been ridden with barriers for Halifax's queer community and similar obstacles remain today.

As the largest city in Atlantic Canada, it might seem logical that Halifax would offer more possibilities for queer community and queer-centred spaces relative to surrounding areas. To an extent, historical and recent accounts of queer space in Halifax reveal this to be true; however, there remain obstacles to accessing these spaces. In an investigation of queer lives in rural Nova Scotia, Baker (2009) describes a well-explored trend of rural versus urban queer experiences, as participants described visiting or moving into the city from less populous surrounding areas to meet other queer people. For several participants,

> accessing ‘the gay world’ meant not only crossing the bridge into Halifax, but also finding certain spaces within the city. Be it Spring Garden road, the Commons, or certain coffee shops, simply being in Halifax didn't provide immediate access to ‘the gay world’ - it had to be sought after and found. (Baker, 2009, p. 52)

While the city, predictably, provides increased access to queer-friendly and queer-centred spaces, finding and using them is not always a straightforward process. The queer spatial reality is Halifax has been and continues to be fraught with barriers as already-marginalized queer citizens struggle to navigate everyday heteronormative space in accessing essential services, like education and health care, as well as in finding queer-centred space.

Though this social conservatism and heteronormativity that comes along with it have displaced queer folks in Halifax through history, we also see numerous accounts of resistance and attempts for queer folks to create space for themselves in the city. While Halifax and Nova Scotia more broadly are often considered to be quite conservative, activism and queer community formation have been occurring in significant ways over the last several decades. Robin Metcalfe (1997), a revered queer rights activist in Nova Scotia, describes the queer exclusion present in Halifax’s arts communities in the 1970s through to the 1990s. He notes, “in marked contrast to other Canadian centres (notably Toronto), the visual arts in Halifax have never placed Queer issues high on their critical agenda” (Metcalfe, 1997, p. 24-25). Metcalfe (1997) mentions a hope to address the exclusion of queer voices with his 1997 exhibit, *Queer Looking, Queer Acting*, at the Mount Saint Vincent University Art Gallery, portraying a collection of photographs, posters, and other items he collected from the lesbian and gay movement in Halifax. The exhibit acted as one instance of resistance to a realm that was exclusionary of queer people and, when revisited in 2014, acted as a reminder of a history of queer activism and a chance for younger 2SLGBTQ+ community members to learn and gain inspiration from queer elders (Rose, 2014).

Rose's (2019) *Before the Parade: A History of Halifax's Gay, Lesbian, and Bisexual Communities* compiles and recounts the rich queer history in Halifax and Nova Scotia from the 1970s and early 1980s, aiming to remedy the neglect of Nova Scotian queer activist contributions and queer lives in retellings of broader Canadian queer history. Rose details the elder generation of gay, lesbian, and bisexuals' ongoing efforts to claim space in the city, demonstrating that queer efforts for social and spatial justice are not a recent development. In conversation with gay, lesbian, and bisexual elders, Rose (2019) learns that the community found and created safe space "in unlicensed gay clubs, in church basements, while cruising the sidewalks of 'The Triangle,' and at house parties…a lesbian drop-in at a women's centre; a community-run bar-cum-drop-in-centre; a gay bookstore; a women's housing co-op" (p. 12). Places like Thee Klubb and The Turret and the people and organizations behind them (like the Gay Alliance for Equality) are evidence that claiming and creating space, though an ongoing and often turbulent process, has been a part of 2SLGBTQ+ realities in Halifax throughout history (Rose, 2019).

Engaging with ideas of queer spatial politics compared to other Canadian cities, Hammers (2008) presents queer women's bathhouse events in Halifax and Toronto as spaces to transgress heteropatriarchal ideas about women's—and particularly queer women's—sexuality. Through an ethnography of bathhouse events in the mid 2000s, she argues that these kinds of spaces, "provide suggestions for the potential of queer, and how queer spaces, because of their sheer heterogeneity, not only offer respite, but more importantly, allow bodies, in all their queerness to speak, while providing a landscape for what is possible in a queer world" (Hammers, 2008, p. 161).

Overall, the scholarly literature examines the experiences of particular queer groups—Black gay men, queer women, 2SLGBTQ+ youth, queer university students, LGBTQ women with spiritual/religious affiliations—in Halifax with particular focus on their relationships with other queer folks, their unique experiences in institutional and other settings, and potential for improving the issue of marginalization for queer folks across a variety of settings. Crichlow (2004) discusses the experiences of Black queer men, who often remain invisible in white queer worlds and must navigate Toronto and Halifax's black "communal structures of dominance that are informed and regulated by heterosexist thinking" (p. 3). Droesbeck (1997) looks to the 1993-founded Halifax Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Youth Project (now the Youth Project) in its earlier years as a part of a queer youth movement, examining how diverse queer youth work together towards common goals. Joy and Numer (2017) examine the operations of a queer university student group in Halifax, offering recommendations for advocacy groups at universities to function effectively.

Moreover, several scholars have focused on queer people's experiences in healthcare settings in Halifax. For instance, Baker and Beagan (2015) describe LGBTQ women's perceptions of health care access in Halifax, noting that "an overall lack of LGBTQ-specific health care services and professionals and the resultant maneuvering of a small number of gatekeepers limited access to quality care" (Baker & Beagan, 2015, p. 939). Colpitts & Gahagan (2016) similarly report that several health service providers and LGBTQ patients have had negative experiences with health care services in Nova Scotia. They suggest that heteronormativity in health care settings causes discomfort from having to explain oneself and one's identity, filling out forms that do not reflect one's experience/identity (e.g. only M/F gender options on forms), and inadequate care from practitioners who are not educated about or prepared for queer health issues (Colpitts & Gahagan, 2016, p. 5). Furthermore, Gahagan & Subirana-Malaret (2018) investigated LGBTQ participants' perceived barriers to health care services in Nova Scotia, arguing that, "in several key areas, the primary health care needs of LGBTQ populations in Nova Scotia are not being met and this may in turn contribute to their poor health outcomes across the life course" (p. 1). Many health care providers reported a lack of knowledge, cultural competence, or comfort with providing care to LGBTQ patients (Gahagan & Subirana-Malaret, 2018). These findings demonstrate that health care spaces are one type of public space that are not welcoming for Halifax's queer community members.

Non-scholarly accounts show that recent years have seen ongoing 2SLGBTQ+ activism in Halifax as the city's queer community works towards more inclusive public spaces and a more just city. For instance, the abovementioned concerns from students at Dalhousie University about the conference that brought Laura-Lynn Tyler Thompson to campus sparked protest (Maclean, 2019 Nov 23). Students and faculty members attended a protest intended to air their concerns for student safety and to gain attention and a response from the university's administration regarding their actions in allowing Thompson to speak on campus (Maclean, 2019 Nov 23). Their demonstration shows a concern for the safety of students and challenging of ideas that so often make public space unsafe for 2SLGBTQ+ folks.

In the summer of 2018, local advocacy groups organized a protest to discourage the group Coming Out Ministries from attending a scheduled speaking engagement at a summer camp in nearby Pugwash, Nova Scotia (CTV Atlantic, 2018). Dozens of protestors attended the demonstration, incited by the group's use and promotion of conversion therapy and anti-gay rhetoric, and signed a petition calling for an end to conversion therapy in Nova Scotia (CTV Atlantic, 2018). These demonstrations, among others, show Halifax citizens' ongoing commitment to activism and advocacy efforts towards a safer city for the queer community, meaning more visibility and acceptance of non-normative sexual and gender identities and the ability for queer citizens to live without fear of discrimination. Participants in this project offer a continuation of these accounts of queer resistance and space-making within a socially conservative city and province that have historically sought to repress and displace them.

Halifax has historically been the site of significant queer community and activism and has seen the struggle for queer space play out in the numerous queer bars, community sites, and activist groups that have been established, terminated, and/or maintained over the last several decades. Together, these works offer a small glimpse at the potential for emancipatory queer spaces in Halifax as well as the possibility for moving towards public spaces that meet the needs of Halifax's queer communities. Robin Metcalfe sums this up well, noting "The history of lesbian and gay activism in Halifax has been, to an extraordinary degree, a history of creating and contesting spaces" (1997, p. 28).

Chapter 3: Safety in Context

Recalling scholars' suggestions to examine safe spaces in their particular contexts, I begin the discussion of findings by situating participants' spaces, looking at their purposes, their emergence, and the identities of their cultivators. In the following chapters I will describe the multiple and complex mechanisms at play in some of Halifax's queer safe spaces through the lens of their knowledgeable operators and users. First, this chapter is dedicated to introducing the sites of study and the participants who cultivate them as operators and users. Here, I detail the types of spaces discussed, their purposes, and the meanings and components of cultivating safety within them. Although each space has a different focus, participants generally described their spaces in ways reflective of previous safe space research, as emancipatory sites of community, culture, and a freedom to be oneself. Additionally, there are multiple factors involved in generating a sense of safety and queerness in space that work in concert to create the desired atmosphere.

Getting to Know Participants & Spaces

In interviews, participants described a range of unique queer spaces in Halifax, each with its own focus, purpose, and guiding philosophy. I was fortunate to speak with folks who operate and/or utilize different kinds of spaces, including commercial and not-for-profit sites, and each with a unique mission and methods of operating. Cameron and Jesse, for example, co-own and operate a queer business space, serving the general public, but with a focus on queer patrons. Blake and Elliott are part of a small team that founded a not-for-profit arts organization that hosts queer parties at different bars and restaurants in Halifax. Kara is one of several volunteers that form a non-profit that advocates for 2SLGBTQ+ rights and equality in Nova Scotia, hosting events to raise funds and awareness for organizing efforts. In our meeting, Kara discussed both these events and the group's meetings as temporally-limited safe spaces, as they are temporary and held in changing locations. Spencer is a frequent patron of a queer business, offering insight into the everyday functioning from a consumer perspective. Finally, Drew is the founder and primary operator of a queer arts-based community group whose meeting spaces were the focus of our interview. Recall that, as Halifax is a small city, the descriptions of spaces as well as those who operate and use them will remain quite vague in order to protect the confidentiality of participants.

Participants offer insights on an interesting collection of spaces—some are permanent while others are wandering, creating queer space out of non-queer locations in Halifax. Although each space has a distinct focus, participants describe the central purpose of each space as catering specifically to Halifax's queer community, addressing their particular needs in relation to the product, service, or environment they offer. Jesse and Cameron's business is operated with queerness as a central thread as they seek to provide a space within which queer clients can comfortably be themselves and access the services they offer:

> "we try to cater more to…communities that feel uncomfortable or pressured or out of place in [typical businesses of the same focus] …where there's a lot of masculinity." (Jesse; big dyke/queer; operator, business space)

While their space is open to anyone, Jesse and Cameron's business prioritizes queer patrons:

> "our space is queer-centred…we're not exclusively queer by any means. Like, the door is totally open to everybody, but at the end of the day, that space is there for…the LGBTQ community primarily." (Cameron; trans man; operator, business space)

Similarly, the events held by the not-for-profit organization Kara describes are open to everyone, but since their aim is to advocate for 2SLGBTQ+ rights, these events are a celebration of the queer community and the progress that's been made by activists thus far. The business Spencer patronizes is quite the same, welcoming of any customers but characterized by queerness with the purpose of providing a space for folks who feel out-of-place in regular businesses of the same focus. The arts program offered by Drew intends to centre queer experiences in an art form that is often exclusionary of 2SLGBTQ+ folks. Blake and Elliot describe the intentions of their parties as providing an opportunity for the queer community in Halifax to come together and creating joyful queer community. It is notable that all of the spaces described are intentionally inclusive, welcoming of allies and other non-queer users; however, their queer-centred nature is the central element of each, providing guidance for operators' everyday activities and goals.

Shared Meanings of Safety

When speaking about their spaces, participants also offered common ideas about what it meant to cultivate safety for their queer users. As expected, safety in these queer spaces means more than physical safety. Participants described expanding notions of safety that encompass physical, emotional and psychological safety, emphasizing the ideas of freedom from discrimination, community, inclusion, and the ability to be oneself fully and comfortably.

Unsurprisingly, participants noted that providing a space within which people could be protected from sexuality- and gender-based discrimination was an invaluable part of the overall cultivation of safety in their spaces. Spencer describes the business space he frequents, noting:

> "I go into that space assuming that no one's going to challenge me on my queer identity…No one's gonna like yell at me for being queer. No one's going to like attack me…" (Spencer; queer; user, business space)

Blake and Elliot aim for their event spaces to offer a reprieve from everyday anti-queer experiences:

> "We don't want them to be confronted with the small, sort of microaggressions and

> uncomfortable moments that are present in their everyday lives, because they live against
> sort of what society is built for." (Elliot; gay/queer; operator, non-profit events)

Kara describes the purpose of safe space from her own perspective:

> like if I come out or I declare myself as pansexual, I do not have to worry about someone else [being] uncomfortable about my presence in the room or attacking me for who I am…for my perspective, being accepted—that would be the ultimate…end goal. (Kara; pansexual; operator, non-profit events)

An imperative part of creating a queer safe space, it appears, is the ability for patrons to be confident that they will not encounter violence or discrimination in any of the multitude forms they might expect to experience in public space.

Furthermore, as participants discussed the importance of queer spaces in bringing queer folks together, it became clear that creating community is another way to generate safety in these spaces. Blake describes the importance of community: "you know we're not making tons of money off these parties, like this isn't a huge fundraiser. It really is to create that community" (Blake; queer; operator, non-profit events). In a similar way that Ghaziani (2014) describes the continued significance of gay neighbourhoods as sites of community and culture, the goal to bring queer people together is integral to creating a sense of safety in these queer spaces. We return to the significance of community later in more detail.

As stated above, the spaces discussed are all inclusive in that they welcome queer and non-queer patrons alike. Another important facet of inclusion emerged as a consideration for each participant as well as they described efforts to make their spaces physically and financially accessible and comfortable for a wide variety of potential patrons with consideration for race/ethnicity, sexuality, gender, ability, and socioeconomic status. Spencer described a pay-it-forward program at the business space he uses that is intended to help community members access the space's services when they cannot afford to pay for themselves, noting: "I think in the space people are…aware of different lived experiences"

(Spencer; queer; user, business space). Blake and Elliott discussed a similar attention to financial barriers in planning events: "Our parties are by donation and so we don't want there to be any barrier to entrance for people" (Elliott; gay/queer; operator, non-profit events). When planning events, Blake and Elliott also try to generate ideas for making the spaces welcoming for trans and racialized members of the community by inviting diverse individuals to DJ, perform, and fulfill other important roles at events. The two are mindful that inviting entertainers who represent a wider array of people within the queer community (in this context, specifically BIPOC and trans performers) is a move towards inclusivity, as it may make trans and racialized people feel more welcome. Similarly, Kara mentioned the need to consider whether a venue is wheelchair-accessible and has all-gender washrooms when choosing where to host events for the non-profit. All participants agreed that inclusion and accessibility to as many people as possible is a part of creating safety because it enables trans folks, BIPOC, and people with disabilities—members of the community who are often excluded even in queer spaces—to share in a sense of belonging. In advertising for his arts-based community program, Drew emphasizes that it is open to folks with any level of experience, all the while operating with a "boundary-free" model which means participants do not pay a fee to participate and transportation fees are covered, if needed.

Finally, a 'come as you are' philosophy surfaced in each participant's narrative as an important element in cultivating safety. The ability to embrace and confidently enact one's own sexual and/or gender identity is a driving force behind offering these spaces and events. Drew describes his intention to address a need that he's observed over his years in arts-based programming, which is "…this need for providing a space for queer individuals to…be able to bring their whole selves, baggage included" (Drew; queer; operator, community space).

When Blake and Elliott organize events, they encourage attendees to be unapologetically queer: "people are encouraged to dress however they want…like, as [Elliott] says, wear what makes you shine from the inside out. And so people feel free to kind of…be who they want to be" (Blake; queer; operator, non-profit events).

Jesse describes a satisfying kind of moment when staff can see the affirming power of their queer-centred atmosphere working:

> every so often we'll get something like two males who are [in] a gay relationship come in and think that they might still be…walking into a space that's like predominantly masculine and it's really fun to see them be like 'oh' and just…that masculinity shield that one needs to survive in the world kind of dissipate. (Jesse; big dyke/queer; operator, business space)

Participants hope that their spaces enable queer folks to embrace and celebrate their queerness outwardly in a way that they may not be able to in everyday life in heteronormative spaces.

Components of Safe Space

Participants described a number of elements that contribute to the ongoing safety in their spaces and/or at their events. Within their narratives, geographical location, physical markers, accessibility and logistical considerations, and the people and interactions within the space and involved in its operations emerged as key factors in the cultivation of safe queer space.

Geographical Location

As queer-centred space tends to appear in the form of small alcoves within wider heteronormative public space, it is important to consider the journey people take to get to these safe spaces. Participants revealed that the location of their venue(s) within the city could either facilitate or hinder the overall feeling of safety associated with the space. For example, when Blake and Elliott began advertising for one of their previous parties, some friends and community members questioned the choice of location, expressing concerns that the venue was located in a part of the city frequented by motorcyclists, or biker gangs. In retrospect, the team notes that the location of that particular venue was not an ideal choice for the event, as previous experiences of anti-queer interactions involving motorcyclists in that area of the city made some event attendees worried, compromising their feelings of safety.

Safe space operators discussed that they need to consider the potentially dangerous travel that may be involved in the moments before arrival at a safe space as patrons traverse through the wider city in ways that may leave them vulnerable.

> "people…can be wearing all different types of…fashion and clothing and also wearing perhaps less clothing and that can make them stick out…and make them vulnerable…a lot of the time…you're wearing [particular clothes] because you want people to look at you at the party…but then for me…personally it's like 'oh but I don't want everyone looking at me when I'm walking down this street.'" (Blake; queer; operator, non-profit events)

Since many queer folks experience general public space to be dangerous, it is important for safe space operators to think beyond the immediate atmosphere of their queer-centred sites to consider their users' experiences in the surrounding city.

Interestingly, some participants did not have a permanent space in which to offer a queer-centred environment, but discussed temporarily creating safe spaces in other, generally heteronormative venues. For a short time, Blake and Elliott, as well as Kara's organization create queer safe space that is anchored in time and in the particular temporal practices of an event. While the sense of safety is still clearly tied to the physical space and its geographical surroundings, it is significant to note that participants' safe spaces can be temporally-delimited, not just geographically-determined. I discuss this point in more detail in later chapters.

Physical Markers

Participants also attribute some of the sense of safety in their space to the use of physical markers, which include tangible indicators that the space is queer-centred. One participant describes physical markers at a non-profit event:

> "Well, ok, this is gonna be very obvious, but when you see the flag…you would know that we're open for you. Yeah and obviously not just […] the rainbow flag. We're talking about the transgender flag, the pansexual flag…you know the space is meant for you." (Kara; pansexual; operator, non-profit events)

In Kara's case, as well as some other participants spaces, hanging pride flags that represented a multitude of identities was a simple way to indicate that a space is queer-friendly. Similarly, Spencer paints a picture of the atmosphere at the business space he patronizes, noting the "art from local queer artists for sale and on display and lots of cool…books and reference material and they have a wall of queer history in Halifax on a bulletin board" (Spencer; queer; user, business space).

Blake and Elliott discuss dressing in drag when welcoming party guests as a gesture that helps guests feel more comfortable flaunting their own outfits or presenting their queer identity in other ways. Also, referring to an event which was in a venue in a potentially non-queer-friendly neighbourhood, the two used physical markers of the event to mitigate the effects. They had a company representative stand out front of the venue and "put a sign up for [the event] even further out so that again we try to expand the feeling…the reach cause it was in a neighbourhood that people felt unsafe" (Elliott; gay/queer; operator, non-profit events).

When talking about the arts-based community space he operates, Drew did not bring as much attention to décor, but still noted a significant physical marker that influenced the feeling of safety. The group meets regularly inside an institutional building and, somewhere in the city, there is a billboard that indicates the group's place within the institution (using the term 'queer'), which Drew sees as contributing to and indicating a sense of belonging in the space and the broader institution. All of these physical markers of queerness—a variety of queer pride flags, art representing queer themes, and walls of 2SLGBTQ+ history—indicate a celebration of queer identities in the space, creating a sense of belonging.

Logistical Considerations & Accessibility

Also an integral part of cultivating queer safe space in Halifax are logistical and operational considerations encountered in their day-to-day maintenance. In describing the process of choosing a venue for queer-centred parties, Blake explains one such consideration: "They have single person washrooms…neutral washrooms. And so…nothing has to be changed, like there's no challenges with the space which is really great" (Blake; queer; operator, non-profit events). Five out of seven participant mentioned universal restrooms as a key part of creating a welcoming environment, as trans and non-binary folks in particular benefit from non-gendered bathrooms.

Another everyday logistical consideration involves the use of people's proper pronouns and names. Cameron describes how they address this administratively: "the waivers that [patrons] sign very specifically put preferred name and pronouns on it…I've had people thank us for putting that on the waiver" (Cameron; trans man; operator, business space). Similarly, when members of Drew's arts-based group meet, "We always go around and do pronouns and names, even if we all know each other" (Drew; queer; operator, community space). Though they may seem like minor details, calling people by the name and pronouns that match their identity and providing bathrooms that people feel comfortable using are important everyday actions that participants know cannot be overlooked in creating a space that is affirming and safe for their patrons.

People Using & Cultivating Space

While a good portion of my conversations with participants focused on the activities that occur in their spaces—drag performances, eating, drinking, improv, activism, practicing, art, theatre, conversations, dancing, and more—interestingly, it is not so much what happens in the space that determines feelings of safety, but the relationships and interactions involved in these activities. For instance, Kara described how the simple act of recognizing someone familiar can create a sense of belonging and safety. She reflects on her own experience at queer-centred events, noting:

> If I know somebody there who happens to be…queer and a part of the community and happen to be…somebody that I met around somewhere, then yes, I would feel safe because I know who that person is and for that person to be in the space, that means I belong. (Kara; pansexual; operator, non-profit event events)

For Kara, seeing other queer people that she knows is one way to facilitate a sense of belonging at events. In planning and executing events, Blake and Elliott must consider how to create the most effective welcoming moment for patrons when entering the party, which usually involves strategically placing people at the entrance to the venue. They note that asking questions such as, "are there people around the entrance? who? what people are around the entrance?' can be a major player" (Blake; queer; operator, non-profit events). Evidently, the people involved in cultivating safe space as well as those who occupy the space as patrons play a key role in the overall feeling of safety at a given location or event. This idea will be discussed to a fuller extent in the next chapter.

In the next four chapters, I will present and discuss the core interview findings that emerged from participants' descriptions of their safe spaces. In particular, participants paint a picture of their sites that suggests the process of cultivating queer safe space is relational and ongoing; involves a great deal of intentionality; benefits from the active transgression of heteronormativity; and reveals the complicated nature of safety.

Chapter 4: Relational & Ongoing Process

The most prominent theme across my conversations with safe space cultivators was the very clear ongoing relational nature of these spaces. While factors such as location and physical markers proved to hold significance, participants demonstrated that the essential component of offering a queer safer space is not in the physical space itself, but in the ongoing relational work done by operators and users to cultivate and environment of safety for queer folks. This point reflects safe space literature which suggests that safe space is always in the process of being created and cannot be separated from the relational work involved in its cultivation (Clark-Parsons et al., 2018; Roestone Collective, 2014) as well as the principle found in wider literature on space and place that it is always in the process of being created. Both the relational and collaborative nature of these spaces are significant themes in their own right, but the two appeared in participants' narratives in such an interconnected way that it is most appropriate to discuss them as inseparable components of the same process, occurring alongside one another. We see the collaboration and ongoing cultivation in five ways: through the creation and nurturing of community; in operators' collective efforts; within operator-user interactions; amid a process of continual learning; and through the negotiation of relational obstacles.

Creating & Nurturing Community

The theme of community was a major talking point across participants' interviews. As discussed above, bringing queer folks together in celebration is one of the defining purposes of participants' spaces. Participants framed their spaces as being created for and by the community in that everyone who occupies the space—not just operators, but users too—are involved in the ongoing cultivation of that space. Continuing to nurture queer community in space is a central factor in generating a sense of belonging and safety. Without a sense of community, queer safe spaces cannot thrive. Elliott explains how experiences of queer community can have a lasting effect for party attendees:

> when that critical feedback comes back in the form of people sort of saying that the night was special or anything like this, you know it is a cumulative thing and I think that just having 60 people who have a memorable, special night where they really felt…that they were right in the world…that has, I think, a really big effect on what it means to live in Halifax and I feel hopefully those spread…really creating that community is probably more important than anything else that we do. (Elliott; gay/queer; operator, non-profit event space)

Spencer describes a general sense of safety that comes from being amongst similar peers, suggesting "there's also that sense that like, collectively in that space that there would be folks that would stand up for and support and like cultivate a space that encouraged safe-safer experience for people who are more marginalized" (Spencer; queer; user, business space). In queer-centred spaces, community provides a sense of belonging (that can perhaps extend beyond its walls) and of protection as users and operators share an understanding of what it is like to navigate the world as queer people.

Drew demonstrates that community in these spaces is not limited to specifically queer community. He notes the importance of a camaraderie among the group relating not just to their queer identities, but their shared interest in art: "I try and be as community-focused as possible, that the [art] is almost secondary, that it's a space to meet other people who like [art], but then do [art]" (Drew; queer; operator, community space). He describes the pertinent role of community in another sense, regarding their place in the institution where they meet:

> "the [head of institution] regularly comes and chats with the [group] and tells them how excited he is to have them in the space. Our [performances] are in that space. It's not a [practice] space that we rent and then we go somewhere else. We are part of the [institution] community. The administration…there's like office staff…always around…the members in the [group] know that…they can go to the…office and ask for anything they need. So I think that integration into the community just from the

> outset was really wise. That we weren't just renting a space. That we are part of that whole system. (Drew; queer; operator, community space)

The interactions that the group has with other members of the institution work to set the tone for the space as they feel welcomed and integrated into the community. The group's space within the wider institution is characterized by a sense of belonging, as they have positive ongoing associations with other non-queer members. Evidently, a sense of community can come from relating to one another in terms of queer identity, but also along other dimensions.

Operators' Collective Efforts

To begin, in every conversation with participants, it became clear that efforts towards offering their spaces were not individual. Each participant spoke in detail about the teams of people they work alongside each day to cultivate and manage their queer spaces. Both the permanent spaces and those at different sites in the city involve a multitude of people within their corresponding organization who work towards the group's collective mission(s). For example, Kara belongs to an organization that advocates for the 2SLGBTQ+ community in Halifax and Nova Scotia more broadly, so the group's efforts are of course ongoing. In our interview, she spoke about several different issues (including conversion therapy and gender-affirming surgeries) that the group has tackled over the course of her short term there. As a team, the volunteer operators keep abreast of relevant political issues and work together to devise a plan for tackling them. Since there can be any number of relevant issues to address at a given moment and the group must agree on prioritizing them, they have guidelines in place to ensure multiple voices are being heard in meetings, not just one person speaking, and these are enforced as a group. Similarly, Jesse and Cameron value the perspectives of those they work with:

> I mean, technically [Cameron] and I make final decisions for most of the things, but I would say that the other…people who also work there are very involved in how they wanna see the space…I'll typically try to get everybody's opinion…and then based on gathering everybody's opinions on something…I will often like figure out what's the best thing to do. (Jesse; big dyke/queer; operator, business space)

Their relationships with one another contribute to their successful coordination, as they note:

> Now that it's been the [group] of us for a while…we've really honed down on this whole like family atmosphere, like we really feel like it's become more of a family than anything else. We really care about each other. (Jesse; big dyke/queer; operator, business space)

The ability to work together as a team, all holding a collective goal for the space, is an important factor in working towards that vision cohesively.

Furthermore, queer safe spaces that are formed by temporarily taking over and transforming regular spaces like bars, restaurants, and other venues encounter the unique situation of working with the people and organizations who operate those spaces regularly. Kara notes that a majority of the non-profit's events involve working with others: "if I had to break it down, 80% of the events are usually collaborations. It can be a community project or another non-profit organization" (Kara; pansexual; operator, non-profit events). Without a permanent party venue of their own, Blake and Elliott exclusively host their events at locations around the city. As such, they rely on the owners, staff, and sometimes even other patrons of the venue to help deliver their queer-centred celebrations. Elliott describes the ideal situation in this collaboration model in which all members of the event-planning team are invested in the mandate, noting "If the staff and the layout somehow are also lifting it up, then you sort of end up with this like pocket of queer magic in a bubble" (Elliott; gay/queer; operator, non-profit events).

Operator-User Interactions

Unsurprisingly, the interactions between patrons and those who run the space or event are paramount in creating the intended atmosphere of safety. Cameron notes that, as part of operating as a queer-centred space in the service industry, maintaining an ongoing rapport with patrons is vital:

> we will ask every question that we can think of to make a person feel comfortable in their own skin as much as possible…So, it's really just the effort of…asking questions and trying to be as aware as possible of people's vulnerabilities and always checking in with them constantly. (Cameron; trans, pansexual; operator, business space)

Elliott describes the significance of the first interaction between a party attendee and a member of the organizing team:

> that person who [is at the door welcoming guests] can make or break someone's experience when they show up, maybe feeling like a little bit scared and brave at the same time because they've decided to go you know maybe presenting in a different way than they normally do because this is supposed to be a queer safe space and that first person they meet is really important. (Elliott; gay/queer; operator, non-profit space)

Evidently, user interpretations of a space and the people they encounter are instrumental in determining whether they feel safe. Interestingly, participants also discussed the ways in which the people who utilize their spaces are involved as active members in the process of cultivating the space. This often occurs in the form of conversations between operators and users. For example, Drew detailed a series of conversations between program attendees and himself about how to approach the inclusion of allies. He says, "it was a conversation that we spent a lot of time on that we…didn't want it to become a queer space that was almost entirely populated by allies" (Drew; queer; operator, community space). Together, the group made the decision to remain inclusive, as they did not want to exclude members of the community who may be questioning their identity. In a similar way, many of the participants mentioned they welcome feedback from users and put it into action as frequently as possible to improve the efficacy of their spaces. The cultivation of safe spaces involves working in concert with those who the space is intended to serve and these conversations occur on an ongoing basis to meet the needs of users.

Continual Learning Process

When asked about challenges they have encountered, participants divulged stories of mishaps, but did not frame them as failures or disasters. Instead, they acknowledged mistakes and derailed events as part of a continual learning process that has also resulted in moments of resounding success. Blake and Elliott, for example, recall a previous event that did not go to plan and the subsequent reflection and growth that followed, counting it as a learning experience. They note, “this is what we’re learning…that you have to really suss out who you’re working with in the restaurant business” (Blake; queer; operator, non-profit events). Elliott adds, “and we’re starting to get good. We’re starting to recognize like the genuine excitement about the event versus the non-genuine excitement about the event” (Elliott; gay/queer; operator, non-profit events).

In a similar way, Jesse and Cameron candidly express that they expect to make mistakes and, as such, leave room for the process of making the wrong decision, experiencing the consequences, and subsequently learning from the mistake in order to grow:

> we give ourselves a lot of room as in like we know that we’re the kind of people who need to fuck up to learn. So a lot of the times, like instead of eagerly trying not to fuck up, we’ll deal with a fuck-up when it happens…and learn from messing up, saying the wrong thing, posting the wrong thing. (Jesse; big dyke/queer; operator, business space)

The participants have learned from experience that not every event, day, or decision is successful or effective in cultivating the kind of safe space they strive for. They frame previous mistakes and challenges as opportunities for growth in an ongoing process of learning that helps improve their spaces over time.

Relational Obstacles

Participants' narratives demonstrate that the relational, collaborative nature of their spaces is essential for the cultivation of safety; nonetheless, this relationality also presents challenges. Since the efficacy of these spaces rely on these relationships and interactions, interpersonal issues must be negotiated for the space to continue thriving. When I asked about the challenges they have encountered in creating and managing their spaces, participants delved into stories about interpersonal challenges, often ending with an explanation of how the issues were resolved, which also tended to involve themes of collaboration.

Kara explains that the differing perspectives of non-profit group members occasionally cause disagreements which must be resolved before taking action on particular advocacy issues. She acknowledges that, "even though we're part of the same community, we do have different opinions at certain points" (Kara; pansexual; operator, non-profit events). When disagreements do occur, she explains, the group has a process of designating a neutral moderator to guide the discussion towards a resolution. She sums up this process as "everybody keeping everyone in check." Disagreements between members, while perhaps frustrating, can be seen as a means of resolving issues and helping to solidify a unified vision among the non-profit's members.

Jesse describes her and Cameron's efforts to maintain professional boundaries at their space, since their team spend a great deal of time together both at work and outside of work:

> Our personal lives kind of blend a little bit too much when we should be a little more professional…we work so closely together and we're so used to being able to, y'know, call each other out or getting kind of…bickery and holding that back in the heat of the moment has proved a little bit difficult for us occasionally and we don't want to make…other people feel uncomfortable with our bickering…sometimes your tone of voice or the way that you say something to someone, to other people looks a different way, so that's been a little bit of a challenge um navigating our personal relationship in the work space. (Jesse; big dyke/queer; operator, business space)

While Blake and Elliott have encountered success many times when partnering with event venues, they described one event in particular which was a challenge for them, as the other people involved in the collaboration did not share the same vision for the event. They describe the risk that comes along with choosing a new group to partner with:

> And then there's just usually um the manager and the wait staff of each particular space…that can be...hit or miss, to be honest…you have these conversations with them…but at the same point, they're not...they don't have the mandate that [our non-profit] does. They just said yes to having this party here, which really just brings them money because people are buying drinks. (Blake; queer; operator, non-profit events)

When the people involved in cultivating the space are not invested in the goal or in the spirit of the event, issues can arise that make it difficult to achieve optimal safety. Elliott elaborates:

> the staff make a big, big difference…Cause when we went into this other venue where the staff were…they were fine, but they weren't on board. They weren't like 'yes, we get it, we're there, we're here for this, we're gonna help you celebrate this'…and that made a big difference. It made it so that when people were in the little section where our party was, they felt great, but when they had to cross the bar to go to the bathroom, they would actually come to use and say, 'would you accompany me to the bathroom?' So…yes our bubble is safe but it didn't create a…full safe space at all…because the staff…it's their house…When it comes down to it, if there's something wrong or if somebody actually needs to be removed from the venue…you need the staff to be on your side. (Elliott; gay/queer; operator, non-profit events)

It was a significant issue for Blake and Elliott that the staff at the venue were not on board with the event and its mission. Elliott adds, "it felt unsafe because the staff wasn't sensitive to things," such as some attendees using particular pronouns or the need for non-gendered restrooms. It makes a difference whether the people involved in cultivating space understand or at least are knowledgeable about queer issues and the accommodations that some attendees might require. This is especially true within spaces that are not explicitly queer, as the set-up of heteronormative space is often unaccommodating and unwelcoming of queer identities.

The characteristics of space as socially-produced and always in the process of being made feature heavily in participants' narratives of safe space-cultivation as a collective process that relies on operators and users alike. Cultivating queer safe space involves creating and nurturing community by bringing queer folks together, operator collaboration in everyday maintenance, and operator-user interactions. Continual learning and interpersonal challenges are also a necessary element, drawing attention to both the imperfect nature of safe spaces and their emancipatory potential. The next chapter addresses the importance of intentional queer-centricity in creating spaces that are safe for 2SLGTBQ+ folks.

Chapter 5: Intentionality & Active Transgressing of Heteronormativity

Queer-centred space and safe spaces do not form simply because queer people enter a space. Instead, queer space must be cultivated through an ongoing process of decision-making and subsequent action all tied to collective intentions. Intentionality is a critical component of the spaces, both in their original formation and in the ongoing choices and actions involved in their everyday maintenance. In this chapter, I discuss participants' accounts of forming their spaces to fill a need in their communities and of acting with their values and goals in mind each day in pursuit of an environment that meets the spatial needs of their fellow operators and users.

Forming with a Purpose

When asked about how their particular spaces started, participants explained that they saw a need in the city for a particular space that addressed the needs of the queer community in Halifax and were inspired to fill it. Jesse described the motivation for the business, recalling her thought process: "I think this town really needs this…there's other cities with queer [businesses like ours] and I decided I really wanted to give that to my hometown" (Jesse; big dyke/queer; operator, business space). Blake and Elliott felt a similar call to provide for their community through throwing parties, recalling that "people were actually asking for it, 'cause there wasn't something where this particular community was finding a way to come together like this anymore" (Elliott; gay/queer; operator, non-profit events). Likewise, Drew noticed that the city did not have an arts-based group in his particular discipline that addressed the needs of the queer community, namely an arts space to "acknowledge queer selves". Shortly after forming the group, Drew notes that the head of the institution in which they now meet and perform asked them to join the space as a permanent fixture, as one of his priorities was "inclusion of diverse communities that do not exist at all in the [institution]" (Drew; queer; operator, community space). The impetus for the group, then, was an intent to bring together a group of queer folks for arts-based activities in a way that was not being done at the time and, soon, the group gained permanent residence in a collaborative effort to diversify and move towards making that particular institution more inclusive.

In my conversation with Blake and Elliot, they referenced a previous queer space that they contributed to outside of Halifax as inspiring their current work in the city. Elliott explains,

> We were running the queer space and that sort of is like our [event] model now…that's sort of our version of that. That queer space would hold parties and different events all the time and that became…a very strong safe space and a very strong community. (Elliott; gay/queer; operator, non-profit events)

The pair explained that they hope to emulate the feeling of community and safety they observed in that space with their events in Halifax, so they often think back to the time they spent at that space and apply the lessons they gained in planning events in the city. Overall, the cultivation of these queer safe spaces has been approached with intention from the very beginning, as participants applied their particular skills and experience to fill a need in the community.

Keeping Goals in Mind

Possibly the most important component of intentionality lies with cultivators in their ongoing intentions to act in ways that promote the overall mission and goals for the space. It is pertinent, as operators (and users alike), to keep the overarching purpose for the space(s) in mind and work towards them with intention through their everyday decisions and behaviours. Kara describes how this process occurs for the non-profit group, emphasizing efforts to remain authentic when they partner with different organizations for events. As mentioned above, the group avoids partnering with for-profit businesses or applying for more funding from the government in favor of remaining true to their message and values. They do not want to alienate the community they work so hard to serve and uplift and do not want to have to compromise the integrity of their advocacy efforts by partnering with an organization that may not share a similar mission.

Additionally, participants know that cultivating safety is a complex process, so they try to mitigate any issues by preparing ahead of time. When preemptively making decisions about how to mitigate or solve issues that may arise, safe space cultivators turn to their overarching vision and goals to plan how to act with intention. Blake and Elliott detailed their pre-planning process:

> Sometimes that safe space is…it happens just from…conversations leading up and then, you know, we have our intentions and we try to communicate the whole time so that we don't just rush in and just set things up. But we make decisions about why and how it's done and we look at the…bathrooms, and we kinda suss out what it's like to be there. (Elliott; gay/queer; operator, non-profit events)

In a broader sense, the party planners look ahead to future events, predicting that "in order to grow we have to grow with the community and see what the community needs and what is different. Um how philosophies and politics change can affect a party…we need to be aware of that" (Blake; queer; operator, non-profit events).

Drew explained how he sets intentions regarding what should be achieved during each meeting. If they have an upcoming performance, he hopes that they will take some time to practice for it; however, he notes that "sometimes people are really just…they're not in a place to do it and so we don't. And I think we just have to have...more sliding expectations" (Drew; queer; operator, community space). Drew acknowledges that, while performing and engaging in arts is a goal of the group, providing a safe, queer-centred space is more important, so he "would much rather those five people be there and feel welcomed and safe than trying to force some sort of [practice]."

Users of safe space also have a role in carrying out these important intentions. Spencer describes how he tries to always be aware of his surroundings and be respectful of others who use the queer business space he frequents. He explains that a significant part of his role in cultivating a sense of safety is "just trying to be aware of how much space I'm taking up" (Spencer; queer; user, business space).

Participants demonstrate that acting with intention is a necessary component of providing space that meets the needs of their communities, beginning with the original formation of their spaces and continuing into everyday practice in even the smallest-scale decisions about the cultivation and maintenance of their sites.

Active Transgressing of Heteronormativity

A form of intentionality like those discussed above, but that warrants its own discussion, is the active, intentional transgression of the heteronormativity that characterizes most space in favour of cultivating space that is explicitly queer-centred and addresses the particular needs of users. Jesse speaks to the issues of being queer in a heteronormative industry, particularly as many of the establishments she has worked in have been "white, cis male-centred." She describes the heteronormative nature of these places in a way that succinctly sums up the issues of being queer in spaces not created for queer folks: "It's just kind of like systemic structures and…the way it is on the outside is on the inside." Jesse tends to serve patrons who are also queer and came to notice that "facilitating space for bodies…queer bodies…can be challenging in straight spaces…I did it for a while and I just got to a point where I couldn't do it anymore."

When asked how they try to cultivate a sense of safety in their spaces, participants spoke about everyday actions towards subverting normative expectations of space, the activities that take place there, and the relationships between people who occupy the space. Since space is regularly heteronormatively (and cisnormatively) produced, participants' choices to create queer-centred spaces to serve their community members are, in themselves, politically significant acts. However, in order to maintain the integrity of their spaces as queer, they must continue to intentionally challenge the heteronormative nature of space. Blake and Elliott describe their goals for subverting the traditional: "I think something that [we tend] to do is try to create space…where heteronormativity is not only not assumed but it's actively unassumed" (Elliott; gay/queer; operator, non-profit events), noting that the ideal is "a whole space [where] that queer philosophy…is kind of inherent within the whole night" (Blake; queer; operator, non-profit events).

Verbal Queer Intentions

One way participants transgress heteronormativity in their spaces is by engaging in ongoing communication about the goals of the space and the significance of its queerness. Drew notes, "I think it's really important if we're going to have an [arts group] that is queer-centric that we discuss it, not just say it and then have a regular [arts group]. It's not a regular [arts group]" (Drew; queer; operator, community group). He explains that some conversations among the group happen organically, but he also instigates these conversations, as he says, "I think if it didn't receive any prompting, it would just kind of fly by and then we'd just become an [arts group] largely populated by queer people and not explicitly queer-centred space." These conversations between patrons and himself are an essential way to reassert the queer focus.

In a similar way, Blake and Elliott's events incorporate the spirit of transgressing heteronormativity by beginning each party with an intentionally-queer welcome:

> we sort of provide like you know in that welcome, sort of the intention of it being a queer joyful place that we hope people have a great time and that we're so happy that we're all here queering the space and that it's a good thing. (Elliott; gay/queer; operator, non-profit events)

Welcoming guests by sharing the intention of queerness ensures the party that follows is not just a regular party, but one in the process of taking over and transforming a space that is regularly non-queer into a "queer joyful place."

Non-verbal Queer Intentions

Participants also described engaging in non-verbal actions as a form of challenging heteronormativity. Drew discusses the significance of continuing to meet as a group of queer artists in an institution that has historically excluded queer people. He recalls, "when we started setting this up, I wanted to have it at a space that was normally not a space that queer people inhabited" (Drew; queer; operator, community space). The group is hosted at a long-standing arts institution that Drew notes has a history of catering to white, upper/middle class individuals and being unwelcoming for folks who do not fit that mould. Occupying this space, then, is intentional and political. He insists, "we're getting people from as wide and diverse a background into that building as possible because it's important that we de-construct that." By meeting each week and occupying space in the building, they are challenging the heteronormativity of that particular institution and the arts sphere, more broadly.

Drew also tries to challenge heteronormativity by breaking down traditional roles when fine-tuning their performances in practice. He explains that, as a leader of the group, he tries to find ways to actively challenge the power dynamic that would typically occur in a similar heterosexual arts-based program. He states, “I really try and…make it not a hierarchical thing,” so he tries to avoid physical indications or postures of power. For example, when they have conversations, they sit in a circle and he sits with them rather than standing in front of the group.

Using physical markers is also ways of enacting queerness in space. As discussed in Chapter 3, participants use queer-centred décor such as pride flags and walls of 2SLGBTQ+ history to establish a sense of queerness in their spaces. The queer-centricity of the spaces is asserted in advertising and awareness-raising efforts, such as on the billboard for the institution where Blake’s arts group meets or the Facebook pages for Blake and Elliott’s events that feature photos of people in drag. Some operators utilize social media pages to reinforce the queerness of their space, discussing queer issues and/or celebrating queer lives in their spaces and communities through posts on Facebook and Instagram.

Re-framing Thoughts

Finally, participants actively transgress heteronormativity in their spaces by challenging traditional ways of thinking about their spaces and organizations. This happens, for instance, in the way they reframe ideas of progress and success, actively seeking to disregard how success might be qualified in a similar non-queer space to, instead, frame it as effectively meeting the spatial and community needs of queer folks. When I asked Blake and Elliott what their hopes are for the future of their events and organization, they responded, “we’ve started to think about what strengthening as a company means versus growth as a company…We’re not just constantly seeking more money with more people” (Elliott; gay/queer; operator, non-profit events). Their decision to look beyond financial measures of success speaks to different goals that need to take priority when catering to a marginalized community.

Likewise, Drew describes how he has to stop himself from thinking about success in the form of how many group members there are or how many people come out to shows. Instead, he chooses to focus on the fact that some patrons have come to participate that have not engaged in their art form for years and that, as a group, they "have made inroads in a place…that like frankly was very exclusionary for many, many, many years…it's more important the we…are in that space and…providing an opportunity for people" (Drew; queer; operator, community space). Reframing success to reflect the achievement of occupying space that the queer community has historically been denied is a conscious act of protest that enables cultivators to refocus on the goals of providing safe, queer-centric space.

In a similar way, when asked what success looks like for his space, Spencer described a process of trying to shift his thinking from what he thought would be a traditional, capitalist idea of success for a business (i.e. profit) towards a more social-justice-minded perspective. He suggested that more suitable markers of success include the ability to pay staff fair wages, abundant partnerships with local queer artists, and that the seats are often filled (which he pointed out is not a sign of success because it indicates that many people are paying for their services, but because it means people feel comfortable in the space and that they have built a sense of community). Choosing to reject traditional meanings of success (such as profit, growing membership, or reputation) and reframe it to recognize and celebrate achievements is a conscious act of transgressing heteronormative ideas of space, including the activities that should occur there and the people who should occupy it.

Of course profit-making and growing patronage are not essential features of heteronormative space that cannot exist in queer space. Yet, participants described needing to reconsider the importance of these factors in order to provide safe spaces for queer users. As such, I suggest that prioritizing the needs of the queer community is a form of transgressing heteronormativity because they must place the queering of the space ahead of other concerns in a way that non-queer-centred businesses, non-profits, or community spaces do not need to. Participants suggest that, if they were to measure success in terms of profit or another concern rather than in meaningful interactions with patrons, community-building, and celebration of queer identities, the spaces would no longer be sufficiently queer-centred nor safe.

Space by & for Queer Folks

Something that has become abundantly clear through conversations with participants is the salient difference between a regular space that is populated by queer folks and a distinctly queer space that is cultivated by and for queer folks. When a space is created and re-created from a queer perspective, it is imbued with a sense of authenticity as the people operating and occupying it have an all-important degree of understanding for the lived realities of being queer.

First, a mutual understanding of queer realities in Halifax between those who cultivate safe space is important in offering space that is in line with participants' values. Recall, for example, that Kara's non-profit group tends to be selective in choosing other organizations to partner with for events:

> We don't usually…make a deal with a profit organization…mostly we just plan our own events and then we collaborate [with other community/non-profit groups] …It's more flexible that way…when you have some other like profit organization in the grand scheme it just kind of…it makes it a little less authentic. (Kara; pansexual; operator, non-profit events)

Kara demonstrates that, while a certain degree of authenticity comes from cultivators simply belonging to the queer community, it is important to continue to act in ways that align with the core values and intentions of the space (and the organization that manages it). For the organization she belongs to, collaborating with groups whose mandates are similar to theirs or reflective of the same values enables them to maintain a sense of integrity in ongoing actions, which is an important way to cultivate a sense of safety through building trust with users.

Furthermore, a collective understanding of queer experiences goes a long way in facilitating a comfortable environment for both users and operators. Blake and Elliott were excited to host an event at a particular venue when they learned that many of the staff were queer: "I had a phone call with the manager and turned out that this manager is, like, as he described himself 'the gayest person'…so that was really comforting…and there's also a lot of queer people that work there" (Blake; queer; operator, non-profit events). An understanding for one another between the people involved in cultivating the space is immeasurably beneficial, as understanding the necessity of queer spaces and the needs of particular users in the space makes collaborating smoother.

Furthermore, queer sites cannot be safe for patrons if they are not, first, safe for those whose labour (on a paid or volunteer basis) produces the space. Jesse divulges,

> as much as we focus on our [patrons]…our space is also a …safer space for the people we work with. And at the end of the day, I find myself prioritizing them and their experience and their safety more than everybody else because safety in the workplace is so big. And that it's so hard to find stability as a queer person in a work environment…we can't always be a safe space for everybody but maybe we can start with the people who work here and we move outwards from there. (Jesse; big dyke/queer; operator, business space)

Spencer describes a similar situation he has observed as a patron:

> So, foundationally, it's not like pandering to the queer community like other places might. It's like…so it's not just a space where queer folks can come and spend money and feel safe, it like has to be safe for the owners as well. That's the way they prioritize it from a business sense, but also from their own lived experiences so I think that makes a huge difference. (Spencer; queer; user, business space)

Moreover, a shared queer reality is also important in the context of operator-user relationships, creating a sense of safety and belonging through relatability. Jesse and Cameron sum this up well:

> I think that the number one thing that makes our space safer for queer folks is that we're queer folks…when you see a business that's clearly run and operated by straight folks and then they put a…rainbow flag in the front, it doesn't really mean anything. (Jesse; big dyke/queer; operator, business space)
>
> But when you walk into a [space] where there is a rainbow flag and then there's gay art everywhere and everybody who's in there is very obviously queer, it's very much so a different feeling of relatability to people who come into the [space]. (Cameron; trans, pansexual; operator, business space)

The relatability Cameron describes is a distinct feature of space that is created by queer people for queer people. What seems to be an inherent understanding of queer realities and existence, in some moments, needs to be paired with a willingness to engage in deeper communication. Jesse explains, "if someone's telling me about a hard time they had with a straight [business person] or something like that, like I'll hold space for that conversation and I'll also know what that's like" (Jesse; big dyke/queer; operator, business space). Through common experiences, operators have an understanding of the emotions, hardships, and behaviours of their patrons; nonetheless, they must engage in the relational work of engaging with patrons in a way that acknowledges, respects, and celebrates those shared understandings.

Since space is heteronormatively (and, I argue, cisnormatively) produced as standard, the cultivation of space by and for queer folks involves intentional choices and ongoing maintenance. Participants demonstrate that, in everyday practice, challenging the heteronormativity that typically characterizes space is imperative in celebrating the queerness of individual identities, but more importantly of a collective queerness in space. It is meaningful for participants to engage with and challenge ideas and expectations of heteronormativity to ensure that their spaces are continually characterized by and prioritize queer identities and realities, as there are so few spaces where this is possible. Drawing on de Certeau (1984) helps to understand cultivating queer-centred space as political, particularly with reference to his notion of tactics. Kara's and Blake and Elliott's events can be characterized as an example of tactics. In cultivating temporally-delimited queer-centred spaces, participants exercise power through temporarily taking over everyday heteronormative space and *queering* it, subversively challenging the institutional powers that marginalize queer communities. Although these participants are without a permanent geographical base, they demonstrate power through enacting queer identities in heteronormative places. In the absence of physical space, the participants take advantage of time, instead, to cultivate safe space that transgresses the usual heteronormative nature of others' physical spaces for a temporary moment. This is significant as it shows that safe, queer-centred space can exist even without a permanent physical place, through momentary transgressive actions that intentionally challenge heteronormativity and centre queer priorities.

Participants detail several ways of actively 'queering' space, through conversations, behaviours, and reframing the way they think about their spaces or events. For participants, the everyday actions cultivating space by and for queer folks is political and significant. Through all of these means, operators and users alike continue to cultivate space that necessarily retains its integrity as queer-centred in order to meet the needs of a community which is too often out-of-place. The next chapter endeavors to problematize the notion of safety as it has to do with the everyday operations of participants' spaces.

Chapter 6: Complicating Safety

To work towards a fuller understanding of queer safe space in concept, we must return to the critiques discussed in the literature. Recalling scholars' assertions that safe space is "necessarily incomplete…never completely safe" (Roestone Collective, 2014, p. 1346) and of "partial, and imperfect nature" (Clark-Parsons et al., 2018, p. 2128), it is as relevant to discuss the incomplete and imperfect elements of participants' safe spaces as it is to explain the factors that facilitate their success. This chapter discusses the complex nature of safety within the studied spaces by unpacking the limitations of safety as a term and concept, the obstacles participants encountered which made cultivating their spaces more challenging, and a need to prioritize some goals over others because of those constraints.

Limitations of "Safety"

Participants discussed the meaning of safety and its limitations in terms of understanding and describing the actualities of their sites. At several points, the term "safe space" was not necessarily fitting perfectly even in my conversations with folks who offered queer-centric environments. When I investigated further, participants revealed several limitations of safety as both a term and concept which render it an imperfect representation of their goals or experiences. Cameron explained how the term "safe" doesn't quite fit with the team's intentions:

> It's hard to be a safe space when something safe for one person isn't safe for another person, but we do try our best to maintain at least a comfortable space…It's very clearly not gonna be everybody and that's something that we try to advertise right from the get go is that we're gonna try to be a safer space, so not necessarily a safe space…we can't actually cater to everybody. (Cameron; trans, pansexual; operator, business space)

Blake and Elliott took issue with the idea of declaring an event or space to be safe:

> For me…it's complicated because I think stating that somewhere is a safe space…is I think setting you up for failure…especially when we're not in charge of the whole

> entire space so we can't guarantee it…While it might be our ideal and we're trying to create that, I think there's always aspirations for that but it…kind of is impossible to create a fully safe space. (Blake; queer; operator, non-profit events)

Elliott agrees, offering an alternative that feels right for them:

> So inviting people through a certain type of welcome and language to actively create safe space is more important in how we do out work than it is to sort of declare that we are a politically safe space for people to come. (Elliott; gay/queer; operator, non-profit events)

For them, it is more important to take concrete actions in real time that reflect the intentions of queerness, joyfulness, and inclusion than to claim at any given time that the event is 'safe.' The emphasis of these concrete actions—such as choosing venues with universal washrooms, decorating with queer art and pride flags, and inviting BIPOC members of the queer community to perform and help host events—is on the ongoing relational work and the intention, rather than in the 'safe' label.

The 'safe' label—while understood and sometimes used by participants—did not seem to fit with their lived experiences in their spaces. Participants offered terms such as 'queer-centred,' 'comfortable,' and 'safer' as alternatives; however, cultivators' actions and intentions, rather than terminology, prevailed as the essential elements in determining how community members feel in their spaces. Queer lives—like all lives—are complex and multidimensional, so 'safety' for some folks will not necessarily mean 'safety' for others. From an intersectional perspective, what is safe for a majority of white, middle class queer folks will not necessarily be safe for racialized members of the queer community. This is something that many of the participants are aware of in their everyday lives operating and/or using spaces. To be successful, these spaces need not promise safety, but rather offer queer-centred alternatives to the broader collection of often-hostile heteronormatively-produced spaces, that meet the needs of the queer community.

Constraints to Safety

In their ongoing efforts, cultivators of queer safe space encounter numerous obstacles, which demonstrate that achieving safety in these spaces is not straightforward nor linear. In addition to the relational obstacles discussed above, the most prevalent obstacles discussed by participants include financial constraints, limits to the physical space they occupy, and the number of people who use the space.

Financial constraints were a common issue for participants, in offering queer businesses and non-profits alike. Kara noted, for example, "I guess the number one restriction right now for us is most likely money" (Kara; pansexual; operator, non-profit events). Jesse and Cameron encounter a similar issue with lack of funds:

> we're juggling the space capacity and like financial capacity you know like we still have to pay for the space that we operate. We're not getting any money for having a queer safer space or community space by any means. It's completely our money that we have to make ourselves. (Jesse; big dyke/queer; operator, business space)

Some participants reported constraints related to the physical space they occupy. As a business with a permanent space, Jesse and Cameron's space is not large enough to achieve their ideal vision:

> Well the challenge is like the limit to space…cause we only have one little couch for [patrons] to sit on, so if we have a friend in there with all of their stuff splayed out and the [patrons] are in there kind of standing awkwardly around not feeling like they can sit down, that's become a little bit of an issue recently. (Cameron; trans, pansexual; operator, business space)

Participants who take over venues to host queer-centred events experience a similar issue with physical space. Blake and Elliott explain that utilizing a space that is only temporarily in their hands presents obstacles:

> …because we don't own the space, right? And so we do have to consider that. And like even though we're bringing a crowd in that makes them money, they're also donating the space to us…So you sort of have to find a way to use that venue for what it actually is in a way that kind of starts to resonate and sometimes there's not much resonance. (Elliott; gay/queer; operator, non-profit events)

Recalling de Certeau (1984), "The space of a tactic is the space of the other. Thus it must play on and with a terrain imposed on it and organized by the law of a foreign power" (p. 37). Since Blake and Elliott do not have access to a permanent space of their own, they must work within the bounds of the venues they use for events. The two must negotiate the "terrain" of heteronormatively-designed venues in order to create temporally-delimited safe space.

Another factor that can present barriers to successful cultivation of space is the number of people involved in an organization. Drew mentioned that weekly attendance is unpredictable: "We did two shows in the summer…and then in the fall sometimes we'll have five people which is not enough to run" (Drew; queer; operator, community space). Similarly, the non-profit Kara volunteers with finds themselves constantly trying to recruit new members. She states, "we try to recruit as many people…every time we have our events open, we [say] we need more members on the board because our board is like ten [or] thirteen people right now, we need more" (Kara; pansexual; operator, non-profit events). Participants' descriptions of barriers problematize the notion of safety as linear within their spaces. Safe space cultivators cannot label their spaces as safe and assume that they will remain as such through their efforts, but must overcome various obstacles that challenge and change the sense of safety in the space.

Prioritizing Multiple Goals

As participants manage multiple objectives on a day-to-day basis, the aforementioned constraints sometimes force them into the difficult process of choosing which goals to compromise in favour of achieving others. This negotiation is also an indicator of safety as non-linear, as a space's sense of safety changes in response to the prioritizing of different goals. Surprisingly, prioritizing objectives looked quite similar for business, non-profit, and community spaces as well as for permanent and takeover spaces.

A common issue across spaces was the need to balance the cultivation of community with profit or, more generally, funds. Jesse talks through the issue of serving both the community and paying customers:

> But we do try to be as community-oriented as possible, and sometimes that can be as little as figuring out…how to navigate people in our space. Like, sometimes we'll have a bunch of people who are just in there to hang out and then some people who wanna pay money. Um, and then sometimes they're overwhelmed by the amount of people…so that does happen, and we try to juggle the prioritizing customers but also, we want to be a community space, so we only do so much prioritizing of money. (Jesse; big dyke/queer; operator, business space)

Cameron continues,

> We do need to prioritize our [patrons] over our friends, but we do want our friends to feel comfortable. And like we've had people express that our [space] is one of the only places that they feel comfortable going out and being out in. So…that is difficult. (Cameron; trans, pansexual; operator, business space)

The two competing goals are difficult to prioritize, and as small business owners, Jesse and Cameron find themselves struggling to balance the desire to offer a space for their friends and community members and the need to sustain a profitable business. In sum, Cameron offers: "We want it to be a community-centred business. But it is a business."

Blake and Elliot have experienced a similar issue, even though they operate a non-profit organization. They mention that by-donation events, "we suggest ten dollars so that we can cover the cost and we do hope to raise…you know to put a little bit of money in the [company] bank account" (Elliott; gay/queer; operator, non-profit events). The celebration of community is the most important piece, but they cannot continue to throw events if they are not covering costs.

Spencer sums up this situation nicely: "I think ideologically, the priority would be around social justice and inclusion, but pragmatically, like, they would also have to keep the lights on" (Spencer; queer; user, business space).

Somewhat differently, Drew discussed a need to negotiate between meeting the immediate needs of group members and upholding commitments to the institution and audience members through performing. He explains, "we have had to push back some concert dates, which again initially felt really bad…but again I would much rather those five people be there and feel welcomed and safe than trying to force some kind of [practice]" (Drew; queer; operator, community space).

Even though there are moments when operators have to prioritize some goals over others, this does not mean a general neglect of these goals. For example, Drew mentions that the cost of transportation for group members often comes in part from his own money, as he prioritizes the need for community and inclusion. As participants have demonstrated, cultivating queer space is an ongoing process. What is prioritized in one moment may not be in another as operators try to balance multiple competing objectives in pursuit of their overarching mission.

The way these constraints impact for-profit, non-profit, and community spaces differently speaks to the idea that these spaces must be understood in context (Roestone Collective, 2014). In this chapter, we returned to the suggestion that safe space is incomplete, imperfect, and that studying them must move beyond a singular, out-of-context notion of safety (Clark-Parsons et al., 2018; Roestone Collective, 2014). Participants noted the limitations of safety as a concept and term to describe their own experiences in their spaces and those of their users. They also told stories about obstacles they encounter (occasionally for some, more frequently for others) in their day-to-day cultivation relating to finances, their physical spaces, and the number of operators and users who share the space. In each case, participants were able to describe overcoming or mitigating these issues and learning from them in the resilient fashion that has historically characterized spaces for queer and other marginalized groups. The contestability of 'safety' as a term and concept in Halifax's queer-centred sites, even though it was widely understood and applied, evokes the notion that space is imperfect and both created and inhabited by a homogenous set of people with different identities. Perhaps, in light of the inaptitude of "safe space" as a descriptor or goal for participants' spaces and its ambiguity within scholarly and colloquial contexts, the term's use should be reconsidered. Researchers and space cultivators alike seem to have outgrown the usefulness of "safety," and its representation of a multitude of meanings, as they seek to understand and create dynamic sites of community, reprieve, and joy that meet the needs of queer users. Cultivator and user accounts of Halifax's queer-centred spaces may serve as a guide from which to generate a more appropriate term, just as participants' narratives will help to bolster a scholarly understanding of queer space in Halifax and beyond. Until a new term emerges (that is meaningful for cultivators and researchers), I continue to utilize "safe space(s)" in this paper both because it is the best available option and because it retains some resonance with participants and within the wider collection of scholarly literature and popular accounts of spaces for marginalized groups within which this research is situated.

In the final chapter, I tie together the project's themes and further elucidate the connection between the research findings and concepts from previous literature. Also discussed are the contributions of the present research and recommendations for future study.

Chapter 7: Discussion

Halifax's queer safe spaces (at least those explored in this project) are lively, joyful, dynamic sites of community and activity that represent an admirable goal of carving out space for 2SLGBTQ+ people to access services, community, and a sense of safety in its multitude of meanings. Participants' narratives match the descriptions of safe space found in the literature and achieve their goals in comparable ways. Participants' narratives demonstrate: that queer safe spaces are cultivated (and re-cultivated) through a process that is ongoing and relational; that intentionality is integral to achieving goals and maintaining efficacy; that the active transgressing of heteronormativity through continued acts of 'queering' space are vital; and that cultivating safe space is a complex process that involves successes and challenges and cannot be fully captured by a singular, static concept of 'safety.'

Participants' spaces, though different, are modelled around shared meanings of safety that are multiple and contestable, yet remain meaningful for participants in cultivating their queer-centred environments. The sites discussed, while inclusive, primarily focus on serving the queer community who may not otherwise have access to the services or space offered in other, heteronormative places. The spaces incorporate a shared understanding of safety that includes physical, emotional and psychological safety, emphasizing the ideas of freedom from discrimination, community, inclusion, and the ability to be oneself fully and comfortably. Participants described cultivating their spaces as a complex process with a multitude of factors influencing the overall efficacy, including geographical location, physical markers of queerness, logistical considerations such as universal restrooms, and the people involved in cultivating the space.

Significantly, participants discussed operators' and users' ongoing relational work as the essential component in cultivating queer-centred space. This process involves creating and nurturing community by bringing queer folks together, operators working together in everyday maintenance, and interactions between operators and users as cultivation happens in concert with all those who occupy space. Participants also drew attention to a continual learning process and interpersonal challenges that draw attention to both the imperfect nature of safe spaces and their emancipatory potential.

Moreover, participants' narratives describe an intentionality from which their spaces formed and with which they continue to engage in everyday maintenance. These intentions are shared between those who operate and use the spaces as an essential component in working towards goals of safety. Findings demonstrate that maintaining safe, queer-centred spaces involves ongoing confrontation with the boundaries of heteronormatively-produced space. Each and every day, participants intentionally transgress heteronormativity in their spaces in order to actively queer it, transforming it into queer-centred space that more readily meets the needs of operators and users. By engaging in ongoing conversations about queer realities, subverting heteronormative norms through nonverbal actions, and re-framing traditional ways of thinking about space and success, queer groups set intentions that help generate a sense of belonging, community, and comfort. Participants' stories emphasize a distinction between space occupied by queer individuals and intentionally-queer space that is created by and for 2SLGBTQ+ folks, which they aim to exemplify in their everyday cultivation.

Finally, participants spoke to the limitations of safety as a term and concept, demonstrating that the complex process of cultivating their spaces is not necessarily reflected in the term. The label of "safe" was not a perfect fit for all participants, as it does not necessarily accommodate the multidimensional and complex realities within queer communities. This discrepancy speaks to the possibility for multiple interpretations of the term “safe space.” Operationally, these spaces addressed the same needs for security and community as spaces discussed in the literature as safe spaces and historically (before popular use of the term “safe space”) in marginalized groups’ spaces. However, participants complicated the notion of safety. Multiple constraints to safety were discussed, including financial obstacles and space limitations, which make cultivating spaces more challenging. Additionally, the nature of participants’ spaces—as business, non-profit, or community space operated by and for queer folks—presents a need to prioritize some goals over others in tackling the difficult task of operating queer space in a wider heteronormative city and society.

Findings fit neatly into, but also add to the existing literature in interesting ways—both with respect to space and place theory and, more specifically, empirical and theoretical accounts of safe space. Major theories of space and place are reflected in the findings as the safe spaces act as examples of space which is produced socially, continually in the process of being created, and intimately linked with struggles of power and domination. Participants’ accounts reveal that cultivating queer-centred space requires collaboration between operators, users, and other stakeholders, evidently requiring social interaction to produce. These spaces are also social as they are situated in a particular sociopolitical context and tied to institutions. Massey’s (2005) notion that space is heterogenous and of “the spatial as the sphere of the juxtaposition, or co-existence, of distinct narratives” (quoted in Escobar, 2001, p. 164) rings true in participants’ arguments that, despite their efforts, their spaces cannot be safe for everyone. While the meanings of safety that are shared within and across their spaces speak to the social nature of space, so too does the existence of multiple meanings of safety within these spaces of multiple identities. That spatial relations are power relations is also evident in participants’ stories of navigating heteronormative spaces to host queer-centred events. As Massey (2005) argues, public space is "necessarily negotiated, sometimes riven with antagonism, always contoured through the playing out of unequal social relations" (p. 153). This negotiation of public space relates to de Certeau's (1984) concept of strategies—demonstrations of power in the form of "classification, delineation and division" (Low, 2016, p. 19). It is perhaps telling that some of the participants did not have access to permanent physical space, instead having to host queer-centred events in other, heteronormative spaces. Considering the queer advocacy organization Kara belongs to, for instance, it is important to think critically about the "classification, delineation and division" (Low, 2016, p. 19) of space by those in power. Perhaps that the organization is without a permanent space reflects the fact that the government and other power-holders (and delineators) do not perceive the organization's efforts towards equity as valuable (or perhaps they view it as challenging to existing structures of power). Moreover, participants described active transgressing of heteronormativity that occur in their spaces, as part of their continuous production—a clear embodiment of an ongoing struggle for power and equity.

Next, participants' spaces are continually in the process of being made and remade, recalling the ongoing process of their cultivation. Low's (2016) idea of "space and place as always under construction" (p. 211) asserts that, since space is social, it is continually produced and reproduced through interactions among social actors and changes over time. Reflecting this notion, participants continually question the efficacy of their spaces, learn from mistakes, and try to adapt to the changing needs of their community.

Moreover, participants' spaces reflect themes from existing literature regarding safe spaces. Halifax's queer-centred spaces address the needs of the queer community in similar ways as marginalized groups' spaces elsewhere and through history have done. Through their spaces and events, participants aim to protect users from violence, harassment, and discrimination; provide a place to embrace one's queer identity; bring 2SLGBTQ+ folks together in community; and serve as base for collective organizing. Like in spaces described in the literature, safety is multifaceted, referring to physical, emotional, psychological, and social safety. Participants' safe spaces address marginalization at both interpersonal and structural levels through protecting individuals from harassment they may face outside of its boundaries and challenging heteronormativity in space.

Additionally, the literature on queer space more generally describes rich spaces of culture and community such as gay bars and neighbourhoods; yet it also mentions several common issues in queer space such as privileging white cisgender gay men (Casey, 2004; Doan, 2007) and inaccessibility due to commodification. Notably, participants demonstrated an awareness of issues of intersectionality and oppression that featured in their cultivating efforts and, consequently, helped to prevent such issues. Participants saw intentional actions like involving queer BIPOC performers in events or subsidizing costs of participation as effective ways to avoid issues that past queer spaces encountered.

The heterosexual and heteronormative production of space is a recurring theme in participants' narratives. Hartal (2017), Valentine (1996, 2002, cited in Casey, 2004; 2000, cited in Hartal, 2017) and Casey (2004) argue that regular everyday space is not welcoming or accommodating of queer identities and that, to function effectively, "[queer] sites have to be reinscribed with a gay and/or lesbian visibility and identity, if not, they risk being (re)claimed by heterosexual bodies and the continual normalization of space as 'naturally' heterosexual" (Valentine, 1996, 2002, cited in Casey, 2004, p. 448). This is noticeable when participants explain the need to intentionally display and discuss the queerness of their spaces, events, and programs. The production of space as hetero- and cisnormatively is evident in participants' actions at actively challenging heteronormativity in their spaces through embracing and celebrating queerness.

Furthermore, the nature of space as social, political, and dynamic speak to the Clark-Parsons et al. (2018) and the Roestone Collective's (2014) assertions that safe space cannot be separated from the relational work involved in cultivating them. In their reconceptualization of safe space, the Roestone Collective (2014) "seek to better understand safe spaces in their respective contexts, to explore their normative messiness, and to investigate the ways they are rife with problems but also possibilities" (p. 1348). This project carried the same intention forward as it examined the everyday cultivation of safe spaces with different focuses, comparing the meanings and limits of safety with a focus on the ongoing collective efforts involved in achieving successes and navigating obstacles. As part of this "normative messiness" (2014, p. 1348), the Roestone Collective classify safe spaces as paradoxical, as they both assert the legitimacy of social differences (such as sex, gender, race/ethnicity) and, contrarily, affirm the contestability of related binaries (such as female/male, heterosexual/homosexual). To review, the Roestone Collective (2014) discusses the paradoxical nature of safe spaces for marginalized groups: they challenge binaries (such as heterosexual/homosexual or man/woman) in order to uplift people harmed by them; yet, at the same time, they reinforce those same binaries by providing space specifically for people displaced by the normative practices that uphold them. For example, the queer businesses described by participants challenge the queer/non-queer binary by providing services to any customer regardless of identity, but also reinforce the queer/non-queer dichotomy by asserting a sense of queerness and catering particularly to the needs of queer consumers. The Roestone Collective (2014) asserts:

> The failure to recognize emergent paradoxes would erase those people who are marginalized by them. On the other hand, reifying paradoxes—or to consider them

> absolute and unchanging—gives them undue power and restricts us from conducting the porous interventions of safe spaces. As such, the work of producing of safe space is embedded in particular experiences of and challenges to paradoxes, and this work is always incomplete. (p. 1359)

To recognize and confront paradoxes is important, so safe space cultivators' work must be ongoing and collective in order to negotiate these paradoxes in a way that preserves the integrity of the space. Participants' spaces demonstrate this concept, asserting queerness as an imperative attribute of their spaces and the key differentiating factor between them and broader, heteronormative space. At the same time, they seek to create space that is inclusive, within which identity labels are not a basis for entry or acceptance by the community. It is interesting to observe that a collective understanding of queer realities which makes the spaces sites of queer joy and escape is simultaneously reinforcing the binaries that are used to place them at the margins. This dilemma is certainly part of the reason participants value the decision to remain accessible to queer and non-queer people. By including people who do not identify as queer, participants seek to meet the needs of queer patrons while simultaneously resisting the rigid queer/non-queer binary. In this way, participants simultaneously reinforce and challenge the boundaries of space.

In an endeavor to explore the successes and challenges encountered in the everyday maintenance of queer safe spaces in Halifax, this project depicts several significant elements of queer safe spaces in Halifax and contributes to a conceptual understanding of safe space continued from the Roestone Collective (2014) and Clark-Parsons et al. (2018). In focusing on a small sample of spaces and their cultivators, the study responds to scholars' calls for research to situate analyses of safe spaces in their particular social and political contexts and to focus on the relational work necessary for creating and maintaining them.

A main contribution of this project stems from the nuanced approach to the discussion of safe space(s), particularly as it demonstrates that safe spaces are not cultivated just through physical, geographical space, but also through time. Drawing on de Certeau's (1984) discussion of power in space and place, I analyzed participants' event-based spaces as tactics, using time to cultivate queer-centred spaces of safety. As the events were temporally-delimited, participants needed to work within the bounds of the physical space to create queer-centred moments, which presented challenges. Nevertheless, participants demonstrated that queer safe spaces can exist within dominant physical spaces through the use of tactics. As such, participants' narratives lend nuance to the discussion of safe space(s) as they reveal that safety can be created by occupying geographical space with defined boundaries, but also through interactions and processes in time. Time is as significant in the process of cultivating safe space as physical space itself.

In a changing world, the structure of safe spaces has changed, too, to reflect the needs of marginalized groups and shifting spatial possibilities. It is telling that all of the spaces participants discussed were queer-centred but inclusive of non-queer people, that some were permanent physical spaces while others were event-based, and that spaces integrated goals of safety within places of business, leisure, and community service. Participants' spaces appear to be part of a shift from space exclusive to a particular marginalized group towards more broadly-inclusive spaces that cater to a particular population, but value including others for reasons of visibility. It is interesting that queer safe spaces are not necessarily defined by geographical boundaries and rules about who can or cannot enter, but are often queer-centred as well as inclusive of non-queer people and are co-created through ongoing practices in space and time.

The project also contributes to the ongoing popular debate about safe space which includes some critical perspectives that overlook accounts of actual practiced safe space—like those of participants—, their meanings, and historical context. The absurdity of a few interpretations that claim safe space is not only unnecessary, but a detrimental force threatening free speech and critical thinking was put into perspective when I received an anonymous email during data collection. A visitor at the Halifax Central Library had seen my recruitment poster displayed, torn it down, and sent a vague, but threatening email to warn me not to put up another poster in its place. I was (perhaps naively) surprised to receive the email, as the Central Library, a cornerstone of Downtown Halifax, is generally regarded to be a welcoming, inclusive space. The anonymous email, along with critical news articles discussed in Chapter 2 and participants' constraints related to finances, physical space, and raising awareness indicates that safe space for queer communities remains a contentious issue. In spite of the progress towards creating queer spaces of reprieve and a wider society that is increasingly accepting of 2SLGBTQ+ people, queer space is still strongly opposed by a subset of people. Despite ongoing discrimination and institutional obstacles experienced by queer people, there exists an assumption that the struggle for queer space has been won, presumably justified by increasing acceptance for 2SLGBTQ+ people and queer folks feeling comfortable living in a greater array of places within their home cities (Caldwell, 2007; Ghaziani, 2014; Kirchick, 2019). Participants' narratives demonstrate that this assumption overlooks not only some people's oppositions to queer safe space, but also the remaining structural inequalities that queer groups face in the struggle for spatial justice.

The email threat was a timely reminder that accessible, public space is still heteronormatively-produced space; hence the still-relevant need for queer safe spaces. This need is thoroughly understood and carefully addressed by the project participants, and their qualities as relational, ongoing, intentional, political, and imperfect position these spaces in the ever-evolving landscape of queer space and history in Halifax.

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Appendix A: Interview Schedule

You indicated to me that you identify as a member of the queer/2SLGBTQ+ community or an ally. If you're comfortable, could you tell me a bit more about your specific identity/how you would like to be referred to in the research? *[If the participant indicates that they are a member of the 2SLGBTQ+ community, ask what pronouns they use for themselves]*

What queer safe space do you primarily utilize/associate with, how long you have been part of that space, and in what capacity?

Can you describe the space? What is it for and what is its mission?

Who uses the space?

Who created/cultivates/manages/maintains the space?

What kind of space is it (i.e. commercial, community, non-profit, etc.)?

What kinds of activities occur in the space?

When do these activities occur (all year vs. seasonally, scheduled, on an event basis)?

How did this space come into being? Why?

What kind of rules/policies/guidelines govern the space and what activities occur there?

What does safety mean within the space/what makes the space safe for queer folks?

How do you ensure the space's safety? What do you and fellow users of the space do to keep the space safe?

What does the everyday maintenance of the space look like/involve?

What successes has the space achieved? How do you measure success?

What challenges have you encountered? How are you negotiating them?

How are new people welcomed/initiated? Is there gatekeeping involved?

What kinds of relationships/interactions occur in the space?

What makes your space different from other queer safe spaces in Halifax and elsewhere?

What are your hopes for the future of the space?

Is there anything else you'd like to tell me about the space?