

DRAGGING IDENTITY: A CRITICAL ETHNOGRAPHY OF NIGHTCLUB SPACE(S)

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## ABSTRACT

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This study investigated the production of space within a nightclub that has weekly theme nights. Using critical ethnography and Butler's theory of performativity, the researcher studied the ways in which space was created on 80s, Drag, and Goth Nights. Through participant-observation and in-depth interviews with patrons and employees at the club, the researcher argued identity performances altered the social space of the club from night-to-night and suggested the space changed through the physical things in the space and the rules associated with that space. Performativity of space, like performativity of identity, occurred not through a single performance but through the constant and consistent repetition of performances over a period of time. Specifically, the history of the space (each night building on the night before for years and years) created a stability for the nightclub that remained regardless of the individuals within it. The specific theme nights, however, did not reap the benefits of that stability. Despite the site-specific (read theme-night specific) normative performances in the space, the social space was altered through individual performances in the space as well as rules associated with the club. Through identity performances and moments in the space happening over and over again across a period of time, the researcher discovered not only the performativity of space as relates to Club North, but also the applicability of performativity to other social spaces.

I dedicate this dissertation to my grandmothers:

Claire T. (Connelly) Davis

Ruth Jean (Michalek) Sausville

Through different means they both inspired in me a love of learning.

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
CHAPTER I. ENTERING THE SPACE(S).....	1
CHAPTER II. LEARNING THE GROUND(WORK) .....	13
Review of Literature.....	15
Space Construction .....	16
Place .....	16
Space.....	17
Public Space.....	20
Club Space .....	23
Gay Club Space.....	27
Theory.....	32
Binaries & Discipline .....	35
Queer Theory.....	38
Heteronormativity.....	40
Identity .....	41
Performativity of Space.....	44
Conclusion .....	47
Methodology .....	49
Method.....	53
Access .....	53
Gathering Data.....	54
Analysis.....	58

CHAPTER III. DRAGGING IDENTITIES .....	60
Discursive Performance .....	64
Membership – authenticity .....	65
Outsiders .....	70
Community.....	74
Embodied Performance .....	79
Membership - authenticity.....	80
Outsiders .....	85
Community.....	92
Conclusion .....	96
CHAPTER IV. UNPACKING SPACE(S).....	99
Safe Space .....	103
Risky Space .....	111
Access .....	111
Violence .....	114
Home Space .....	118
Home as positive .....	119
Surveillance and scrutiny .....	121
Recreation Space .....	123
Design.....	124
Music .....	126
Conclusion .....	128

CHAPTER V. EXITING THE SPACE(S) .....	131
History/Sediment .....	135
Stability of Space .....	138
Site-specific Normative Performances.....	142
Conclusion.....	145
REFERENCES.....	148
APPENDIX A. HSRB APPROVAL.....	154
APPENDIX B. INFORMED CONSENT LETTER .....	155



## CHAPTER I. ENTERING THE SPACE(S)

The first time I ever went to Club North was on a Saturday night; a group of my new friends (we'd all just begun our doctoral program) started at Bar South, a sports bar, playing pool and air hockey and having a few drinks. After awhile my friends decided we needed to dance. It is important to note that I don't dance; I can't dance. Due to my inability to dance, I just don't do nightclubs at all. Nonetheless, I followed my friends to Club North trying to think of a way to get out of dancing.

Getting from Bar South to Club North is fairly easy, as they are connected through a set of stairs, though on a Saturday it involves working one's way through a narrow hallway with people traveling both directions. One of the bouncers maintains a line that stretches from the beginning of the hallway to however far back the line goes, often, inconveniently, parallel to the entrance of the women's restroom. Once the bouncer calls me forward, I show identification, get a paper bracelet, a handstamp, and a mark with a yellow highlighter and I am free to move upstairs. Four steps, turn, ten steps turn, six steps, turn. At each turn I'm waiting for someone to jump out at me, and sometimes people do because the stairs are narrow and people are going both ways. These back steps open to the back of the pool room.

Waiting for my friends at the top of the steps, I move to one side to let other people through. Leaning against the wall, a natural tendency for me, is not an option, as there is a shelf about three feet off the ground that goes all the way around the room where people have placed their drinks. Instead, I stand off to one side and watch the

games of pool being played. After we're all upstairs we walk the length of the pool room, about twelve steps, turn left through a wide doorway, and go into the bar.

Trying to get a drink at Club North on a Saturday, like at most bars in this town, can be a project. We send two people up for drinks while the other four of us grab a small bar table that is available. Sitting at one of the five backless barstools, I look around. At the time, with all the people moving around in all different directions, the place reminds me of nothing so much as an overgrown ant farm. Drinks in hand, Nikki suggests we all go dance. While Nikki and some of the others go to the dance floor, I stay behind with my drink to hold the table.

After a dance or two they come back a bit sweaty and drinkless. After asking why I'm sitting there and wasn't dancing, I try to explain that I don't dance; I can't dance. In their various ways, my friends explain that "not dancing" is "not acceptable." Following my friends to the dance floor, we walk through a narrow doorway directly across from our table. From the doorway, the women's restroom is on the left and the dance floor is about ten feet to the right. This space, between the dance floor and the rest room, for me, is a place to stand and strategize. At the start of the dance floor there is a wall of people; where do I go? How do I get past those people and onto the dance floor?

However, getting past the people is quickly a non-issue, as my friends lead the way and I follow in their wake. Once we have found a few feet of dancing space, created mostly by bumping into other people until they move, my friends start to dance. Torn between not wanted to be viewed as a square and not wanting to make a fool of myself by trying to dance, I stand there stepping back and forth watching my new friends and looking over them to see the other people on the dance floor.

After pretending to dance for a few minutes, I shake my empty bottle at my friends and head toward the back side of the bar. There is a cut-out in the middle of the wall between the bar and the dance floor that allows dancers to get new drinks without actually leaving the floor. I bypass this bar though and go out the narrow doorway at the opposite end of the dance floor from where I entered it, back into the bar. About two feet through the doorway, on the left, is the front entrance to Club North. A steep set of stairs leads down to Main Street. Ignoring the stairs, I take a right, and join the mass of people at the bar trying to get a bartender's attention.

At the time, this club was just an ordinary club; it's an ordinary club that catered to an ordinary college population that played ordinary loud remixes and presumably provides ordinary Bud Light by the truckload. The more I went to the club, however seldom that actually was, the more intrigued I became. I suspected that something far from ordinary was happening here.

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The drink flyer reads "Techno Party Night" under the Tuesday listing. Below that it says, "featuring two drag shows." I never really looked at the drink flyer before, or at least never absorbed what was on it. I really enjoy drag shows and I was disappointed that I'd missed out on nearly a year's worth of them.

Using the front entrance, I hand the bouncer my identification; he directs me to the cashier. "One dollar cover." I've since found out it's the only night the club has a cover. One dollar – it feels like such an odd amount to me; getting a soda upstairs costs more. Why a dollar? What does this admission price provide for those who pay it? What

do I get as a result of this fee? But it is a dollar, so I pay, week in and week out, as I travel Club North.

The climb up the front stairs is rather steep, but the stairs themselves are not. At the top of the stairs, the bar is just ahead, and a sharp right will put you near the middle of the dance floor. Starting at the bar to get a party soda (what most other people call a malt beverage, like hard lemonade), I notice the people. The people are the same; the people appear to be the same people that were there that first Saturday I went, and other Friday's and Saturday's since. This is what surprises me – everywhere else I've lived "Drag Night" usually guarantees a fairly large and visible gay/lesbian/bisexual/transgender audience. Of course, it is quite likely that some of these people would identify as GLBT, but the club is by no means giving me a feel of a "gay space" right now. A gay space is, of course, going to be different things to different people. My definition of it would include not only the visibility mentioned above, but also (and this will sound so cliché) a sense of community – an openness and friendliness that I seldom feel in "regular" clubs.

Outside of the loud Madonna remix blasting from the speakers and the three drag queens walking around the bar stopping to talk to patrons, I don't see much that reminds me of drag nights I've seen at other clubs. Walking the length of the bar, I step through the doorway into the entrance of the dance floor. The people seem to enjoy the Madonna mix, as people are dancing and laughing – by themselves, in couples, in groups. This is the first time I see an indication of this being a gay space – men dancing and touching in a way that might be hard to explain in a straight bar. There are heterosexual couples doing this too, but nobody seems to take notice of anyone other

than the people they are with. Weaving through the dance floor, back out to the other side of the bar, it feels like there are more people here now, despite the fact that I've been here only five minutes.

Twenty minutes later, the emcee announces that the second show is beginning. Following the crowd of people back to the dance floor, I find a square foot to call my own and wait for the show to begin. The emcee is actually one of the drag queens who performs in the show. After announcing herself, she hands the microphone to one of the audience members and gets up on the stage (here a permanent fixture that takes up a third of the dance floor in the middle of the dance floor, two feet off the ground). With the exception of one, she looks like all the drag queens here: forty-ish, heavy, big hair, a little too much makeup, nice clothes, and a fair performance. Everyone seems to enjoy the performances, cheering, singing along, giving the performer a dollar. Having attended drag night regularly for awhile now, I see this part of the show differently; all of these performances are merely leading up to THE performance: Rebecca.

Rebecca is the performer who looks different from the rest. Early thirties, thin, blond, large breasts, tiny outfits, and full pouty lips. Her performances are bigger and louder; her performance of Def Leppard's, *Pour Some Sugar on Me*, ended with her and half the audience covered in beer that she shook and sprayed all over everyone. As soon as she comes onto the stage, men and women will lay on their backs around the perimeter of the stage with dollar bills in their shirts and pants waiting for her to lean over, kiss them, and take the dollar.

At the end of the show, about half of the people funnel back into the bar. Following them, I hear snippets of conversation. Interestingly, most of the comments

about the drag show come from the straight appearing individuals; a lot of “did you see?!” and “oh my god” type comments in a way that seem to come more from curiosity than it does mean-spiritedness. Pushing through the now crowded bar, I follow the string of people walking down the front steps and go home.

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This study is a critical ethnography of a nightclub space. By going to Club North and observing and participating in the goings on there and interviewing other people who participate in that space, I have an opportunity to understand what is actually happening there and how the space is being used. It is my hope that this study will show how space and identity are linked and how the formation of space cannot simply be taken for granted. Though everyone at Club North is participating in the same physical space, I argue that the ways in which that space is created from night to night differs. In recognizing the different ways space is used at Club North, we are given the opportunity to recognize the ways in which power and culture function in this small piece of society. The space(s) involve not only individual performances, but also physical things (bar, tables, stage) within the space.

It was my first few trips to Club North, particularly those first few trips to drag night, which helped me to formulate what I now have as my three guiding thoughts for this study. For example, my first trip to Club North on a Saturday versus my first trip on a Tuesday were very different, though some of the patrons are the same. How is the space used differently by patrons on different nights? Who is involved in changing the space? Lastly, how does the use of the space on a given night change how the space is used in subsequent nights (i.e., is there a social residue left from a given night that

affects subsequent nights)? For example, does Goth night change in some way based on who or what (flyers from Drag night) was there the night before?

To answer the questions listed above, I use Butler's (1990) theory of performativity as well as queer theory. These theories, while not the same, are certainly strongly related and out of, in many ways, the same tradition. Together they serve as an appropriate choice for this critical study. Both performativity and queer theory can be critical theories that focus on change and identity. While space, more so than identity, is the cornerstone of this dissertation, I believe these theories of identity are my best options for understanding the space at Club North. Chapter Two gives a full explanation of the theories I use as well as my reasons for choosing these particular ways of thinking as grounding for my work.

Chapter Two also explains the context of the study: I review literature on public space, club space, and gay club space. While there are multiple definitions of space, I have not found one in particular that fits the way in which I am trying to use it for this study. In lieu of using a single definition, I am going to borrow from both Lefebvre (1991) and de Certeau (1988) in an attempt to build an understanding of space.

Lefebvre (1991) states, "*(Social) space is a (social) product*" (p. 26, emphasis in original). Space here is larger than a single club; each society has its own space. In the case of studying a nightclub, I am looking at only a miniscule piece of what makes up our society's construction of space. Social space is influenced by the actors who exist within it. To a certain degree, Lefebvre's (1991) concept of space can be applied to the nightclub I want to study: "Within it [the space] they [individuals] develop, give expression to themselves, and encounter prohibitions..." (p. 34). While Lefebvre argues

that the space is where the individual perishes, the other experiences (development, expression, prohibition) certainly occur within the space of a nightclub. As an individual attends a particular club over time, s/he learns to perform his/her identity in a particular way in that space, which are sometimes limited in their performance by either bar staff, friends, or others.

To Lefebvre, I add deCerteau's (1988) discussion of strategies and tactics which leads to his theorization of space. A strategy is the "calculation of power relationships that becomes possible as soon as a subject with will and power can be isolated" (p. 36). A tactic "is a calculated action determined by the absence of a proper locus" (p. 37). For deCerteau, those in power use strategies to maintain control utilizing their institutional places – those defined and specific locations – to protect their desire. Tactics, on the other hand, are momentary claiming of space within dominated places, a resistant (but temporary) action against the status quo. While I discuss the relationship of strategies and tactics to places and spaces in the review of literature, it is important to note that power is the common link between strategies and tactics as well as places and spaces. This relationship of power to the space I propose to study is interesting in that I suspect it changes from night to night, and therefore the role the nightclub plays changes as well.

In Chapter Two I also review Butler's (1990) theory of performativity and queer theory and discuss how each relates to my project. I discuss the how people construct identity through their performances, connecting that to the performativity of space. In brief, Butler (1990) argues that gender is not essential or fixed. It is not that I am masculine or that I am feminine; it is that masculine and/or feminine are things that I do.



Gender is done through a “stylized repetition of acts” (Butler, 1990, p. 270). Gender is performed from birth and sometimes, with the advent of ultrasounds, even before. Think of a toy store and the ways in which there are clear indications of which toys are for girls and which are for boys. The pink of the Barbie aisle can be easily recognized from the front of the store; children are being directed to pick out the “right” toys, often without actually being told what the right toys are. Most toys are for *either* boys or girls, but seldom both. There is no single act, however, that constitutes gender. It is the constant and consistent ways in which I continue to identify myself through marking my body and language. As Butler (1990) argues, the only way to do gender correctly is to see gender done incorrectly as comparison; likewise, the only way to change how gender is done is to vary that pattern that we each repeat. Gender appears stable, but is mutable under certain conditions, as this study will show. Chapter Two will expand Butler and clarify her contributions to my work.

While there are many definitions of queer theory, most of them share certain qualities including a rejection of any type of fixed or essential identities, supporting the idea that identities are fluid (Dilley, 1999; Sedgwick, 1990; Slagle, 2003). Further, Dilley (1999) believes queer is an area of study; that is, less a way to look at individuals than it is a way to look at communication. He argues that the purpose of queer theory is to question that which usually goes unquestioned. Slagle (2003) points to the usefulness of queer theory to academics, in particular, to ask other questions of identity because of its fluidity as a lens. I think the concept of fluidity of identity can be expanded to include fluidity of spaces. This club is a space that changes by night; as the space shifts to too do the identities of those who enter it. The differences and similarities of the identity

performances in the narratives of my initial visits to Club North, as well as the differences and similarities of the space itself, make me think that while they are both fluid, they are also co-constructed. Club North is what people make it.

Additionally, my methodology (critical ethnography) and data collection and analysis procedures are explained in Chapter Two. The goal of critical ethnography, like most critical studies, is to show the power structures that exist within a given framework, and to make change or propose alternatives within those power structures.

Conquergood (1991) discusses ethnography's interest in studying borderlands and boundaries, and the importance of doing so: "Communication becomes even more urgent and necessary in situations of displacement, exile, and erasure" (Conquergood, 1991). While studying subcultures in a nightclub might not be seen as cultures suffering from displacement, exile, and erasure, I show here that they are, as the need for gay bars and queer theme nights suggest. Some of these cultures (i.e., GLBT communities in this political climate) are, in fact, without a place of their own and are read as social exiles.

My critical ethnography involved two phases of data collection. First I observed the space at Club North for a year, going on different nights of the week with an emphasis on drag night. My observation focused on how the different areas of the club are being used (by whom, in what way), who is attending the club and what they are doing (same people each day, or different people on different days), and lastly how any of the above change on different nights. It is important to note that I observed not only the patrons and workers, but I also consider how I (as both patron and researcher) use the space and perform identity. Second, I interviewed individuals who visit and work at

the club in an attempt to understand how these individuals use the space and perform identity.

Chapter Three, the first of my data chapters, focuses on answering the question of who is involved in changing the space. The various ways in which participants lay claim to the space (when they go; what they do when they are there; how they see others using the club) in addition to the information within chapter three of how participants use the club helps to answer who is involved in changing (and sometimes not changing) the space.

Chapter Four focuses on the physical use of space within the club. Like parts of Corey's (1996) study of an Irish Pub, I focus on who uses the different spaces of the club and in which way the different spaces (including the dance floor, the pool room, and the bar) are used. I place an emphasis on the ways in which the different spaces are used differently on the different theme nights.

The last chapter concluding my study focuses on how the space becomes sedimented; by this I mean I focus on the how the history of the nights and of the club as a whole affects the current use of the club. History, in this sense, can be both short and long term. I focus on how this Tuesday night affects this Wednesday night, but also how that first Tuesday night affected all the Tuesday nights since.

This project, while not the first arguing a performativity of space, is one of very few focused on performativity of space in communication work. This project adds to the research in communication and performance by focusing on not just a single space, but a space that changes from night to night. In a single space that has multiple sites to study, I have the opportunity to learn how performance happens through multiple lenses

without technically leaving a single space. The continuity of the single space with the independence of the multiple theme nights affords me a unique opportunity. While learning the physical space and the staff that remains relatively constant, I have the opportunity to focus on the similar and different methods of performance that occur from night to night.

## CHAPTER II. LEARNING THE GROUND(WORK)

As a child I loved field day – that day in the spring where there were no classes and instead spent the day outside in a contest of athletic ability. There was the 50 yard dash, 100 yard dash, broad jump, long jump, and lots of other activities that I can't remember. My favorite, without question, was the obstacle course. Through, around, over, under, running, jumping. It was what field day was all about, wrapped up into one event.

On a beautiful June day in northern Virginia, standing in my bridesmaid's dress on the back deck of the house and all I can think about is field day. As I write this, I feel a little guilty – instead of thinking of my former roommate Candy, the bride, I was thinking of field day from nearly twenty years ago. It really wasn't until her wedding day, however, that I understood why some people didn't like the obstacle course. I understood that some people really weren't very good athletes and that some people preferred doing other things, but until that moment I never really recognized the fear of potential humiliation that could affect people standing at the beginning of the obstacle course.

Standing on the deck in my gauzy, nearly lime green dress and chunky, three-inch, clear heels I could see the whole obstacle course laid out in front of me: down the ramp, meet my groomsman at the bottom, walk up the hill (don't slip on the big paving stones!), stop, breathe, enter the tent (remember to walk correctly – left foot first!), look solemn, look happy, step on to the parquet floor (don't slip!), stop, turn, curtsy, wait for his bow, three steps backward (across the parquet floor and back DOWN the hill!), stop, finished. It was a nightmare laid out in front of me.

Like a good athlete or student (I'm not sure which), I practiced. The day before I got out my heels and practiced walking down the ramp. Kevin (my groomsman) and I practiced our walk through the tent. The night before the ceremony, during the latter stages of the bachelorette party, I learned to curtsy.

We all sat in the hotel room drinking some champagne that we had taken from the house in the afternoon. It was pink and fizzy; I nearly fell over when, walking around in my heels (still practicing), I took a sip of the champagne and had bubbles go up my nose. Still holding our glasses of champagne, Donna, the mother of the bride, had us line up to practice our curtsy. Two-by-two (one of us pretending to be a groomsman and then switching off) we stood in front of her and curtsied. As the five of us practiced, there was an obvious range of curtsying ability from very good to oh-my-God bad. Not shockingly, mine was the curtsey that was unrecognizable as such.

As a group, the others worked on fixing my curtsey. I sat on the bed and watched the others curtsy; sadly, I did not get anything through this process of learning by observation. They sat on the bed and watched and critiqued my curtsy; this was much more effective. Slowly (over the course of one of the longest half-hours of my life) my curtsy transformed from an awkward hips back, butt out, almost squat to a reasonably acceptable hips forward, butt in, demure curtsy.

Late the following morning I readied myself for the challenge. The music began and I began my obstacle course: down the ramp, met my groomsman at the bottom, walked up the hill (I slipped a little on the big paving stones, but Kevin helped me balance), stopped, breathed, entered the tent (remembered to walk correctly), forgot to look solemn, forgot to look happy (I was too focused on the parquet floor), stepped on to

the parquet floor (without slipping), stopped, turned, curtsied, waited for his bow, and turned and walked forward the three steps to my place. As I waited for the next bridesmaid to make it down the aisle, I glanced over to Donna who gave me a brief nod of approval.

### Review of Literature

Much like my experience at Candy's wedding, as described above, before I can move forward I need to learn the ground(work). To start this process, I review the work that has come before mine as relates to performance and nightclub space. This review of literature begins with the concept of space and then continues to narrow as I focus on public space, club space, and gay club space. Borrowing from both Lefebvre (1991) and deCerteau (1988), I create an understanding of space that allows for fluidity and change within space. In continuing to narrow down space to what I am specifically studying, I will focus on studies of how public spaces are used, including restaurants, health clubs, and social spaces in general. From there, I will begin to focus on club space, and the problem with the lack of studies that focus on club *space*.

There is no shortage of studies on clubs. Most of these studies, however, do not focus on the actual changing space of the club; they focus instead on individual activities within the club (dance, drug use, etc.). This is important to note, because my study does not focus on individual behaviors, but instead how the space changes through the *use* of the space, including those various behaviors by different people in the space. The last section of this literature review will focus on gay club space. I do this because I am using the Tuesday Drag Night at Club North as the focal point of my study. Additionally, the gay club literature focuses more on space than the majority of

the literature on clubs. It is through this discussion of gay club space that I can begin articulating my argument for performativity of space.

This study fills a void in the already limited studies of space use in clubs. I make this claim because the studies that do focus on the use of space concentrate on a given, somewhat stable space (a gay club, a straight club, etc.) The space I studied is one that has various themes – straight club, gay club, goth club – and as such I argue the space actually changes as well.

### *Space Construction*

As mentioned in the introduction, deCerteau (1988) differs “place” from “space” by considering power. Place inherently includes power; it has institutional backing and its purpose is to keep out “others.” Space occurs only in moments; it is created by others in a moment of rebellion against the place and the strategies the place uses. Spaces occur within places; they carve out a momentary niche within the place. The nightclub, as it stands, is a place. I question, however, the roles that drag night and goth night fill as place or space.

*Place.* de Certeau (1988) argues three advantages of having a place: independence, visibility (both being seen and being able to see others), and sustained knowledge. A place has the advantage of both history and future; there is a stability attached to an organization over time. A university would qualify as place. For example, think of how Harvard has the three advantages of place: it is an organization that has existed over a significant period of time and appears to be going strong into the future; it literally has a location and is easily recognizable; and, as a historical and physical place it can create and continue particular types of knowledge. There is a snowball effect; the



longer a place has existed and the more visibility the place has, the more history that place has which increases its power.

*Space.* Space occurs only in moments; it is created by “others” through tactics in a moment of rebellion against those with power. Space is the opposite of place: it has no history, visibility, or power. An example of a tactic might be a student protest on the campus of Harvard. It occurs within the gaze of the place; it is limited to protesting a certain piece or issue of the place; what it wins there, it cannot keep. Indeed, soon the institution will normalize again, accounting for the breach.

The question as to what the theme nights would qualify as (space or place) is more complicated. Having a night once a week devoted to a particular subculture does not ensure long term legitimacy, but for the short-term, it does give the appearance of credibility. This is particularly interesting in that it is not just a space for a given subculture –it is a mainstream club that caters to these different subcultures on these nights of the week. The potential space that occurs, in this case, still feeds into the place financially; all the profits associated with the theme nights still goes to the club as a whole. Spaces are not long term (week after week) and would not occur without planning from management/ownership. As such, I would argue that the theme nights are simply a part of the greater institution and are a part of the place.

The club as a whole, however, might be considered a space in the context of larger (heteronormative) society. Of course, the key to a space is its momentary status; considering that Club North has been in this town a long while, it seems to be eliminated from being a space. It is important to consider heteronormative history, and the way in which heterosexuality seems so natural through generations upon generations of

society functioning in particular ways. The long term history of “acceptable” (hetero)sexuality marks other spaces as “unacceptable.” Though here and now Club North appears to be a stable place, in comparison to the long-term history of sexualities in our society, Club North very well might be a space that exists in this moment, but does not have a long-term presence in sexuality, in society, as a whole.

Lefebvre (1991) argues space must be looked at as a whole; fragmentation inevitably occurs when a larger global perspective is discarded to look at a single piece of social space. Considering I propose to focus on a single piece of social space, it is likely Lefebvre’s understanding of space might not be the most appropriate one for this study. I argue, however, that many of his arguments will still apply to the space that I chose to study. Lefebvre (1991) argues that space is unique as it is simultaneously producing and being produced. He states, “Though a *product* to be used, to be consumed, [space] is also a *means of production*; networks exchange and flows of raw materials and energy fashion space and are determined by it” (p. 85, emphasis in original). Space cannot merely be; it depends on (and is dependent upon) that which exists in the space. Gerodetti and Bieri (2006) state Lefebvre’s idea most clearly: “space can be read through the marks left upon it by the multi-layered mental and material processes involved, providing the lens through which our perception of ‘reality’ is shaped” (p. 73). McCann (1999) explains Lefebvre’s philosophy in more detail.

McCann (1999) discusses Lefebvre’s (1991) triad which has “three moments encompassing two aspects of social space, and the practices that mediate, and are mediated by, social space” (p. 172). The first is *spatial practice* which is the way in which spaces are actually used through personal experience. The second is

*representations of space* which “are tied to the relations of production and to the ‘order’ which those relations impose” (Lefebvre, 1991, p. 33). McCann (1999) describes representations of space as “space constructed through discourse” (p. 172) such as that used by city planners in literally designing a space. The third is *representational spaces* which are the ways a space is created through imagination. McCann argues that the works of photographers and filmmakers would qualify as representational spaces.

Shome (2003) argues “we need to think of space...not as inert backdrops against which struggles of identity occur. Rather, these relations themselves must be seen as active components in the unequal heterogeneous production and distribution of identities, politics, and actions” (p. 43). This argument is important for the study of space in general; it allows for space to be not a static landscape, but instead an agent in the creation and change of power. Shome’s argument lends support to my proposed study in that it notes the importance of space as an area of study. In studying only identity “we risk rendering invisible the situated practices of space and place through which identities are continually reworked, contested, and reproduced” (p. 43).

Lefebvre (1991) and Shome (2003) both note space as an active dynamic in the production of power, identity, and society as a whole. While each of these concepts has been studied, I argue that the study of space – particularly as it relates to power and identity -- has been understudied. This dissertation studies that dynamic within the particular setting of a nightclub. For the purpose of this dissertation, I discuss space by borrowing Lefebvre’s (1991) concepts of spatial practice and representations of space along with deCerteau’s (1988) explanation of place. What remains is a physical space,

controlled by individuals in power that changes based on the ways in which individuals understand and make use of it.

### *Public Space*

As Club North is a space that is open to the public, barring only those who are underage, it can be considered a public space. The following studies focus on public spaces and how those spaces are created and used by the public. The studies also focus on the concepts of determining space as public versus private. Determining space as public or private relates to my study through individual claims of membership, answering who belongs in a given space. While each of the studies below discusses space, none of the studies define space through the method I have used above. Through a discussion of each study, I note the ways in which it specifically ties into my study of Club North.

Podmore's (2001) study of space in a neighborhood in Montreal studies what she calls "place making" for lesbian residents. The researchers in this study focus on social space, particularly how lesbian social space, is created within a physical neighborhood in Montreal. Through qualitative interviews with lesbians who live in that neighborhood, she examines how the neighborhood space functions to support "lesbian place" through visibility of social interactions and desire. Podmore (2001) states, "Along Boul. St-Laurent, being a lesbian in the crowd is possible. More importantly, it is commonplace" (p. 342). The author specifically claims that using homosexual / heterosexual binaries when studying space is not always useful, as that particular binary does not exist within the area she studied. Instead, she calls it a "space of difference" (Podmore, 2001)

because the space caters to many sub-cultures without any of them seeming to assimilate to be like the others.

While Podmore's (2001) study does place an emphasis on the visibility of the lesbian community within a given space, it does not focus on the ways in which the space might change. Through studying a particular urban space, Podmore treats the space as stable and the ways in which individuals use it as changing. I argue that while individual performances within space change, so too does the space itself. Treating space as fixed lets space, as a whole, go unquestioned. Within this study, I consider the norms of sexual expression in the nightclub space, but with a larger goal of understanding how the space itself is created and maintained. Podmore's (2001) study does, however, point out the importance of avoiding easy categorization of a given space. Though space is often labeled as either gay or straight, it seldom actually fits this binary.

Gerodetti and Bieri (2006) state "axes of identity never function as a-spatial social constituents, but are bound up with spaces and places where social interactions occur" (p. 71). This interdependence of space and identity, particularly sexualities, is the cornerstone of their research on train stations as sexual spaces in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The authors determined that train stations "become a pluri-normative space allowing contradictory and ambivalent sexualities to be discursively as well as materially articulated" (p. 83).

The concept of space as both public and private is studied by Magni & Reddy (2007) in their research on bathrooms in a gay nightclub in South Africa. Through survey, participants observation, and interviews, the researchers determine that the

“bathrooms act as both a material and an imagined space for its patrons” (p. 239). The space is public in that any number of people can be in the space at a given time; and the space is private in that it allows people an area away from the main club for any number of activities (conversation, sex, etc). The bathrooms are an area of blurring because the space cannot be entirely public or private.

Frew & McGillivray’s (2005) article on body politics at health clubs is another very good example of public space as political/private space. Through doing fieldwork at three health clubs and interviews and focus groups with both trainers and customers of the club, the authors determine that capital is based on both the physical body as well as gaining and maintaining of the body so that it meets the standards of the place. Customers compared their body to other members’ bodies, to the trainers’ bodies, and sometimes – when using a personal trainer to monitor their progress over time – to their own bodies. Often, the customers find themselves lacking in any or all of these comparisons and are dissatisfied. The authors determine that the health club often becomes an unhealthy site wherein customers attempt to attain a certain level of physical (cultural) capital without recognizing the societal expectations that have driven them there in the first place.

Considering that class distinctions have already been made, to a degree, by considering who can afford the monthly fee of a health club (often plus the cost of a personal trainer), this means of measuring capital is somewhat specific to this type of public/private space. Of course, health clubs are not the only place that fits within this category – entrance into (and role once you are in) club space is also often determined by the body (and that which is on the body.) Frew & McGillivray’s (2005) study is useful

for my study through the importance and use of physical capital within a space. The ways in which bodies are marked, both in the health club and in the nightclub, can play a significant role in how the space is used. While useful, however, this study is not enough; despite their similarities the health club and nightclub serve different purposes of social interaction.

### *Club Space*

There is no shortage of studies that focus on nightclubs and activities that take place within them (Hunt & Evans, 2003; Malbon, 1999; Northcote, 2006; Purcell & Graham, 2005; Thornton, 1995). Most of these studies, however, focus on drug use in club space or dancing practices. These individual practices are not the area of focus for my study. Instead, this section of the literature review will focus on club space from a wider lens – access, “authenticity,” and resistance within club space.

Scheibel’s ethnography (1992) of faking identity to gain access to clubs is important for the studies of clubs in general, but particularly important to my study, as this club is in a college town and undoubtedly this process of faking identification by underage students occurs (as shown by the regular police blotter descriptions printed in the school paper), which does affect the space. Scheibel’s (1992) study finds that the performance of faking identification occurs for different audiences: first, for the gatekeepers (individuals who check identification to allow entrance to the club) and second, for the other patrons of the club, some of whom are also performing the same role of faking identification.

Additionally, Scheibel (1992) found that the interactions between the male persons checking identifications and the female clubgoer often involved flirting and

teasing. Dependent upon who initiated the flirtation, the outcome of the performance could differ. When the person checking identification initiated the flirtation, he had already decided to allow the patron entrance. When the female patron initiated, it was less sure; some of these flirtations were initiated due to nervousness about an ID.

Scheibel's (1992) study is useful for my work as I study entrance performances; but also important for the ways in which individuals perform their identities for other club attendees. There are also ways in which this study does not go far enough; while the patrons are performing their identity for multiple audiences (club staff, friends, other patrons), there is little information regarding how these identity performances alter the club culture as a whole. While I recognize that that was not Scheibel's goal, it is important to note as my study will examine the larger club context. While these club patrons are not necessarily performing an "authentic" identity, their identity performances do create some meaning for the space as a whole.

Like Frew & McGillivray's (2005) article on physical capital in health clubs, Urquia (2005) determined cultural capital was institutionalized through individual bodies. Using data collected through ethnography in London Salsa clubs, Urquia found Salsa, "related forms of music and dance that draw on rhythms from the Spanish speaking Caribbean" (p. 385), was used as cultural capital, though not without conflict. Salsa was measured as authentic or inauthentic by members who examined others through ethnic, linguistic, or technical characteristics. In lieu of merely claiming authenticity, salsa dancers attempted to label rivals as inauthentic. As such, participants explained their reasons for being authentic dancers where others were not. This is particularly important to answering the question of perceived authenticity within the space I propose to study;



this could be involved in determining who is able to engage in changing the space.

Consider Goth night at Club North: in which ways is the space of “Goth night” reinforced by “authentic” or “inauthentic” performance of Goth culture (or, on another theme night, gay culture)? Through what means does perceived authenticity alter the space?

MacRae (2004) completed an ethnographic study that focuses on the ways in which “clubbers” typify dance club cultures. Through participant observation and in-depth interviews, she determines that there is an us-versus-them concept in the clubbing lifestyle; many of these determinations are based on actual cultural knowledge. “Participants socialized in and sought out environments where they would find their own kind” (MacRae, 2004, p. 63). She notes that there were still factors that influenced who might fit at a certain club – while some identifications might be similar, social standing can and does influence who is entitled to be in a certain club. In continuing her discussion of club culture, she notes two ways in which individuals are limited in their choice of clubs and club cultures. First, the cultural knowledge that an individual has will limit their options, both in where they will fit and where they are willing to go. Second, personal identification with a lifestyle will also limit where individuals fit within a particular scene. She notes, “We use ‘otherness’ as a powerful means of identification and differentiation, inclusion and exclusion” (p. 69).

Like Urquia’s (2005) study, MacRae’s (2004) study emphasizes the notion of belonging (authenticity/having knowledge) within a certain setting. While MacRae’s study focuses on individuals fitting in different types of settings, my study focuses on one physical space that claims to have different settings through the different theme nights of 80s, Drag, and Goth cultures. I am particularly curious about the ways in which

ideas regarding what counts as authenticity exist within the space and how authenticity is created differently on the different nights. Perceived authenticity of identity performance seems to be a significant piece of determining the creation of the space and the maintenance of the space as “Goth space” or “GLBT space.”

Willis' (1997) ethnographic study of “Latino Night” through Goffman's concepts of frontstage or backstage lead to some interesting implications for my study. Her study takes place at a mainstream nightclub that once a week hosts a Latino Night. She claims that the negative attitude many Anglo persons in the area hold regarding Latino/a persons increases the importance of having a Latino Night so that Latino/a persons have a place to celebrate their culture without backlash. Willis argues that Latino night is protected by three different sets of “screens” individuals must pass through to join Latino Night. These screens include the music, the language, and the racial mix of people. There are no actual rules that limit who may attend Latino Night, but these screens limit the people who are comfortable in the setting.

Willis' (1997) study is very useful for my study as it is one of very few I have found that focuses on a mainstream club with a night that focuses on a particular culture. Club North does not limit entrance by culture on its theme nights, so Willis' discussion of screens is interesting to me. How do club goers know if it is acceptable for them to be in a particular space? While Willis' study informs us on how theme night can transform a space, I think my study is still necessary. She studies the space through the lens of backstage (authentic) Latino identity being performed in a front stage (mainstream) club. I would argue that once the individuals were performing their identity that identity *is* front stage, just a different front stage from the one they use in

their everyday interactions. I feel a better lens through which to view the space is Butler's (1990) theory of performativity, due to Butler's claim of identity not being static (front stage or back stage) but something that is constantly occurring in every moment.

While dance clubs differ from exotic dance clubs, Egan's (2006) article on music as resistance in exotic dance clubs also informs how space is constituted, in part, by how it is used. Her ethnography of exotic dance clubs in New England focused on dancers' use of music as resistance against both the owners and customers of the club. Egan's concept of resistance, while in a very different circumstance, translates from the exotic dance club to a dance club floor. Egan's study focused on the resistance being directed at the club management and the patrons of the exotic club; in Club North that resistance is directed toward the audience that is (usually) not there, those who would question that sub-culture and that expression of identity.

Music is a significant marker for club culture – it is usually not difficult to tell the difference between Goth Night and 80s Night just from standing outside the club. Each of the nights I studied uses different music and, arguably, uses music differently. The different music allows each sub-culture to mark the space as their own. I am interested in determining how patrons of the club see the role of the music being played; is it to claim ownership? Is it to produce authenticity?

### *Gay Club Space*

Gay space is important; through the production of gay space, gay individuals gain power through legitimacy: It "is about power against the power of straights" (Moran, Skeggs, Tyrer, & Corteen, 2003, p. 174). Moran, Skeggs, Tyrer, & Corteen (2003) claim that gay space puts gay persons in the position of power. It does not, however, end with

power. Instead of only filling the role of quieting heteronormativity, it allows discourses of homonormativity to exist and expand (Johnson & Samdahl, 2005).

Even within areas of gay space, othering exists. Johnson & Samdahl (2005) found in determining insiders and outsiders, the clientele at a country-western gay bar othered women who attended on Lesbian Night. The authors found that the gay men who attended often felt the women were trying to take over a space that was not rightly their own. Many of the regulars at the country-western bar stopped attending on Lesbian Night due to the higher attendance by women. Interestingly, the men did not appear to be as bothered by the women who attended on other nights, perhaps due to their lower numbers. In determining the persons who were threatening their space, in this case women, the insiders lashed out against that threat.

Determining who qualifies as insider and outsider at the club I studied should allow me to identify a sense of community (or lack thereof) that occurs in the space on given nights. Throughout the literature on both clubs and gay clubs, legitimacy and authenticity are recurring themes. The performance of insider or outsider will likely alter how the space is being used. While the lesbians at Lesbian Night could not perform “insider” in a way that the men who frequented the club would recognize, they were able to perform insider for the way in which the club *labeled* the night

Buckland’s (2002) text on queer clubs in New York City is the most in-depth text I have discovered on queer club culture; she focuses her work on queer world-making. She states, “queer world-making is a conscious, active way of fashioning the self and the environment, cognitively and physically, through embodied social practices moving through and clustered in the city” (p. 19). In attending various gay clubs in the city, she

studies this world-making through dance, queer politics, desire, and community that occur in these clubs, and between goings to these clubs. While this study does not focus on a single space, it might, most accurately, describe what it is I am trying to study. Within the discussion of world-making she studies both how the space is made into what it is, and how people perform identity in that given space. The co-construction of space and identity is what gets to the nature of world-making.

Fred Corey's (1996) "Performing Sexualities in an Irish Pub" focuses on The George, a gay pub in Dublin. Corey considers the spaces that different people occupy within the pub, describing The Georges's three main areas: the bar, the lounge, and the club. Individuals within the bar are usually men from Dublin who either choose not to identify themselves or claim identity as a homosexual or a man who has sex with men. The lounge usually has both gay men and lesbians in it, but more men. These individuals are younger than the individuals in the bar. The lesbian women use the space differently than the men in that they usually enter as a group or arrive alone to meet a group of friends. Men more often come alone, and many of the men who are in the lounge are from Ireland, but not Dublin. The club caters to a younger crowd, still more men than women, but the culture here is different than either the lounge or the bar; this is the one area of The George where Corey (1996) saw touching. Additionally, the individuals in the club are vocally and visibly out of the closet. While the patrons in the other areas of The George are also out, the people in the club are louder, through their touching, their clothes and their means of identifying.

Different groups of people gather in each of these areas and identity construction occurs differently in each of these areas. While the club I studied has three distinct

areas, I suspect identity construction does not differ by area of the club they use. I expect, instead, their identity construction occurs based on the night(s) of the week they attend. Considering Corey's discussion of each section of the pub, I wonder how the club attendees do their identities differently based on when they attend.

Rivera-Servera's (2004) study of Latina/o queer clubs argues that there are "choreographies of resistance" which are "embodied practices through which minoritarian subjects claim their space in social and cultural realms" (p. 282). These choreographies of resistance, arguably, occur at most clubs that have a focus on a particular group. I would also argue that even mainstream clubs, such as the one I studied, will have choreographies of resistance at certain times – most likely on the nights attributed to minority groups.

McVeigh's (1997) study of an entrance policy at a gay disco is of great interest to me, as it is the only article I have found that is actually studying a gay night at a straight disco. Like Scheibel's (1992) article, the determination of authenticity lies mostly with the people checking identification at the door. While there is no single gay identification marker, the bouncers instead used mostly "looks and attitude" (McVeigh, 1997) to weed out heterosexual from gay patrons. McVeigh (1997) pointed out that many of the patrons were regulars and, therefore, did not need to go through the screening process. Those individuals who the bouncers did not recognize, however, went through the process, beginning with appearance. Instead of looking for stereotypical gay or lesbian appearance, bouncers would look for the type of dress associated with the regulars who attended the club. Additionally, those individuals who were difficult to label as straight or gay were asked questions to allow the bouncer to categorize them. Straight individuals

were allowed in on gay disco night, but only with a “regular” gay participant who could vouch for them. While potentially problematic, this process allowed a performance of “authentic gay night” through the literal performances individuals needed to engage in to “pass” the bouncers that other clubs with open door policies might not achieve.

What differs from this gay night from drag night at the club I propose to study is the entrance policy itself. The club McVeigh studies limits the heterosexuals who enter the club on gay night, whereas the club I studied has no entrance policy, aside from individuals being at least eighteen or twenty-one years of age (depending on the day). It is useful to note this difference in entrance policy because the lack of an entrance policy itself is a marker of the space and determines not only who makes up the members, but how the members constitute that space. On any of the theme nights the space I propose to study does not have specific criteria for entrance which is going to change who is “legitimately” in the space, and therefore how the space is actually used by the different makeup of individuals.

The literature on space and nightclub space has shared a great deal of knowledge about who spends time in nightclubs, what happens in nightclubs, and the ways in which clubs are different from one another. Through this groundwork, I have continued to see a gap for my study; none of the studies mentioned above focus on Butler’s theory of performativity to explain space. It is this gap in the literature that my study can fill. In focusing on not just who is in the space, or what activities occur in the space, but how space is created through performance, this study can add to the literature in communication, performance, and gender studies.

## Theory

I didn't grow up in a subdivision. I grew up on a few acres next door to a farm that is only about a mile from the town center – I had the benefits of living in the country with the convenience of having my friends only a bike ride away. I spent a lot of time outside as kid; my mother always sent me out “exploring.” I ran around the field in the back yard with my dog; I spent time wandering through the woods across the street; I stood at the edge of the pond (really more of a swamp) looking for the bullfrogs that I could hear so clearly in the evenings. In many ways I had a great childhood and my (arguably overdeveloped) imagination is directly related to all that time I spent wandering around outside making up games to play.

Since I didn't grow up in a subdivision and since I attended a Catholic school the next town over, I didn't know a lot of the children in my area of town. In an attempt to rectify that (and to direct my energy to an appropriate outlet) my parents signed me up for classes and sports teams. I played basketball, softball, and soccer. For awhile I took swimming and gymnastics lessons. The only one that I really hated (and the only one my mother insisted on) was ballet.

My memories of ballet class are admittedly hazy at this point. The things that I do remember are that I enjoyed the pink leg warmers (though the teacher wouldn't let us wear them in class); I had a friend named Dawn from class; and whenever I said I didn't want to go to class my mother said I had to because I sounded like an elephant when I walked. Sadly, the years of ballet didn't help; I'm nearly thirty and I still sound like a linebacker with each footfall.



By age eleven I'd pushed my mother to the brink of insanity regarding the ballet lessons and she let them go. I continued to play the other organized sports (and some unorganized sports as well) and did, as my parents had hoped, make friends through those teams. My weekends and a few weeknights were spent playing whatever sport was in season. My summers were spent playing whatever sport for which we could find enough people to field a team. Of course, not all of my free time was spent playing sports. I had a lot of alone-time and I read a lot. I also spent a lot of time as a child with my Grandma Claire (a retired teacher) working on my math skills, reading, playing cards or baking.

Even as an adult, I look back at my Grandma Claire as an almost mythical figure. Describing her is hard; she was smart; she was patient in teaching me things; she was tall; she had curly, red hair; she was very put-together. When my descriptions fall short I always turn to this one: she was a lady. While we didn't always see eye to eye, I loved her very much. (As a child, one of my biggest complaints about her was that every year she would knit me a sweater and it was almost always pink. Now that I, myself, knit, I cringe thinking of all the work she put into those sweaters and how I'd do anything to get out of wearing them.) I know she loved me very much as well and often told me she was proud of me, but I know there are also ways in which I made her cringe as well.

Sometimes I would go to Grandma Claire and Grandpa Joe's house after my game, even before I'd go home to shower and change. I'd come in energized, dirty, and often with skinned knees or elbows. I don't remember particular reactions as a very young girl, but as I got a little bit older (eight, nine, ten years old) I remember her telling me to be careful. She also started calling me a "young lady" and telling me how it was

important to behave properly. She never sat me down and listed appropriate and inappropriate behaviors for young ladies, but I did clearly pick up the impression that while sports were probably acceptable, the dirt and skinned knees that came with the sports were somehow less acceptable.

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Performativity does not occur through a single act. Instead, it is a process that involves creating, over and over again, a gender performance that has some meaning in society; because of these meanings we recognize gender in particular ways (Butler, 1990). Consider the narrative above: I thought about gender very little until my performance of gender was called out by my grandmother. My day-in and day-out life (sports, hiking through the woods, playing with my dog) and each moment of doing those things (dressing for playing versus putting on my school uniform of a skirt and blouse) was reinforcing my own gendered performance of what was “natural” to me. Gender “is constituted through the repetition of acts, verbal and nonverbal, that continue to communicate difference” (Warren, 2003, p. 29). I began to notice that my gender performance happened (though I wouldn’t have called it that as a child) by my grandmother slowly teaching me how to be a “young lady.” The only way to change how gender is done is to vary that pattern that we each repeat. This variation strategy emphasizes that we cannot change gender outside of repetition, because repetition is how we *do* gender. My grandmother knitted pink sweaters and praised my looks when I was in a dress or even my school uniform. She bought me slips to wear under my skirts and chastised me when she knew I wasn’t wearing them. As gendered individuals we

must work within the system of repeating our performances hour-after-hour, day-after-day, and year-after-year.

To frame my dissertation, I borrow from queer theory and performativity some key concepts through which I examine the performativity of space in Club North. Specifically, I discuss: binaries and discipline, queer theory, heteronormativity, identity, and culminate my argument with a vision of a performativity of space. While the experiences of an eleven year-old girl might not seem related to that of a twenty-something nightclub attendee at first glance, there is more than a passing similarity. The ways in which individuals perform their gender, whether as a child at her grandma's house or as an adult at a nightclub, open themselves up to be read by society as a whole (be that society grandmothers or other club attendees) and to be marked by their either "correct" or "incorrect" performance of gender. Through the concepts embedded in performativity, I am able to discuss the ways in which performativity happens as a whole and particular ways in which gender performance can be noted, particularly at Club North.

### *Binaries and Discipline*

My school uniform consisted of a navy blue plaid skirt, a white or light blue blouse and appropriate shoes. The boys in my class wore navy blue slacks, a light blue or white dress shirt and a navy blue tie. During the winter months the girls were allowed to wear navy blue slacks as well, but only during the winter months. During our lunch period, at least during good weather, we were expected to play outside once we had finished lunch until it was time to return to class. Our uniforms made much play difficult. While boys could run about, the girls' uniforms were a bit of a hindrance. Not only did

our uniforms put us at a disadvantage in games involving running or jumping, but we were discouraged from doing so in our uniforms because we could easily appear immodest with our skirts flying about. Particularly on the days that I wore a slip (those days that my grandmother's reminders were in my head as I dressed) I felt a little guilty running around knowing that it wasn't lady-like. Over time I played less during recess (because my friends had stopped running about, because I saw the older girls just sitting on the fence waiting for the classes to be called back in) and came to understand that recess was no longer a time for girls to actively play.

Butler (1990) states that while we do mundane actions that reinforce normative gender types as individuals, the outcome affects and usually continues to support a false gender binary. Through the repetition of acts, society as a whole recognizes gender in very particular ways: masculine or feminine. Consider even the uniforms from the school I attended as a child: boys' uniforms were designed for activity while girls' uniforms were designed to encourage passive pursuits. Boys were expected to be young gentlemen (complete with tie) while the girls were expected to be young ladies. Within this false binary society recognizes individual gender performances as correct or incorrect. Butler (1990) argues that the only way society knows to do gender "correctly" is to have something incorrect to compare it against. For example, heterosexuality is "good" and "right" because homosexuality is "bad" and "wrong." Or, seeing Andrea's unladylike behavior (in my early insistence of playing tag in my school uniform) and hearing from the teachers that it was, in fact, unladylike taught the other girls in class that their more passive behavior was ladylike. The binaries serve to regulate gender, a system with a great deal of social value.

Foucault's (1995) discussion of docile bodies also fits into this discussion of binaries and discipline. In the section on "the control of activity" (p. 149) he argues "By bending behavior towards a terminal state, exercise makes possible a perpetual characterization of the individual either in relation to this term, in relation to other individuals, or in relation to a type of itinerary. It thus assures, in the form of continuity and constraint, a growth, an observation, a qualification" (p. 161). That the boys in my class were dressed in pants and the girls in skirts did not just happen. That boys were taught to be physical, to play and that girls were taught to observe is not incidental. It was a process that, over time, focused on "bending behavior" to its proper state. I learned to be passive, at least in while in my school uniform, through my family, my classmates, and my teachers.

The appearance of a correct way of doing gender is important to note, as it is this that teaches us that if we are not doing gender correctly, we must be doing it incorrectly. Of course, as with doing many things incorrectly there is a punishment for not doing it correctly. Punishment of incorrect gender performance serves dual roles: demonstrating and strengthening the stability of the societal expectations which created the binary. Punishment of a transgression depends on how significant the violation as well as the persons who have witnessed the violation of gender norms. The boys and girls at my school who did not perform their gender correctly were scolded by their teachers, and often teased (or even ostracized) by their peers. Again, the leap to a nightclub is not long; when individuals do not perform their gender identity correctly by the standard of the night (80s, Drag or Goth), they can be punished through mocking, threats, or even being ignored. It is through transgressing these rules and repeating the transgressions

over and over again, however, that expectations of gender might change. In considering the importance of transgressing the false binaries that are so standard in society writ large, it is important to consider queer theory; a theory based on the idea of acknowledging and challenging multiple problematic status quos.

### *Queer Theory*

I really enjoyed playing on my sports teams as a kid. A lot of the girls I played on these teams with played multiple sports, like me. I came to recognize them (and they me) over the seasons, even if we weren't on the same team. I knew whose dads coached every year and I learned which teams I liked being a part of and those I didn't like as much. While the girls' sports teams in Agawam weren't especially large, they were constant. There was a certain sense of stability within them. I knew how they ran and I expected it to remain the same; I preferred it to remain the same.

Butler is considered a pioneer in queer theory, though in the preface of the tenth anniversary edition of *Gender Trouble* she acknowledged that she didn't realize her work would be considered so significant in the development of queer theory. Butler (1999) states:

I sought to counter those views that made presumptions about the limits and propriety of gender and restricted the meaning of gender to received notions of masculinity and femininity. It was and remains my view that any feminist theory that restricts the meaning of gender in the presuppositions of its own practice sets up exclusionary gender norms within feminism, often with homophobic consequences (p. viii).

Queer theory and performativity are interrelated both through their respective theorists, but more importantly, for their shared goals. Though differently, each focuses on power, and the importance of inciting societal change based on a problematic status quo.

Dilley (1999) argues: "Queer theory is not simply about the studying of people whose sex lives are not heterosexual or even the positionalities of those people; at its core, it is about questioning the presumptions, values, and viewpoints from those positions (marginal and central), especially those that normally go unquestioned." Even while questioning presumptions, values, and viewpoints from multiple positions, we must recognize that we work within an already built system, and one that does not always work against us. Consider Butler (2004)

To be part of a sexual minority means, most emphatically, that we are also dependent on the protection of public and private spaces, on legal sanctions that protect us from violence, on safeguards of various institutional kinds against unwanted aggression imposed upon us, and the violent actions they sometimes instigate. In this sense, our very lives, and the persistence of our desire, depend on there being norms of recognition that produce and sustain our viability as humans. (p. 33).

The protection of which Butler speaks clearly does not always work, as we've all learned from the lives of Matthew Shepard, a gay man who was robbed, beaten, and tied to a fence by two men and later died, and James Byrd, Jr., a Black man who was beaten by three men and dragged behind one's pickup truck until he died. The push/pull that seems to exist between sets of social rules (doing gender correctly versus shared qualities of human beings) plays out differently in different situations, but the tension

that exists between these sets of social rules is, I believe, part of what allows these different theme nights at a nightclub in a somewhat conservative Midwestern town.

In considering Butler's (1990) theory of performativity as well as queer theory, I must also note the importance of heteronormativity, as queer theory is, in part, about recognizing and attempting to break down heteronormative expectations.

### *Heteronormativity*

Most of my organized sports teams were girls' teams, my soccer team being the only exception. As a child I didn't play much with boys, except in pick-up sports games or the brothers of my friends. As such, I always found it strange when my family members would ask if I had a boyfriend and then laugh a bit (though at what I was unsure). When I answered no, they always told me not to worry, because at some point I would (both be interested and have one.) As I got closer to an age where I might have a boyfriend the questions continued, but without the laughter accompanying them.

Heteronormativity is "the normative status of heterosexuality which renders any other alternative sexualities 'other' and marginal" (Jackson, 1999, p. 163).

Heterosexuality "is sustained by maintaining a silence about itself. [...] Hence, heterosexuality is named by straights only when it is felt to be under threat" (Jackson, 1999, p. 173). My family asked me about my dating life at age ten to be funny, but it also served the purpose of teaching me that by fifteen I should be looking at boys in a way that was somehow different from how I looked at them at ten. At no point was I asked if I had a girlfriend; it was assumed that whatever partner I had would be male. Heteronormativity ties in closely with my prior discussion of binaries and discipline.



Heteronormativity is the status quo and acting outside of that norm results in some form of discipline.

Most nightclub space, too, is heteronormative. Though there are gay nightclubs, one usually assumes that they are walking into a heteronormative space. In engaging in non-(hetero)normative behaviors at nightclub, patrons open themselves up to critique and punishment. In studying a nightclub with different theme nights, heteronormativity is what all other performances are compared against. While we all live in a heteronormative society, the ways in which people do or do not acknowledge and connect with heteronormativity can make up a significant part of their identity.

### *Identity*

As I child I considered myself a girl, nothing more or less. I guess that means I considered myself a normal girl. I knew I was a girl; I knew I did certain things (played sports, went to school, went to Grandma and Grandpa's house) and so I assumed that was what all girls did. As I learned over time that some of my behaviors were not what they should be, I decided I was still a normal girl, even if I wasn't perfect. I knew some perfect girls: some of the girls I went to school with fit the description. They had perfect hair, dressed appropriately, got great grades, and didn't run around too much at recess. I knew them, but I didn't want to *be* them. Being a perfect girl seemed so boring in comparison to being a normal girl.

Identity can be understood as features of a given category that characterize an individual (Heisterkamp & Alberts, 2000). The idea that individuals can "find or lose social identity in social groups" (Williams, 1995, p. 9) is important in understanding how they come to gain identity in the first place. "One feature of the general or type

classification that can help it contribute to someone's identity is that it is thought to explain or underlie a lot of the individual's activities, emotions, reactions and, in general, life" (Williams, 1995, p. 9). This can be used to both validate and discriminate based on what traits are seen as positive or negative. In understanding identity it is important to note that identities are flexible and fluid (Antaki, et al., as cited in Heisterkamp and Alberts, 2000). Identity is also formed by how individuals construct "others" (Lingard, Reznick, DeVito, & Epstein, 2002, p. 729). The idea of constructing others is "the process by which we perceive and implicitly categorize or form impressions about those with whom we come into contact" (Lingard, Reznick, DeVito, & Epstein, 2002). There are many purposes to claiming identities. For example, my understanding of my identity as a girl, and later as a not-perfect girl, was based on those things that I did (play in my school uniform, continue to get Bs instead of As in school) as well as what I saw other girls do (sitting around during recess).

The performance of gender and the expectation of how gender will be performed in different public spaces is going to play into the construction of a given space. For example, I was expected to behave in a certain way while in school that was very different than how I was expected to behave on the softball field. If I was to switch those performances, they would not fit within the given space. My performances would be considered (even more) incorrect and in need of correction. The continued incorrect performances by groups of individuals, however, would force society to look at those spaces differently than it had in the past. To subvert dominant ideologies within public space certain transgressions of appropriate behavior must occur (Cresswell, 1996). Trauger (2004) found that visibility was often a key to finding comfort when performing

gender non-traditionally. While the female farmers in Trauger's (2004) study were often treated as though they were out of place in some areas, alternative areas, such as co-ops, were more welcoming because there were more women in the space. Doing gender differently is, again, about having a space to do so without punishment, or finding a place that will allow that performance.

Butler's (1999) attempt to understand identity asks, "To what extent is 'identity' a normative ideal rather than a descriptive feature of experience?" (p. 23). One way to consider this is to look at what I considered a girl to be: my reality ("normal girl") did not match my Grandmother's and teachers' expectations (what I considered to be a "perfect girl"). She goes on to ask, "How do the regulatory practices that govern gender also govern culturally intelligible notions of identity?" (p. 23). I find this second question to be particularly useful as it asks us to look at the ways society claims identity can be done correctly or incorrectly. Identity claims do not just happen; "correct" gender performances do not just happen. The regulatory practices determine not just the correct or incorrect performances, but what we can claim those performances that are correct or incorrect to be.

Bernstein (2002) claims that identity can be used to critique mainstream ideas. While I agree with Bernstein, reading Butler's questions regarding identity makes me recognize that this critique does not happen without a reaction from mainstream society. Though I can make a claim of "lesbian" and find a community of other individuals who also claim that identity, there is a societal punishment for making that claim over one of a heterosexual identity. That punishment is the mainstream reaction of my identity claim that is made as a critique of society. The concepts of "Drag Night" and "Goth Night" at

the very least imply they are catering to larger group identities, but there is also an implication that Drag and Goth identities are some “other” identities which require separation from mainstream club space. Though these nights are separated from the mainstream club nights through time (the beginning of the week versus the weekend), they do take place in the same physical space. I argue that the space in which Drag and Goth nights happen are a different space than the mainstream club. The sense of community that group members get in claiming an identity can also affect the ways in which they use and claim space; I discuss this concept through considering a performativity of space.

### *Performativity of space*

I just never really enjoyed ballet the way that I enjoyed my other activities as a child. The ballet studio on Saturday morning was an obligation, like going to church or school (both are places I didn’t enjoy going as a child). The one hour once a week, even having made friends in the class, took forever. The space, which so many other girls seemed excited to enter, was just something I had to do before I could go play softball or basketball or soccer. Because of my mother’s enthusiasm, or maybe because I couldn’t wear my leg warmers in class, or maybe because I was just not that flexible (both in body and opinion) the ballet studio became more prison than utopia each Saturday morning. The following studies have used performativity to study particular social spaces (one actually being a ballet studio).

Bell, Binnie, Cream, & Valentine (1994) study the performativity of space through a study of hypermasculine “gay skinheads” and hyperfeminine “lipstick lesbians.” They theorize space through the concept of straight space. While they agree that there is gay

space, it is the exception to the rule. They believe, therefore, that all other spaces are implicitly labeled as straight. They state: "Employing Butler's notion that there is a potential for transgressive politics within the parodying of heterosexual constructs, we try to assess whether the parallel argument can be made for the production of spaces" (Bell, et al., 1994, p. 33). They found, through studying the identity performance of "gay skinheads" and "lipstick lesbians" in particular heterosexual spaces that they were unable to determine if transgression occurred. Due to the authors' multiple positionalities, they had multiple readings of the performativity that occurred within the studied spaces and the level of success in the parody performed by the "gay skinheads" and "lipstick lesbians."

Performativity of place, as studied in a ballet studio by Hamera (2005), occurs through the change of the ballet studio from space to place. Through observation and interviews, Hamera studies dance at LeStudio and the ways in which identity and space come together for the dancers who work and take lesson at LeStudio. Citing de Certeau, she labels space as having limitless opportunities for change, while place is fixed and stable. She argues that "the construction and reproduction of place from space can be explored in performative terms" (p. 95). This change from space to place occurs through performances of mundane acts, particularly the role of bodies and the organization of the studio within the space. "These bodies are themselves viewed as spaces to be organized by technical protocols, then performatively stabilized" (p. 96). Through literally placing bodies in the space, organizing them, and teaching them proper movements, the studio (and the bodies within the studio) are marked. Place is also created through the individuals within the ballet studio. Through the dancers'

individual narratives and fantasies (and looking backward to years past or forward to what might be) they are able to create place. Hamera's (2005) study ties into my ethnography in multiple ways. Its most important link, however, is the ways in which individuals' performances can be used to create place (or in my case, space). As chapters three and four note: the identity performances that occur in the space help to construct a performative space, a space that changes over time and from night to night.

Conlon's (2004) study of Christopher Park, a small park in Greenwich Village, as a gay space, focuses on the stability and fluidity of queer space. This study uses both textual analysis of historical documents as well as ethnography of the space contemporarily to determine the stability and/or fluidity of the space. Her ethnography focused on the "number, location, and activity patterns of park users at any given time, as well as interactions among park users" (p. 472). She noticed the performativity of space through two themes: tourism and homelessness. Tourists would regularly visit the park to see the Gay Liberation monument there. She argues, "With this, sanitized and economically driven productions of what amount to pseudo public spaces are reinstated" (p. 473). The homeless persons who frequented the park blurred the line between public space and private. The middle-class persons who frequented the park would label the (homeless) others as "disruptive miscreants" (p. 475) thereby claiming the space as rightfully their own, middle class space.

Conlon's (2004) understanding of performativity of space comes from joining Lefebvre's concept of space and Butler's concept of performativity. "In this sense space and identity, as well as representation and discourse, are mutually constituted and our productive bodies constitute performative spaces" (p. 464). Conlon determined that the

social space was produced both as hegemonic patriarchal space but also as a transgressive space. She notes the importance of recognizing the impossibility of authenticity in social space and sexual identity. She concludes by suggesting extending research within public space while recognizing the possibility of performative spaces.

Similarly to the multiple creations of ballet studio (particularly considering how I viewed the space as compared to the ways in which my classmates *appeared* to view the space), I believe the space at the nightclub has multiple performances based on more than just the night. In considering the individuals who are at a given night, both who is working and who is attending, the space will change, creating a different performance of space.

### *Conclusion*

I'm glad I didn't go to school and live in the same town. My separation of school and school friends from my home life and in-town friends made my life a lot easier. While I was always at least mildly unsuccessful at performing "perfect girl" at school, I usually did a good job of performing "athletic girl" when playing with my friends in town. In removing myself from the consistent criticism of my performance(s) at school, I was able to relax, have fun with, and not be punished by my friends from town. It is possible that I avoided punishment in town because of my "correct" performance of athletic girl, but it is also possible that some of the girls I played with had similar problems with "correct" performances in one venue balanced with "incorrect" performances in another, thereby recognizing our similarities.

As I noted in my review of literature, Shome (2003) discusses the importance of studying space and not only identity. While I agree, I also believe it would be

problematic to study space without studying identity. They are, to a degree, co-constructed. As such, while my study focuses on the performativity of space, I cannot ignore the importance of identity within the site I am studying. Just like my performances of “girl” were somewhat different from school to the softball field (at least after multiple corrections by my family and teachers), so too do my performances of club attendee differ from night to night (and space to space). Using the themes above, I apply each to identity performances in the club, and then note the ways in which identity performances carry forward a performance of space.

My research questions are focused around this co-construction of identity and space: I ask how these spaces are created; how the spaces change from night-to-night; and who is involved in creating the spaces. In working from a belief that the performance(s) of gender that occur at Club North differ from night-to-night, I use Butler’s (1990) theory of performativity to note the ways in which those performances happen. Through binaries and discipline, queer theory, heteronormativity, and identity I can focus on change within the space. Through analyzing my field notes and transcripts, I note moments where these concepts are discussed overtly and those that can be noted through interaction. In seeing the ways in which Butler’s themes are applied to identity performances (chapter three) and the ways in which those performances take place in the space, I am able to argue that the space is performative and show the ways in which the performativity occurred (chapter four). As I am looking at the performativity of space including and through identity performance, the most effective way for me to do this study is through ethnography. By participating in the culture, interviewing individuals involved in the culture, and observing the ways in which



the space is created I hope to have answered my research questions more fully than I would through other methods.

### Methodology

I have proposed three main questions for this dissertation: how is the space used differently on different nights; who is involved in changing the space; and how does the use of the space on one night alter how the space is used on subsequent nights. In choosing both theory and method that will aid in answering these questions, I have chosen to use critical ethnography because it gives me the best tools not only to learn about the space, but to critique what is happening within it.

As explained above, performativity is a critical theory; critical theory often focuses on power structures within society and seeks change within those structures. In asking critical questions, and using critical theory to answer those questions, it is often best to use a critical method to collect data and assist in answering the proposed research questions. Because this study relies on examining queer populations, a group identified as marginalized and thus always already framed within power, I use critical ethnography here in order to examine this cultural site. This study can frame how social spaces are used within everyday power structures. In recognizing the ways in which power is produced in a nightclub, I can more accurately discuss the ways in which identity performance and the performance of space, happen.

According to Thomas (1993), one of the main differences between conventional and critical ethnography is the role the researcher plays in comparison to his/her audience:

Conventional ethnographers generally speak *for* their subjects, usually to an audience of other researchers. Critical ethnographers, by contrast, accept an added research task of raising their voice to speak *to* an audience *on behalf* of their subjects as a means of empowering them by giving more authority to the subjects' voice...Conventional ethnographers study culture for the purpose of describing it; critical ethnographers do so to change it (p. 4, emphasis in original).

Additionally, Lindlof and Taylor (2002) suggest that historically critical theorists and interpretive ethnographers have clashed due to their differing beliefs. Critical theorists have argued that interpretive ethnographers "...mistake cultural members' *consent* to dominant arrangement for their *endorsement* and ignore the political complicity of a 'neutral' research stance" (p. 53, emphasis in original). In turn, interpretivists have argued that critical theory is not appropriate for qualitative research. More recently, however, critical researchers have begun to use "ethnographic methods to produce careful and empathic descriptions of everyday life" (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002, p. 54). In making use of critical research questions as well as critical theory to answer those questions, critical ethnography is a better choice than conventional ethnography to complete this study.

Carbaugh (1990) discusses three dimensions of the critical voice in ethnography: the object of criticism, the locus of criticism, and the mode of criticism. Different critical voices exist as one falls into different spaces within those three dimensions. Part of his purpose is "to highlight a premise in some critical voices that is often left unquestioned, namely, criticism equals an unveiling of power, a display of resources distributed unequally" (Carbaugh, 1989/1990, p. 278). In doing this, often the voice of the culture

being studied is silenced, which will, at best, limit the usefulness of the study. I make note of this because, as a critical researcher, I look for power structures and ask how those structures alter the culture. This is not to say that is not useful; it is only to say that I had to be careful that I was not forcing my own agenda on the culture I studied. To account for this, I relied on my participants' statements in conjunction with my field notes to back up all claims I made. In avoiding focusing solely on what I was seeing and including my notes along with transcripts, I was able to determine what themes existed across texts.

Madison (2005) argues: "Critical ethnography begins with an ethical responsibility to address processes of unfairness or injustice within a particular *lived* domain" (p.5). She goes on to say that critical ethnographers attempt to change the status quo by making visible the power structures that exist in the culture being studied. Carbaugh's (1989/1990) and Madison's (2005) understandings of critical ethnography read as though they are different, but I don't believe that to be the case. The importance of ethics within all research, particularly critical ethnography comes into play here. While Madison discusses the importance of making power structures visible, she also warns of ethnographers seeing only what they choose to see. It is here where Carbaugh's and Madison's understandings meet. Critical ethnography has a purpose of inciting change, but with the ethical responsibility of really trying to find what is there, not what the researcher *wants* to see there.

Madison (2005) argues that to successfully complete a critical ethnography one must recognize their positionality as a researcher and the way in which that relates to subjectivity. Positionality goes beyond subjectivity in that it focuses on "how our

subjectivity *in relation to the Other* informs and is informed by our engagement and representation of the Other” (p. 9, emphasis in original). Additionally, while my experience in the field is important, it cannot be *only* my experience. Within any period of time in the field I must recognize that while I am experiencing an event, so too are the Others I am studying. Furthermore, my experiencing of the event has, to some degree, changed it. Critical ethnography, according to Madison (2005), involves multiple perspectives. It is “a meeting of multiple sides in an encounter with and among the Other(s), one in which there is negotiation and dialogue toward substantial and viable meanings that make a difference in the Other’s world” (p.9).

Important to note is that critical ethnography is not just for “obviously oppressed or socially marginalized groups” (Thomas, 1993, p. 4). It also includes those who are not so clearly oppressed, because most people have experienced some form of oppression regardless of cultural categorization. Additionally, consider Madison’s (2005) discussion of the role of the critical ethnographer to the Other. She argues that audiences can “experience the partial presence of a temporal conversation constituted by the Other’s voice, body, history, and yearnings” (p. 10). Within my study, it is not just the clearly marginalized groups, (potentially gay persons at drag night or individuals who engage in goth culture) but also the weekend nights where the “regular” patrons attend where individuals have experienced oppression. Through critical ethnography, the Other (both those whom we would recognize as other and those we might not) can be best given the opportunity to express their experiences and opinions.

*Method*

*Access.* Prior to beginning a research project a researcher must gain access to the site the researcher plans to study (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002). Most often, the researcher must negotiate with some kind of “gatekeeper,” the individual who has the authority to approve or deny access into a particular research site (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002). While I do not have a problem literally gaining access to my site, as it is a public club, I did still need to gain permission from the owner to recruit participants to interview. Madison (2005) suggests writing not only a research proposal but also a “lay summary,” which will address common concerns that individuals involved in the research might have. Madison (2005) states, “...the purpose of the lay summary is to explain your project to the people who are central to it; therefore they have a right to know, and you have a responsibility to explain your presence in their lives” (p. 23). The lay summary is very similar to the informed consent form required by the Human Subjects Review Board (HSRB), and as such I have already completed it.

Thomas (1993) argues the importance of choosing the most appropriate sources for one’s study. The key is to find sources who have “insider’s knowledge” (p. 37) of the site. For the purpose of this study, both employees of the club as well as its regular patrons will probably have some insider’s knowledge. It is also important to recognize which participants you can easily contact again, versus the participants you will only have one opportunity to interview. Within a college town, this is important to note: depending on the time of year (summer, holiday break) there will be more or fewer potential participants. Thomas suggests that the participants whom the researcher

might not be able to meet more than once should be saved for the end of the study, as that is when the research will be most defined.

*Gathering data.* I collected data through two means: participant observation and qualitative interviewing. VanMaanen (1988) states that fieldwork requires the ethnographer to engage in the culture as much as possible; to put it another way, I involved myself in the environment and, as best I could, immersed myself in the problems of the culture. Before I began this study I had gone to the club as a participant in the culture. As a participant observer, I continued to go to the club and engage socially; however, I also observed the goings on of the club. I immersed myself in the culture of the club and took note of the space and the identity performances that occurred in that space.

Over the course of approximately one year I attended fifteen 80s Nights, thirty-three Drag Nights, and seven Goth Nights. Additionally, I attended several times on Friday and Saturday nights. While I did not attend each of the three theme nights equally, the observations from each night allowed me to see the ways in which the space was used on a given night. I chose to focus this dissertation on Drag Night because of the literature based around gay club space and opportunity to see the ways in which 80s Night bled into Drag Night and Drag Night bled into Goth night. Drag Night is the day that links all three theme nights together. Also, given my focus on sexuality and gender, Drag Night was the most directly related to my research questions.

According to Lindlof & Taylor (2002) there are two ways in which researchers become competent participant observers: first, through learning to perform identity so that it is accepted by the group being studied; second, through learning to create notes

that are, over time, “increasingly sharp, detailed and theoretically relevant” (p. 135).

Participant observation also varies based how involved the researcher is in the site. The authors discuss “passive” versus “active” participant observers; I would qualify as the latter. Active observers attempt to gain a more thorough understanding of the culture being studied by being more active within the culture as a whole and through “decreasing the status and activity differences between themselves as participants” (p. 144).

I chose not to take field notes at the club. Ethnographers, by their nature of being in the space, change the environment they study. As a critical ethnographer, I hoped to change the environment I studied, as it related to understanding how and for whom the space was used. I preferred not to, however, change the atmosphere of the club as related to how people might have reacted to my scribbling notes in a nightclub. Writing field notes in the space clearly does not fit with the general use of the space. As such, I scheduled my time so that after returning from the club, I immediately wrote down my observations from a given evening. I began by writing down actual observations, and I separately recorded reactions to and theories about those observations.

Lindlof & Taylor (2002) state that fieldnotes “are supposed to describe (and at least initially interpret) the field experience” (p. 160). While Lindlof & Taylor (2002) note that there are many different opinions on what should be included in fieldnotes and how, they suggest fieldnotes should: be written at, or after returning from the site; show a chronological account of the researcher’s time in the field; have extensive description of the activities and individuals within the site. One of the problems with fieldnotes is that after a visit to the site the notes are all that is left to support an account that events did

occur, and they did occur in a certain way. The researcher cannot go back and relive the event being studied. As such, Lindlof & Taylor note that the researcher carries a burden to write his or her field notes as accurately and carefully as possible.

The second area of data collection for this study occurred through qualitative interviews with club patrons and workers. One of the major purposes of and advantages to qualitative interviewing is that it gives the interviewee the opportunity to discuss his or her experience in their own words (Rubin & Rubin, 1995). This, of course, is one of the goals of qualitative interviewing – understanding experience. There are three types of experiential understanding that are shared through qualitative interviews: stories, accounts, and explanations. Stories allow the researcher to understand the interviewee's experience through his or her (the interviewee's) eyes. Through the interviewee's language and emphasis it allows the researcher to understand at least some of the importance of what the interviewee is referencing (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002). Accounts are "justifications for social conduct" (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002, p. 173). Explanations have the goal of "draw[ing] out the individual, interpersonal, or cultural logic that people employ in their communicative performances" (p. 174). Prior to getting any of this information from my participants, I first had to gain their trust.

Building rapport is one of the most important tasks a researcher undertakes in interviewing. Most often the researcher and interviewee have not met before, and it is important that the interviewee be put as much at ease as possible (Madison, 2005). Straightforward ways of doing this include having clarity of purpose as a researcher, and clearly explaining to the interviewee what the process is, and what the researcher hopes to learn from the interviewee. For example, telling my participants that I have



certain questions for them, but that I would like them to bring up questions that I may have forgotten about , or talk about other areas that seem important. I would argue that sensitivity and self-disclosure also fall under the category of rapport building.

Self-disclosure can be a useful tool in building rapport and making an interviewee more comfortable. Often, particularly when dealing with sensitive issues, self-disclosure makes the interview feel less formal, and more like a dialogue. Often feminist researchers use self-disclosure in their interviews (Reinharz, 1992). When doing an interview that has questions of a sensitive nature, usually it is best to ask those questions toward the end of the interview. Sometimes the researcher will not need to ask those questions, as the answers may have come up through other narratives. Other times, the researcher will need to ask those questions, but the interviewee is usually more comfortable with the researcher by the end of the interview than they are at the beginning. This is important to consider for my study, since some of the areas that came up in the interviews were sensitive in nature.

While it was important to have a plan of what I asked my participants, qualitative interviewing allows for more flexibility than some other methods of interviewing. According to Lindlof & Taylor (2002) an interview schedule is more formal and fixed than an interview guide. An interview guide has questions that do not necessarily need to be asked in a particular order, and not all of the questions necessarily need to be asked. The flexibility of an interview guide allows the researcher to ask some questions to get the interview started and then ask other questions based specifically on the interviewees answers. I used an interview guide for my interviews. Some questions I used are attached in the appendix.

After I completed by participant observation I began recruiting people for interviews. With HSRB approval, I printed and hung approximately 100 flyers around campus and at certain businesses in town. On campus, flyers were posted on bulletin boards outside as well as in certain information boards within academic buildings. In town, flyers were posted at a 24-hour grill next to the club, the post office, and a coffee shop. Additionally, I emailed students on campus to notify them of the study.

I have interviewed twelve individuals, two who work at the club and ten who attend the club regularly. The interviews were conducted in my office and a local coffee shop. The interviews lasted between forty-five and seventy-five minutes each. The interviews began with questions from the interview guide, but then each interview went in a slightly different direction; some interviews focused more on identity within the space, others more on spatial practices. Though the interviews were not uniform, they all focused on the themes with which a particular participant had experience. Some interviews focused on a particular night while others on particular practices. These differing interviews afforded me a wider lens than I might otherwise have had, had I focused on maintaining a strict interview guide.

*Analysis.* Thomas (1993) describes data analysis as the “*defamiliarization* process in which we revise what we have seen and translate it into something new” (p. 43, emphasis in original). It is at this point in the research where the I can pull apart the ways in which power is unequally distributed, and use my data to see where and how norms are created and reified. I analyzed my data using performativity. Warren (2003) argues: “Performativity grants social agents a conceptual lens for meaningful critique...and a transformative social project” (p. 35). As my goal for this dissertation is

to understand how the nightclub space is used and how it changes, performativity gives me the best tools to both meet those goals and to recognize the ways in which power structures alter and/or maintain the space.

When starting data analysis, I had to determine “the best way to group or cluster all this material so that it will help me focus on my analysis” (Madison, 2005, p. 37).

When coding data, Madison (2005) notes, “The process of grouping is not only about putting similar categories together; the very selections and act of grouping is creating a point of view” (p. 37). Madison (2005) has several tips for further analyzing data. Once the researcher has determined categories, further analysis includes: examining each topic within a given category; compare and contrast the topic within the categories – in doing this overlapping topics will be discovered – sometimes this warrants re-arranging categories.

Like my experience of learning to curtsy and practicing my walk prior to Candy’s wedding, this chapter is focused on learning and practicing before I move forward to the findings of my study. Through studying the literature of prior studies related to space, theory, and methodology, I can move forward into my own study confident in my abilities. Not only am I confident in my abilities to curtsy and walk in heels without falling, but to collect data thoroughly, recognize moments that matter in the space, and to be able to apply theory to what I’ve found within my site and through my interviews.

## CHAPTER III. DRAGGING IDENTITIES

I seldom think about preparing for Drag Night; I just go. I'm sure this wasn't always the case, but I've been doing it for awhile now and so the process has ceased being a process for me and is now just part of my routine. My wardrobe is built for Drag Night, at least in some ways. I can wear jeans, boots, and a button-down shirt and fit right in. I can wear cargo shorts, a tank-top, and sandals and fit in too. It's easy. I like it because I don't have to do the work of preparing to go to a club to visually fit in on this night at this particular club.

Of course, I don't *just* go. It does feel like it though. This Tuesday night I've been sitting around watching television wearing the same clothes I've been wearing all day. After the nine o'clock show is over I wander back to my bathroom to get ready to go to Drag Night. After a five minute shower and picking out a bra and matching boyshorts (I've really never understood why they're called that) I wander over to my dresser and pull out a pair of jeans (whichever ones are on top.) Walking back to the other side of my bedroom, I open my closet to choose a button-down shirt. I choose a shirt that is quickly turning into my new favorite: a blue and white striped shirt that I paid far too much for at Brooks Brothers. After buttoning the shirt I grab my brown leather belt, my brown boots, and some knee-high socks and walk back into the living room.

The socks are fun (one of my friends labeled them schizophrenic). They're knee high socks that have a different pattern every four inches or so: green toe, pink vertical stripes, black and white horizontal stripes, blue with butterflies (or mosquitoes). They're fun. Rolling up my jeans, I put the socks on, and pull the boots on after them. Zipping

the boots, I stand up, roll my jeans down and look down. Long jeans and brown boot toes – that's all you can see. There's no hint of the fun socks hiding underneath.

Wandering back into the bathroom I quickly brush my hair down (with a brush made for a person who has a lot more hair than me – I should just use a comb) and grab my (made in Vermont) lip gloss and apply it. After sliding my belt through the loops on my jeans, I walk back into the living room, slide my license and money into my pocket, grab my cell phone and keys and walk out the door. Once I'm out of the shower the whole thing only takes about seven minutes.

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Preparing for dark wave party night – what I've always called Goth Night – is a hell of a lot more difficult than preparing for drag night. I know full well I don't have the right things to wear and so I've wasted more than half an hour (a lifetime for me) trying on and taking off clothes. I know I have to wear the darkest things I have or risk standing out like the non-goth listening, t-shirt and jeans wearing, folk rock music listening, lesbian that I am. On what feels like the tenth try, I've got it: black boots, very, very dark blue jeans, and a black tank top layered over an army green tank top, over the best black push-up bra I've got.

Adding to my discomfort is the makeup I have lined up across my sink. I'm usually fine with the basics, but I always hate the eye liner and mascara because I have (on more than one occasion) poked myself in the eye. My lack of practice is telling because it takes me much longer than I know it should to finish. After getting through the eye liner and mascara, I slide my glasses back on; I really can't tell that I'm even wearing it. Ah, an excellent use of fifteen minutes. I quickly put on some lip gloss and

move into the bedroom where I have a larger mirror. Staring at myself in the mirror, I blush. I feel the heat rising from my chest, up my neck into my cheeks. What I'm wearing is much more revealing than what I generally feel comfortable in. What I really want to do is grab button-down shirt to throw over the top of this, and knowing I'm meeting my friends for a drink before going to Goth night, I do just that.

Walking in to meet my friends for a drink, I try to look confident despite the fact that my breasts are much more noticeable than usual and I can still feel that flush of embarrassment. Getting near the table where my friends are sitting, I hear one of them teasingly yell, "You slut!" and the other turns to look and just quirks an eyebrow and smiles. Rolling my eyes at their reaction I have to quickly wipe my palms on my jeans because they've started to sweat. Clearly I am off my game, as Nick, the bartender, has to call to me three times before I realize my drink is still sitting on the counter.

While gender is done through a stylized repetition of acts, I find it interesting that to go into a subversive sub-culture, I end up doing gender "better," according to the mainstream, than I do in my own everyday life (Butler, 1990). Boots, form-fitting clothes, and even a bit of makeup: perhaps this is my own subversion of my own way of doing gender. The repetition of acts does make gender feel natural – I feel natural in *my* way of doing gender. Being dressed in these form-fitting clothes makes me nervous. I keep looking down at my chest, making sure everything is staying where it was put.

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This chapter focuses on the process of performing identity, discursively and bodily. Through narratives of their experiences at Club North, participants both claimed and rejected identities in particular ways. Using both participants' narratives and my

field notes, I show that while there is some continuity between the identities individuals performed discursively and bodily, this is not always the case. These performances (both those that matched discursive and bodily and those that did not) have implications for not only individual identity performances, but also the ways in which the space of Club North is performed.

Hetherington (1998), in his study on expression, identity, and space, argued, “Identity, as well as being about identification and organization is also about spatiality. In part, this means that identity involves an identification with particular places, whether local or national. It also means that certain spaces act as sites for the performance of identity” (p. 105). While this quote focuses on the importance of space for identity, I argue the opposite is true as well. This dissertation, while focused on space, must include a thorough discussion of identity performance in the space because those performances by individuals are a large part of the performativity of space.

Consider the example above: my getting ready for Drag Night and Goth Night. My selection, my putting on, of particular clothes marks both my own identity performance, but also marks the performance of the space. Walking into Goth Night in the clothes I’d worn to Drag Night (or vice versa) does, in some way, change the space. My attendance at these nights changed the space. One cannot fully consider the performance of a social space without considering the individual performances that are happening in that space.

In arguing that the performance of identity makes up an important part of the performance of space, I’ve chosen to separate the two. While I believe the two are co-constructed, I’ve chosen to break them into different chapters for clarity. I’ve chosen to

divide this chapter up into two main sections: discursive performance and embodied performance. This is not to say that performances can always be easily marked as *either* discursive or embodied, but these themes allow me the opportunity to discuss the ways in which performances happened differently while not negating the performances that can cross both themes. Within the two themes, there are subsections of: membership / authenticity, outsiders, and community. I've used the same subsections within each theme because within the different types of performance, participants' experiences fell into similar categories. This mirroring emphasizes the argument that discursive and embodied performances cannot be considered completely different entities; while through different means, the ways in which performances occurred was similar throughout.

One of my guiding thoughts questioned who was involved in changing the space from night to night. Through studying these performances of identity, I have an opportunity to see the ways in which these different performances of identity (and the ways in which the embodied performances do and do not match with particular discursive performances of identity) create and change the space at Club North.

### Discursive Performances

The phrase discursive performance describes the verbal communication used to demonstrate a particular performance. The participants in this study readily claimed particular identities: student, sorority member, bouncer, bartender, gay, straight. In addition to claiming these and other identities, they constructed these and other identities in particular ways; they explained what these identities were. To clarify, they did not necessarily define each identity after they claimed it, but through their



explanation of what they and others were doing, their identities were constructed in particular ways.

This section on discursive performance has three subsections: membership, outsiders, and community. I chose these three subsections because these were the ways in which participants most clearly identified their (and others') construction of identity. The themes of membership and outsiders came up most often; participants shared a great deal of information related to belonging (being a member) or not (being an outsider). The community subtheme came up as a third option; when participants were not discussing Club North as a place of insiders versus outsiders it was instead a place of community. I included the themes in this particular order because this is the way they were primarily discussed: insiders, outsiders, and then a togetherness not focused on insider or outsider.

#### *Membership – authenticity*

Drag and Goth Nights have, what appears at first glance, to be particular membership requirements. Indeed, through my own observation and interviews with individuals who attend Club North on these nights, there appears to be a particular member that fits each of these nights. It is this appearance of a certain identity that allows for a claim of authenticity. This is not the same as saying there *is* an actual authenticity. By claiming the label of “authentic”, members are able to label others as authentic or inauthentic; members use these labels of authenticity to engage in labeling persons as insiders or outsiders. By labeling themselves insiders (and by naming others as outsiders) individuals are able to reinforce their claim on the space. There is a certain degree of posturing as relates to the theme nights. I belong on *this* night and you belong

on *that* night, due to the ways in which I see myself doing things on a given night versus the way I see you doing things on a given night.

In interviews with participants, claims of authenticity were not usually overt. Claims, instead, came through narratives comparing nights. In comparing nights participants talked about where they fit and why they attended particular nights and not others.

You go on Tuesday and the majority [of people are] lesbians or gays. There are a few straight people, but everyone in there has an understanding that you won't be judged if you go there, if you take your girlfriend there, if you take your boyfriend there. I mean you can take your same-sex [partner] and you're not going to be judged. You can feel free to hold hand or kiss in public and it is not going to be a taboo thing, versus on a Saturday. I'm not a racist in any form, but you go there [on a Saturday] and there are a lot of Black guys that are dancing up on you and if you go there with your girlfriend they're going to judge you, label you as gay. So it's a lot different in that you're going to be judged less going out on a Tuesday than on a Saturday (Dorothy).

Dorothy illustrates who she considers to be an authentic member of Drag Night at Club North, and to a degree, who she considers to belong "on the weekend." One does not necessarily need to be gay or lesbian to be an authentic member of Drag Night, but one should be accepting of same-sex relationships and overt expressions of same-sex affection. On the weekend, which seems to read as the average night (a "regular" night) as compared to the Tuesday Drag Night, the people who belong are heterosexual and potentially persons of color. Additionally, though she did not state it, her quote implies

both that there are not many Black men at Drag Night and that Black men at the club on Saturdays are more likely to be homophobic than are the rest of the individuals at the club. While she states that one will be judged less going on a Tuesday, that seems to apply only to gay and lesbian appearing individuals and, from her statement, potentially only White gay and lesbian individuals.

Both through my observation of Club North and through interviews with participants, the lack of persons of color at Drag Night is well-documented. The town where Club North is located is a primarily White town and the University has a very high population of White students. The Tuesday Drag Night rarely has more than a few persons of color who attend regularly; the percentage of persons of color who attend drag night is lower even than the percentage of persons of color in the University. This difference in attendance may have to do with a less visible population of GLBT persons of color in this town.

Some participants implied a certain membership on a given night, but were not as overt as Dorothy in their labeling of a night as belonging to one group or another. In other words, participants talked about a particular night with the assumption that I already knew who the members of a particular night were. Tim discussed the different nights of the week as related to the music played on each night. "You base it off the music. Thursday, Friday are definitely more hip-hop, rap oriented. Saturday up there it's top-forty dance music...I can't remember a single time when there hasn't been strictly techno played on a Tuesday night." While Tim did note that other things were happening in addition to the music, such as drag performances, he mostly described the nights as relates to the music played each night. Membership, in this example, involves

a commitment to a particular type of music. An authentic member is one who listens to, dances to, and appreciates a particular type of music and bases their evenings out on what is being played at the club; it is not necessarily about the type of person at the club on a particular night. Music is an important part of space, not just identity. In chapter four, when discussing Club North as a recreation space, there is further discussion of music as an important part of performing space.

My own expectations of membership at Drag Night, particularly at the beginning of the project, fit into this trap of perceived authenticity. While walking around the dance floor at Club North on Drag Night, I saw one woman who appeared to be alone. As I kept walking and looking around, I started to think that she might think that I was looking at her and trying to flirt with her. At Drag Night I had considered myself an “authentic,” read as lesbian, member, and had read that woman as one too. This experience helped me note two things: first, like my participants I had some preconceived notion of an authentic member of Drag Night; second, with my assumption of authentic member as lesbian, my expectation that other individuals are inauthentic (i.e. heterosexual) even while reading them as lesbian and feel uncomfortable at my assumed flirting. While studying a supposed gay-friendly, potentially queer, site my own heteronormative expectations influenced how I saw the persons in the club. I assumed her inauthenticity despite the fact that: there is no truly authentic member of Drag Night and that the woman very may well have been gay. Having considered the above, I realized I’m still working under the assumption that my concern about perceived flirting hinges on that individual’s sexual orientation; my assumption that if she was not a lesbian she would automatically be offended by my perceived flirting.

Authenticity is claimed not only by what type of person fits at a particular night, but also by skill level. Much like Urquía's (2005) study, Tara labels an authentic member of Club North as one who can dance, and those who can't do not fit as an authentic member.

Because if you can't dance, usually people who can't dance don't like going to Club North because they get looked down on or they don't get a dance. Like, usually people who listen to that type of music [hip-hop / rap] can dance (Tara). Tara is a person who attends Club North only on the weekends. She said she chooses to attend on the weekend at Club North due to it being a more ethnically and racially diverse space than other clubs in town or even than other nights at Club North. Additionally, she considers Club North to be a more "rap friendly culture" and believes people go for that reason. Tara's belief of an authentic member of Club North is one who can dance; additionally being a person who (authentically) enjoys hip-hop music is being a person who can dance. This is problematic on two levels: presumably not everyone who can dance enjoys hip-hop and not everyone who enjoys hip-hop can dance. Authenticity, in this case, is drawn off a stereotype that is damaging both to patrons on the weekend at Club North and patrons who attend during the week.

Participants used authenticity as a marker of their own status in the club. By claiming authentic member, participants were able to make that authenticity mean something by implying (or overtly stating) that others were outsiders and, therefore, did not belong in the space. This is important to consider in the larger theme of discursive identity because the process of claiming authenticity cannot occur without something to compare that authenticity to; or, authenticity does not mean anything without outsiders.

While not all of my participants discussed what made someone a member (or an authentic individual in the space) they did discuss what made someone an outsider. In some instances, participants told me what made them an outsider on a particular night. This concept of being an outsider (both individually claiming outsider and being labeled as an outsider by others) is the focus of the next subsection of this discursive performance theme.

### *Outsiders*

Most individuals have had some experience with outsiders (including labeling, either passively or actively, individuals as outsiders) and being labeled by others as outsiders. Through this study I saw, heard about, and experienced being labeled as an outsider within the site. Though it is even less pleasant to consider as a researcher, I also saw, heard about and experienced labeling others as outsiders within the site. This process, while opposite sides of the same coin, is closely related to the concept of authenticity of identity. Those who are not considered authentic members are outsiders. I will discuss the performing of outsider later in the chapter; here I will discuss claiming the identity of outsider.

Individuals claimed the identity of the outsider in two ways: they discussed not belonging on a certain night (but going anyway); and choosing not to attend on a certain night because they feel they didn't belong. Many of the participants used Goth Night as their example of a night where they did not belong and therefore did not attend:

And I think like I would try to dress it, but I think that people would know. Like just like on... on drag night like I feel like I did still kind of stick out because like I didn't really fit in (Beth).

Rho also had an experience with claiming outsider status on Goth Night:

Rho: It's funny that I said that I would never go because me and my best friend, one night we were trying to convince all of our guy friends to dress in all black and we wore black hair wigs.

AMD: You wore black hair?

Rho: Hair wigs. We would do this, get fish nets. But then again it would be one of those things that no one would know us there and I feel like they would feel we were making fun of them and we would be. Not intentionally, but we would try to be fitting in. You know what I mean?

Though each of the above participants claimed themselves to be outsider in comparison to the individuals who attend Goth Night, there is a way in which they were also marking the Goth Night participants as outsider while claiming a mainstream identity for themselves. Through negation they labeled themselves as normal or average because they did not perform identity in the same ways as Goth Night participants. I do not mean to label these two participants as different than my other participants; each of the participants claimed a particular identity by claiming what they were not. Through the introduction to this chapter, where I discuss putting on my faux Goth identity, I too claimed an identity by explaining the ways in which I did not (usually) fit a Goth identity. Through struggling to perform an identity "correctly" (like my Goth Night performance), individuals note how out "outsider" happens.

Participants also talked about being an outsider and choosing to attend the club under the assumption that they did not fit. Dorothy, in particular, talks about this as relates to the weekend.

Dorothy: A lot of my friends [say], “There’s no way I’m going to a straight bar completely sober.” We’ve done it before, but I’ve got to drink X amount of beer before I go out there.

AMD: Which I think is interesting, Club North as straight bar and then we’re assuming, and I do it too, [that] Club North is a gay bar on Tuesdays right?

Dorothy: At least [at] Club North you have to function within it. Oh well, the next day it’s not [a gay bar] and most of the other times it’s not [a gay bar].

Despite the fact that she and her friends are not necessarily comfortable in Club North on a weekend, they sometimes choose to go anyway, knowing that they will not necessarily fit in. As she said, “you have to function within it.” This functioning within it included enjoying going out on Tuesday where she did not have to monitor her behavior as much. When she and her friends would choose to go on the weekend she would monitor her behavior and yet still acknowledge she didn’t fit in as well as other individuals there. Dorothy did not, however, talk about any of the other bars when talking about going to straight bars completely sober; the comparisons she made were to the gay bars in Toledo. Dorothy’s discussion of changing her performance shares important information about identity; it is not about being straight in a gay bar or gay in a straight bar, it is about the ways in which one modifies and shapes behaviors to fit the space.

While most of my interviewees claimed the identity of outsider in those two particular ways, one interviewee claimed that of victim. Rho, attending her first Drag Night with a group of her friends, found herself not welcomed into the culture.



Rho: I felt like they were mad because I was trying to be like them or I was making fun of them. But, at the same time, once they realized we were there dancing wild and crazy and trying to partake in it, they were just making fun of us. "Look at those two idiots. They never come here. Why are they here?" Know what I mean?

AMD: No, I hear what you're saying. Who is the "they"? When you say "they" on a Tuesday, describe to me who [that is.]

Rho: They are the people, not only the drag queens, but the people I feel are there every week or every other week, watching the drag show.

While Rho claimed that the regulars at Drag Night were angry with her and her friends for being there, Rho felt like she wasn't being given the opportunity to engage in the culture of Drag Night and to have fun and "get the full experience of it." Her use of the word "they" to describe the individuals at Drag Night (and her later use of "it" to describe the Drag performers) notes both her experience of being an outsider while still marking the individuals in that space as "other." Rho's experience at Drag Night is useful for studying identity, but also for studying space. While, from Rho's perspective neither she nor the individuals who regularly attend Drag Night were comfortable, the individuals who are outsiders make up a significant portion of the audience. In recognizing the importance of the outsider (Rho) on a theme night that seems based around a community (GLBT) that is, on other nights, labeled as outsiders, one can note the performance of both power and space. Her experience of being excluded reinforces the insider / outsider binary that seems to play out in this space.

Through labeling others as outsiders and claiming identities as outsiders, participants were able to reaffirm their membership status within particular groups. Much like the section on membership above, outsiders cannot exist without insiders. This process of claiming and labeling outsider status has an important link to performativity. Performativity is not only about those acts that occur over and over in our everyday lives, but also those things that individuals claim; claiming is a way of performing. Despite the examples above, not all interviewees claimed there were certain requirements for membership on a given night. 80s night, in particular, was discussed by most of the participants as an open night for everyone. Even the interviewees who did talk about authenticity in particular ways acknowledged a sense of community within given nights. It is this sense of community that will be discussed in the next section.

### *Community*

Participants claimed 80s Night has a different sense of community than do the other nights. This is not to say that individuals did not claim community on other nights; they did. 80s Night, however, was the one night that all of my participants agreed shared a sense of community. One reason 80s Night has this quality is that it is less rigidly defined than the other theme nights; Drag Night caters specifically to a particular audience (as relates to the Drag Shows), and so too does Goth Night (as relates to specific music.) 80s Night involves 80s music, but usually a variety of music styles are incorporated into 80s Night. A great deal of this community is built on a level of openness about claiming identity, about who one says one is. Of course, one of the

ways in which participants talked about community was through sameness. We have a community because we are alike and we welcome people like us in this space.

80s night, for example, is considered a very “come as you are” night. Individuals who might not fit in on other nights are welcome on 80s Night. When discussing the atmosphere of 80s Night, Zach used the phrase “free-spirited” several times. He discussed it as being free-spirited in style of dress, style of dance, and the acceptance of a wide variety of artistic expression that he believes is hard to find on other days of the week. This use of the phrase free-spirited, which is defined by the Oxford English Dictionary as “unconstrained by convention,” implies a great deal of independence. Free-spirited individuals, by this definition, are not as concerned about fitting in; they are going to perform their own identity without concern for outside opinion. Through my observations of 80s Nights, I did see a wider variety of dress and dance styles than I did on the weekends, but by no means would I consider the variety of dress and dance styles wide. Most individuals I saw on 80s Night were dressed more casually than the individuals on the weekend.

Zach also says “On 80s night it’s much more like we’re all the same.” This statement seems to contradict his statement above in that he is excited by the differences in people on 80s night, by then claiming that they’re all mostly the same. I think what Zach was trying to say was that there are a wider variety of people on 80s Night, but everyone is more welcoming so the differences don’t matter in the same ways. I make this argument in trying to understand the contradiction of Zach’s two statements. From my observations of 80s Night, I believe that it seems so “much more like we’re all the same” because the individuals there perform identity similarly. For

example, all of my participants described 80s Night as more casual than on the weekends and several of the participants used the individuals who dress in 80s garb as examples of the openness of the night. The ways in which people dress and dance on 80s Night is similar across time (80s Nights when I began the project through when I completed my observation) as noted through my field notes and through interviews with participants. This free-spiritedness works in that there appears to be little difference in the performances of the patrons at Club North on 80s Night.

Even this concept of everyone being “all the same” is open for interpretation. In her discussion comparing different nights of the week at Club North Beth said of 80s Night,

You can kind of go out on the dance floor and dance with your friends, dance with the dorky guy with the mullet and laugh about it. And have your own experience. Like I feel like no one invades your space, like they do otherwise. Like if you were... and it's a different kind of dancing. Ok and I think that the type of dancing makes that space different. You're not grinding your booty music. It's more, “put your hands over your head and dance around and joke around with your girlfriends or with some crazy guy” kind of thing (Beth).

This seems to be a common experience of 80s Night. Everyone is there to have fun, relax, dance with their friends and avoid the classic meat market type mentality. Even so, the “dorky guy with the mullet” is easily marked as different. While I will discuss this further in chapter four, the actual space to move about and the lack of acceptance of a meat market type club space on 80s Night is what appears to create this sense of what my participants call community. In noting the ways in which the space is friendly and

comfortable (and easily forgetting the ways in which individuals are labeled as different) 80s Night becomes read as a safe space where everyone can be together outside of difference.

This concept of community was not limited to 80s Night. Through interactions with “regular” participants on Drag Night and being reminded of a “tradition” or history, individuals at the club claimed a sense of community. One Tuesday evening, while waiting at the bar in between shows, one of the drag performers walked up to ask me and my friends if we were staying for the second show. After confirming that we were she mentioned that we (the patrons) had to lie around the edge of the stage because it was tradition. While I had never seen this particular performer at Club North she claimed a sense of history as related to the night. The practice of laying around the perimeter of the stage during the drag performances as tradition put forth a claim of community without ever using the word. Traditions happen through families, through communities. In laying claim to a tradition, Kayla was able to not only include us in the community of Drag Night, but also enhanced the stability of the space. Tradition gives a sense of the way things have been done; tradition does not just happen one day. By claiming this practice was a tradition, Kayla’s status as an individual who has knowledge about the space’s history and performances is enhanced.

Community is not always claimed in a way that is so closely tied to the physical space. Even while within the club, moments occurred of claiming community with individuals while distancing oneself from the (social) space. From my field notes:

It’s still too early for the first drag show, so I ask my friend Jen to shoot a game of pool. Half way through our game three guys and another woman show up and

put up quarters to play. Just as we start the game with the new folk we all introduce ourselves. Jen and I are going to be playing against William and Matt. The woman who was with them walked away, we were never introduced. Part way through the game (we're losing) I'm enjoying the company of William and Matt; they're funny. In our random chatter, William states, "we're not gay or anything." I really hadn't thought they were, but I thought it an interesting choice that he let me know (field note, 8/15/06).

While this doesn't seem like a clear performance of community; I argue that it is. While Will is certainly not claiming a sense of community with the night (in fact he is distancing himself from it) he did, at the time, seem to be claiming a sense of community with Jen and me. Though Jen and I did not respond likewise, we did acknowledge their statement. There was no real sense of community between the four of us, but in that moment of making an identity claim, that putting out there of specific information, William opened up a moment for me and Jen to share information about ourselves. Having distanced himself from the wider community of Drag Night, William saw an opportunity to build community on a smaller level. This moment must also be considered from another perspective; William's statement implies that he recognizes the space to be different than it would be on any other night. It is unlikely, for example, that if I ran into William in Club North on Saturday that he would tell me that he's not gay; he (and I) would work under that assumption.

Claiming community is different than claiming status as member or outsider; it is an in-between space that suggests inclusion. The examples of claiming community above include community as everyone within the space and, at other times, specific

individuals in the space (as compared to everyone else in the space.) While claiming community suggests inclusion, it still only exists within difference. For example, individuals at 80s Night have a sense of community; individuals at Goth Night have a sense of community. This community only exists by not being a part of other communities. Or, we have community in this space because we're different than the people in that space.

Discursive performance is useful for the study of space and identity because performance is not limited to those things we actually do. Individual claims of identity (whether the physical performance matches or not) are a type of performance in that individuals are shaping their performances by the claims they make. Claiming identities modify individuals' identity performances, but also alter the stability of the space in which these performances happen. Identity claims change affect an individual's embodied performance. As such, it is difficult to consider identity performance without focusing on both the claims individuals make and the things they actually do. It is in the next section that I will discuss the individual performances that occurred in the space.

### Embodied Performance

As I mentioned in the introduction of this chapter, participants' performances of identity did not always match their claims of identity. It is important to note the actual performances by the participants; without these various performances of identity the space would not change in the ways that it does from night to night. This theme focuses on the things participants *do* in the club more so than those things that they *claim*. Through considering their (and my own) performance in the space, I am able to analyze the ways in which the performances do and do not fit with the discursive claims above.

In focusing on these two areas together I am able to get a fuller picture of identity performance leading me to a clearer understanding of the space as discussed in chapter four.

Like the section on discursive performance above, this section on embodied performance has three subsections: membership, outsiders, and community. I chose to use the same subsections as above for two reasons: first, because these were the ways in which participants most clearly performed identity; and second because in following the same pattern it is easier to discern the similarities and differences in the themes. Within the subsection of outsiders, I also discuss performing tourism. I've folded it into the outsiders section as it includes my analysis of Rho's experience at Drag Night (as discussed in the outsiders section of the discursive performance theme.) At the end of the embodied performance theme is a conclusion that brings together this and the previous section.

#### *Member – authenticity*

As I discussed in the discursive performance section, Drag and Goth Nights have, what appears at first glance to be particular membership requirements. Although there might not be an actual authenticity, the appearance of authenticity is enough to have individuals claim and perform identities in ways that reinforce the appearance of authentic identities. This theme focuses on those performances that reinforce that perceived authenticity. Through particular performances individuals mark themselves as being members of the space, thereby marking others as outsiders.



A great deal of this performance of member is related to physical appearance. One of the first steps that participants mentioned in performing identity was the process of getting ready for the night out.

I typically go through three or four outfits [when getting ready to go out.] I typically wear cargo shorts and typically either a button-up [shirt] that has the sleeves rolled up or a polo. I don't pop the collar. I'll have four different colognes I wear, but not all at once. I'll figure out what cologne I want to wear based on how I'm feeling or what color the outfit is (Zach).

Depending on the night of the week, the process of getting ready differed. Several participants noted that Monday was a much more laid-back evening and that preparing to go out was not as big a process, because it did not much matter what they wore. Weekend nights, however, were the other end of the spectrum; a lot of time and effort is involved in getting ready to go out on the weekend, as seen in Zach's quote in reference to going out on a Saturday. While literally putting on the clothes, make-up, cologne, jewelry, and everything else that indicated membership with a particular night is a piece of performing identity, it is only one thing; however, that it is something that occurs over and over again signals its power. This identity performance of member continued throughout the night(s) participants were at the club.

Zach's use of "typical" implies a "regular" process and a "regular" night. At no point in our interview did he describe an atypical outfit or process of an evening. Membership and authenticity are created through the typical evening, not the atypical one. By having a "typical" process of getting ready Zach performs, over and over again, an "authentic" member of a "regular" night at the club. While he was focused on his (and

his friends') process of getting ready, through discussing typical clothes for an evening out he succeeded in labeling those individuals who do not dress in the same "typical" fashion as other.

Performing member also included just knowing what to do in the space. One Drag Night, after reaching the top of the back stairs, waiting for all of my group to make it to the top Nicole hands a dollar out to me. Thinking it was for the cover charge we'd just paid to come up, I explained that I hadn't paid, our friend Kim had. Nicole explained, as she handed a dollar to Kim, who had just hit the top of the stairs, that the money wasn't for the cover; it was for the performers. She had brought single dollars for that specific purpose. While everyone must pay a cover to enter Drag Night, the process of giving money to the performers is more of a norm. As the drag show goes on, the performers walk around the space and audience members give them a dollar (and often get a kiss on the cheek in return.) This moment of FB's preparedness not only encouraged us to perform in a particular way, but also marked us as individuals who knew how to perform in the space correctly. While Rho's experience at Drag Night began with her being shocked, watching hand performers money, the experience I had on the night out with FB and K reinforced my knowledge of what happens in the space and, more importantly, how to look like I belonged in the space.

Acceptable performance of member changed from night-to-night at the club. Those behaviors that would indicate a successful performance on Drag Night would very likely not constitute a successful performance on 80s or Goth Night. Each of the participants discussed appropriate and inappropriate behavior at the club; each of the

participants recognized successful performance at the club through recognizing unsuccessful performance.

Waiting for the first show to begin, my friends and I walked over to the corner under the DJ's booth. As we're chatting, I look around to see who I recognize and what is happening on the dance floor. It looks like it usually does before the first show; people just starting to fill in, most of them standing around talking, some dancing, some dancing and talking. As my gaze turns to the far edge of the stage I see a heterosexual couple making out. Actually, they're more than making out; they're all but having sex on the dance floor. I feel embarrassed watching them; I also feel irritated. Who are they to be getting busy in this space? This is supposed to be gay night. I realize it's not; I realize it's Drag Night, which is not the same thing.

Usually, when there was unsuccessful performance, the individual received some sort of sanction or punishment by the rest of the individuals at the club (Butler, 1999). In this case however, there was no particular punishment that I noticed. My irritation with them could be considered some kind of sanction, but I didn't say anything to them. I did not have any interaction with them. I saw this couple just as the show was getting ready to begin – they moved away from the stage and I didn't see them again. This moment of overt performance of heterosexual couple at Drag Night is interesting for considering *who* is being targeted for punishment. While I saw no visible punishment for that couple, their (arguably) over-the-top physical affection does make a statement about who has power in the space. While they did not face any social punishment, their being there, in that particular way, can be read as punishment for the GLBT participants of Drag Night. It is another example of Tuesday being Drag Night, but probably not GLBT night.

Though there are mostly GLBT-appearing individuals in the Tuesday night space, that is overridden by the heteronormativity that exists in society, and in Club North, even on a Tuesday.

Considering some of the examples that participants used to claim authenticity, we can see what is marked as successful performance versus what is not. Through these examples we can also see the ways in which participants changed their behaviors to become more successful in the space. Dorothy's describing the difference between being asked on Drag Night versus on the weekend, if she was dating the woman she was dancing with gives one example of how she feels in the space on different nights.

Yeah, on Saturday it feels like its invasive, but on Tuesday it feels more genuine, trying to stay up on the news. That's all. Not like, "Oh god you're dating." But Saturday it is kind of like "you're dating and either we're going to judge you for that or we're going to get you to make out because that's hot for us" (Dorothy). She continued by discussing the ways in which she and her friends alter their behavior on the weekends so as to better fit in, and to avoid the comments she's accustomed to on the weekend. Through her style of dress and her interaction with her friends and strangers at the club, Dorothy has performed club attendee on the weekend successfully, but at a cost of her own comfort with her identity performance. It is through hearing comments from other patrons (or not) that Dorothy and her friends have learned to alter their behaviors as to avoid the punishment of being called out or harassed for their usual identity performances. Dorothy views even her lesbianism as having a certain role in membership on the weekends; it is not for her or her girlfriend, but the men there who considering it arousing to see women kissing. This perceived

membership on Drag Night versus a weekend night are read very differently; while the same acts might be occurring (Dorothy kissing her girlfriend) the question of for whom that is giving pleasure, changes.

Dorothy was not the only participant who had to modify behavior in the club to perform member correctly. Several participants noted their expectations and behaviors changed from night-to-night. Depending on the night of the week some of the changes in performance were small, while other nights there were bigger changes. Most individuals noted a difference in the way they performed their identities between the weekend (considered Thursday through Saturday) and the theme night they frequented. Change in performance throughout the weekend was minimal as was most participants' behavior on the theme nights.

### *Outsiders*

Just as we've all been labeled as outsiders by other people, we have all also performed that identity of outsider. Performing outsider identity is not the same as claiming a label of (or being labeled as) outsider. This performance of outsider is visible in multiple ways including: through overtly performing another identity, or through attempting and failing at performing the accepted identity. Performing an outsider identity is not always a bad thing; after all, it is only through our changing the way we perform identities that we can change the way society functions. Through these performances of outsider, participants open themselves up to criticism and punishment for not performing identities correctly.

There are different reasons individuals intentionally perform an identity that does not fit in a given setting. At Club North participants chose to perform identities of

outsider because they felt that the space was their space too, where they could perform their own identities. Other times, they performed an outsider identity because they knew they could get a rise out of the individuals performing correctly. Of the individuals I interviewed, those who claimed to perform outsider to get a rise out of the other attendees were the exception. Only a couple of participants mentioned performing their identities in a way that could be categorized as intentionally performing outsider.

More often, individuals performed other because they did not succeed in performing member. Beth, self-described as a person who is comfortable in any situation, discussed not fitting in at Drag Night:

Beth: I'm like, "I'm not having fun, I'm really freaked out." But it was just so odd to me that I've never seen so many just like openness of people. Like girls making out. Not really guys, like I didn't really see as many guys and I think that's what I'm used to...

AMD: Sure.

Beth: ...is I'm used to seeing guys together. And so, there's a lot of the girls and then there's a lot of the guys with no shirts on dancing up on the little pedestal thing.

AMD: Oh, sure.

Beth: But, I think that one of the two times in my life that I've ever been so uncomfortable.

While Beth had every intention of going to Drag Night and fitting in, it just did not work due to her discomfort with the scene not matching her expectations. She was unable to perform a successful Drag Night member identity, so she was stuck in a situation where

she was uncomfortable. The different use of space and the identity performances of the individuals she interacted with was not something she was able to adjust to over the course of an evening. Beth's discomfort tells us that while she was expecting to be in a different environment from her everyday experience, her expectation of what that other environment would be, was not met. While she was expecting to see men together more so than women, the women and the lack of space Beth was given moved her from individual seeing others to the category of outsider watching others.

Dorothy's discussion of fitting in on the weekend versus fitting in on Drag Night (see performing member section) is also a good example for this section. Those weekends where she was not able to successfully perform weekend club attendee there were reactions from the club members to let her know she was not successfully performing member. For example, when she told the narrative about the men asking her if she and her girlfriend would make-out in front of them, that was a moment of Dorothy's being reminded that she wasn't performing her identity of weekend club attendee successfully. To perform correctly she either had to perform a heterosexual identity or a gay identity which allowed for the male gaze to make it legitimate.

Performing outsider also happened through what appeared to be parody. Consider the following example: On Drag Night individuals avoid dancing on the stage in between performances. Tonight there were a few folks dancing on the stage, which feels like a nice change. It feels a little bizarre to walk through a fairly busy space and see the expanse of the stage all but deserted. While thinking about that, I turned to my right and saw something very different: two women dancing together. The fact that they were dancing together was no different than several other couples on the dance floor.

What marked them as different was the guy who was with them who, more than once, stopped them while they were dancing to reposition them. He shifted one woman's hips, then a couple moments later, the other woman's arms.

This moment appears to be the opposite side of Dorothy's experience on the weekend. While the two women were dancing together in a way that appeared quite sexualized, the orchestration by the man with them implied that this was not something they chose to do for themselves. Indeed, in performing other at Drag Night, these women chose to engage in same-sex intimacy in a way that appeared to be more for the man they were with than for their own pleasure. Though they were moving on their own, the ways in which he repositioned them made them seem more like mannequins than live women.

These two instances at the club paint an interesting experience of outsiders at the club. Dorothy and her girlfriend on the weekend were harassed to perform a lesbian identity for the pleasure of a public audience and the two women I observed at Drag Night were engaging in lesbian performance [likely] for the pleasure of a public audience. While the concepts are the same, the experiences read as very different. In both sites women were asked to perform lesbian identities and on Drag Night the physical performance fit; it did not stand out. These women were being othered and were likewise othering the individuals in the space who were performing heterosexual identity differently than they. While Dorothy and her girlfriend did not publicly engage in affection at Club North on the weekend, their othering if they had would have been two-fold. First, (same-sex) making out at Club North on the weekend is not a normative



performance; second, their identity performance of lesbian (based on Dorothy's definition of lesbian) would not have fit; it would have been "selling out."

This performing of other was not limited to the patrons in the space. Even drag performers who did not regularly work the show at Club North would sometimes need to change their performance to fit the individuals and the space: Watching the first show I couldn't help but compare this new performer to the regular performers I watch each week. In comparison to the two performers who had gone before her, she seemed timid. Her performance appeared small. Her gestures were small, her steps were small, and she stayed mostly on (and never more than a step off of) the stage. I wasn't drawn in by her performance; it was almost boring. Apparently I was not the only one having this reaction, as a noticeable number of patrons wandered into the bar area during her performance. She, too, noticed it. During her second performance of the night she appeared bigger: bigger gestures, bigger steps, used a lot more space. I liked it much better than the first. I didn't see anyone leave the dance floor during her second performance.

In this case the process of performing other is through this performer's lack of understanding of the ways in which they physical space of the dance floor is used by the performers during the drag show. Through punishment (patrons leaving, fewer patrons giving her money) the new performer quickly changed her performance to more closely mirror that of the other performers. In so doing, she had more success in retaining her audience.

The last way I discuss the performance of outsider is through the performing of tourist. Performing tourist is like being a patron at a fair; that person is just there to see

the exhibits. One of the participants in this study told me her story of going to Drag Night for the first time with a group of her friends. Watching one of the performers taking a dollar from a patron, Rho said, “It’s something that you don’t want to look at, but you can’t help but look. You’re starting to get your camera...and by the time you get your camera out it’s gone and you’re getting pictures of something else.” Rho is hardly the only person to have taken pictures at a drag show. It is, instead, her mentality of Drag Night being some horrifying yet fascinating experience (“you don’t want to look at it, but you can’t help but look”) that she is somehow separate from despite being there with her friends, with her camera that shows her to be performing tourism.

Additionally, Rho’s discussion of reflecting back on her experience at Drag Night reinforces this idea of her experiencing it as a tourist.

I think it’s just one of those things that I can still picture in my head, but when my computer goes, after fifteen minutes, to the picture slides and then I always see that (the pictures at Drag Night) and it’s just something that makes me laugh. It’s something to think, ‘Wow, that night what was I even thinking going there.’ Then I think, ‘Wow, I really experienced something like that.’ I don’t know, I just think it’s one of those things [and] that I like to experience new things, so it (the pictures) are something to remember it by, I guess (Rho).

While she talks about having “really experienced” Drag Night, all of the information she shared with me indicated that she did not experience Drag Night. Certainly she was there and saw Drag performances, but the experience of Drag Night (as discussed in Chapter four) may not have been open to her, both because of other patrons at Club North and due to her own methods of communicating from the moment she walked into

the club. This example is different than the other examples of outsider; it is not an inability to perform correctly or even overtly choosing to perform identity differently. It is, instead, about the choice to watch individuals perform identity while remaining outside of the social space while being in the physical space.

Some people might question whether research, particularly ethnography, falls into the category of performing other, particularly perform tourist. Ideally, this is not the case; ethnographers are not in place to watch the culture from afar. The role of the ethnographer is to study the culture both through observation and, to the extent possible, engaging with the culture. Particularly when an individual begins studying a given culture, it is difficult to engage with that culture. Often researchers do not have the tools at the beginning of their research to perform member correctly. I believe trying to do so at the beginning stages of research can do more harm than good if the identity performance is unsuccessful.

While I had the skill set to perform member appropriately on several of the nights I studied, I did not have the tools to perform member at all of them. Goth Night, in particular, was a difficult night for me to understand. My first visits there, prior to my research, were very similar to Rho's visit to Drag Night (minus the camera.) I wasn't dressed appropriately, I didn't dance appropriately, and I did not know the accepted ways of interacting, nor was I particularly interested in learning. I was just there to watch and see what happened.

I use this example at the end of the performing other sub-theme to illustrate that it is easy for individuals to perform an outsider identity without real intent to do so. Through not even attempting to engage in the culture, or even attempting to engage in

the culture but not doing so successfully individuals can make the members of that space into a spectacle. While this might not be as problematic on a weekend night in the club, on these theme nights that seem to cater to sub-cultures, already marginalized groups of people can be made to feel further marginalized by the individuals who come into that space and perform other.

### *Community*

Two definitions for community in the *Oxford English Dictionary* are: “common character, quality in common” and “life in association with others, society.” Based on the second definition, that of society, most moments at Club North would involve community. By the first definition, however, moments of community at Club North are much more limited. It is this first definition that I’m using to describe, and then analyze these moments of performing community.

One 80s Night at the club was also the night of the BCS Championship (college football; Ohio State was one of the teams playing.) The space was different based on this special event at the club; though it was technically 80s Night, it was being upstaged, even upstairs at the dance club, by the football game. From my field notes:

Only two of eight tables were being used – one had four people, one had two.

With the exception of the table of four, everyone in bar seemed to be watching the game (near end of 3<sup>rd</sup> qtr). The bouncers (of which there seemed to be a lot for so few people in the bar—maybe staffed for game?) were walking around talking to patrons about the game. (field note, 1/8)

The bouncers at Club North, while polite, are not generally chatty with patrons. On this night, however, there was a general sense of camaraderie and friendliness due to the

game. At this point in the game Ohio State was being fairly crushed by Florida and there was a general sense of gloom regarding the game. In being able to vent to one another, patrons and workers alike forged a sense of community based on their shared frustration. While individuals were performing community on this given evening, it was done through exclusion. It was only the individuals who were watching the game, complaining about the game, and upset about the game who were included. Those individuals either dancing, or just hanging around talking were not embraced by the group focused around the game. Community, then, while about a shared quality is equally about those individuals who do not share that quality; one cannot have community without outsiders.

On Drag Night, community occurred through the drag shows: Though it is not the first time I've seen it, I'm still intrigued by the patrons laying down on the stage during the drag show. One woman I recognize as being a Drag Night regular has laid down and put a dollar in the top of her shirt, apparently waiting patiently for Rebecca (the performer) to get around to her to fish it out. While nobody has sat down on top of the woman, several people around her have people straddling them; lots of these interactions seem to be between strangers. It's loud, it's intimate, and yet despite the close contact it doesn't appear to be sexual.

While the literally laying down on the stage (on the floor where people are walking and spilling drinks all night) is unto itself a brave choice, the flirtatious nature of the process generally feels fun. The drag performers go from individual to individual, take the dollar, and give them a kiss on the cheek; the person laying on the stage then gets up and watches the rest of the performance (and sometimes another person lays

down in the space they just vacated.) The process feels fun, but that is not the same as actual community. The performance of community, in this example, stems from the general acceptance of not only laying on the dingy stage, but being accepting (and trusting) a total stranger to straddle you and basically have you pinned to the floor. In these moments of potential violation, the acceptance of the audience as a whole and more importantly the individual who engages in that which appears sexual, but is not, allows the individual on the stage to feel a part of something: a community.

A friend of mine convinced me to participate in this practice once; she pointed out my requirement to do so as an ethnographer engaging in the culture. Having seen this practice week in and week out, I was not concerned about being hurt, violated, or humiliated by the crowd; I was very concerned about the dirty floor. Laying back on the relatively dirty stage (and honestly thinking about how many times I would need to wash the shirt I was wearing) I waited for the performer to make her way around to me. A minute or so after laying down I felt a weight on my hips and looked up to see a woman I'd never met sitting on me. Chatting, as we waited for the performer, I learned her name, why she came to Drag Night, and what she thought of the northwest Ohio lesbian scene. After the performer came by and took our money, Rachel slid off of me and offered me a hand up.

These moments of inclusion, this general acceptance of giving up physical control to a complete stranger is bizarre. While I note its potential for community, I also note that not everyone engages in this practice. Once one has seen this performance in this space, it is clear how it functions. While there is a relative degree of safety in being in a large crowd, usually with friends present, there is still a giving up of control that can

be disconcerting. Those who are not comfortable with that practice do not engage in it. This sense of community is, again, based not only on those individuals who engage with the culture, but also those who are shut out from it. Community happens through shared characteristics, but also through having other individuals who do not share those characteristics. Insiders cannot exist without outsiders.

Throughout my time in the field, I only once used the word community to describe what I saw and felt happening in the space. From my field notes:

Waiting for the first performance, I walked around a bit. Paranoia, I'm sure, but I felt like people were staring at me. The female bartender appeared to have completely ignored me after seeing me, and two women I knew looked at me and then (what felt significantly) looked away. Other people, however, felt friendlier than usual. Several men did the smile and [give a] nod of acknowledgment as I passed by -- not in a weird pick up way, but in what felt to be more of a "hi, community" way.

Going back through my field notes from that night, I appeared to be having a bad day. I suspect that is why I felt like I was being watched (and ignored). My interaction with the men who acknowledged me was more a moment of interaction in polite society than anything else. While their actual performance (nod, smile) was small, I read it as an opportunity for community, which in this dissertation, has been defined as some kind of shared qualities. Though I felt included by these individuals, I clearly felt excluded by my reading of my interactions with the bartender and other patrons that I knew. To create community, individuals must be left on the outside. In other words, I would not have felt

much of a sense of community unless I had been (in that moment or others) marked as an outsider by other individuals.

Performing community, as different from claiming community, occurred through actions of individuals – workers, patrons, and performers, in the club. Through interactions including, engaging individuals in dialogue, dance, physical touch, and even acknowledgement, individuals were made to feel not only were they welcome in a given space, but they belonged in the space. In creating this sense of belonging for some individuals, other individuals were not made to feel as though they belonged; in fact, some individuals likely were overtly marked as unwelcome (consider Rho's experience as discussed in the outsiders section.) While community is defined as inclusive, that inclusion can only mean something by the exclusion of others.

### Conclusion

Discursive and embodied identity performance is a fluid process. Nobody claims and/or performs a single identity, nor do individuals perform only discursive or embodied practices. As Tim suggests in an interview, we are all doing all of these things simultaneously.

I think it's very rare that you'll find anybody from Monday nights hanging out on Tuesday. There's been a select group on Tuesday now that are going on Wednesdays now too, which is surprising because they don't act at all the same (Tim).

Tim's notice of the same group of women attending two different nights and performing differently during those different nights is a good way to wrap up this discussion of identity. At least as far as Tim can perceive, these women are performing identities



differently in these different spaces. They are not, apparently, confused as to which night they should “act like boys” (Tuesday) versus the way they perform on Wednesday. Interestingly, Tim did not give a description of their Wednesday behavior, but one can assume it to be more “traditional” female behavior where compulsory heteronormativity is so evident that Tim sees no need to mark it. In this way, the performances of identity in this club are momentary, are situational, and shift from night to night regardless of who the performers are. Tim’s use of language was also worth noting: the women were acting like boys; they were not, apparently, acting like men. Boys are children; men are adults. In describing the patrons as women who acted like boys, not only is heteronormativity evident, but so too is a judgment about these women’s (incorrect) identity performance on Tuesday nights.

To capture how my participants enacted identity (both discursively and physically) in Club North, I thematized individuals’ identity performances around the framework of member, outsider, and community. All three of these themes are based around the process of inclusion and exclusion. Through making particular claims and doing particular things in the club, individuals mark themselves as insider or outsider thereby (overtly or not) marking others as insider and outsider. While this is particularly clear in the first two themes, this is also true within the community theme. It is only possible to have a sense of community if one can compare that to other individuals, including other individuals in that same space, with whom one does not have a sense of community. These performances, while only a piece of performing space, are important to note, not just for those individuals, but also for the (social) space as a whole.

While the notion that identity is fluid has been demonstrated in communication research over time, this chapter on identity both reinforces that work while also showing how this fluidity happens. Individuals performing in the space have particular agendas. Whether those agendas involve creating gay space, showing their “normalcy,” or partying with friends, everyone still has an agenda. This is not to say that in every moment individuals are plotting to perform their identities in such a way as to forward an agenda, but nor can researchers allow that fluidity of identity to go unquestioned; it serves a purpose. It is important to recognize that there is a larger purpose when studying identities in larger societal space, be that a nightclub or elsewhere. The fluidity of identity that this chapter demonstrates will become more important as we move to the actual construction of space since space, as conceptualized by deCerteau (1988), is always a momentary and resistant breach of the expected. In other words, it is the enactment of fluidity here that begins to shed light on how this club crafts spaces of resistance that it ultimately can not keep.

This discussion of creating space (space where women can act like boys, space where people can dress and dance crazily to 80s music, and space that allows for neither of these things and other things entirely), is what will be discussed in chapter four. Through a discussion of each of the theme nights that occur at Club North I will explain how not only the identities of the individuals at the club are performative, but so too is the space itself.

## CHAPTER IV. UNPACKING SPACE(S)

I hate moving. I don't believe this makes me different than anybody else; most people I know hate moving. The amount of time it takes alone is enough to make anyone hate moving; once the time is added up it probably takes weeks to move. The cost of packing materials (the bubble wrap!), renting a truck (or hiring actual movers), and beer and pizza for everyone who helped is enough to pay for a vacation (or at least a conference trip). The packing materials, which I usually enjoy at first, drive me crazy after awhile. The screech of the packing tape reminds me of fingers on the blackboard long before I get to the last box. I get irritated that things invariably get lost or broken, or at least hidden in a box not to be seen again for six months. Moving is a pain.

The last time I moved was an in-town move. The apartment I'd rented (sight unseen due to an inability to get to town earlier) was awful. I actually liked that it was small (cozy, really), but when I got my heating bill of \$200 in December, for a 600 square foot apartment, I knew something was wrong. The ice (not condensation, not frost, but really solid ice) that formed on the inside of my bedroom window was another clue. I found a much better apartment (the one I still live in) rented by the same landlord. I signed the lease, forked over the extra security deposit and waited for summer.

The only down side of this particular move is that there was a week between when my lease was up and when my new lease would begin. I negotiated with my landlord to try to avoid the gap, but in the end it didn't work out. My stuff, my cat, and I all needed a place to stay for a week in August. I figured I'd rent a storage facility for a month for my stuff, board my cat for a week, and crash on a friend's couch. Instead, one of my professors gave me use of her garage for my stuff, I guilted a friend into watching

my cat for the week, and I stayed at the apartment of a friend who was out of town. As grateful as I was to all my friends for minimizing the hassle, the process was not fun.

I moved twice in two weeks. I rented a Penske truck twice in two weeks. I had to find two sets of friends to help me load and unload my stuff twice in two weeks. (It's really amazing that I had any friends who would still answer my calls at the end of this two week period.) After moving my heavy television into the new apartment (I should probably acknowledge that I didn't move the television at all – a couple of my friends with better upper body strength than I, did), I closed the door and sat down in the corner of my living room. Everything was in that room; I figured I'd worry about placing it later. Tired as I was (and as cluttered as that room was) it felt nice. It was nice because it was done and it was nice because I started mentally figuring out where I was going to move things (except the television; that was staying where it was.) It's nice to have space change from being "the new apartment" to "my apartment."

This move worked out; I love this apartment. It's not new or gorgeous (the mustard yellow linoleum in the kitchen can attest to that) but it's comfortable, clean, and has storm windows. There's a second bedroom that doubles as an office. It's great. It's mine. If I could transport this apartment to my next town, I would.

I plan on moving this summer; I still have to take a trip to the city where I'm moving to find a place to live. This is always a gamble. I'm going to spend three days looking at a dozen apartments in the hopes of finding one that I can afford and that doesn't have any visible issues. That's always the key, the visibility of the issues. It's a gamble. It's not until after I move in to whichever place I select that I will figure out if I've

made a good choice. It's then that I'll figure out if the heating and cooling bills are ridiculous, if there are hidden bugs, if my neighbors are loud and/or if the walls are thin.

Moving isn't all bad, of course. Once I was into my current apartment, I loved it. And while I'd take the apartment with me to the next town, I don't think I'd want to stay in this town, in this apartment forever. This town is great, but I feel like I've grown stagnant; nothing really changes for me anymore. There are benefits to moving on; when I move I can reinvent myself. Certainly, I don't make major changes; on some level I'm still the same geek I was in high school. I am, however, able to tweak my performance of identity to better fit in with the new community. Often, this change in identity performance is temporary; perhaps I decide it isn't worth the effort of change, or I decide I prefer "my" performance better, but I like having the option of making changes without being questioned about why I've changed.

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Certainly, performativity of space cannot be considered as completely separate from the performing of identities; the two are co-constructed. I designed the chapters this way because while connected, the performance of space has, to this point, been greatly understudied. While acknowledging the co-constructed nature of the two, I feel it is important to give space its own space, so to speak. As chapter three focused on individual performances within space, this chapter focuses on the performances of space, and the actions, things, and outside influences that are part of those performances.

It is important to note that performance and performativity are not the same thing. “Performativity is...not a singular ‘act,’ for it is always a reiteration of a norm or set of norms” (Butler, 1993, p. 12). Elin Diamond (1996) explains the distinction clearly: “When performativity materializes as a performance in that risky and dangerous negotiation between doing...and a thing done...between someone’s body and the conventions of embodiment, we have access to cultural meanings and critique” (p.5). Performance, according to Diamond (1996) is a single iteration while performativity is the process of repetition. This study claims a performativity of space; the individual moments are important, but it is the performativity (the repetition) that really teaches us new information about space. This chapter is a difficult one to write because through labeling these spaces I am making, at least momentarily, that which is fluid, static.

Throughout this study, I have seen and engaged with space being performed in multiple ways; the four ways it was most often performed (regardless of night) was: as safe space, as risky space, as home space, and as recreation space. These four themes arose through careful reading of both my field notes and interview transcripts. Safe space, while a phrase commonly associated with the GLBT community, occurred on multiple nights and through a wider path of individuals than just the GLBT community. Its conception was through dialogues regarding physical safety when going out; this moved into an analysis of my transcripts to note the ways in which individuals performed safety, which then led me to study the ways in which the space itself encouraged safety. Risky space, which arose from my analysis of safe space, was a catch all for those moments where the opposite of safe space was occurring. Through access in particular, the question of the ways in which Club North is not a safe space

was answered. The third theme, home space, was more complicated than the first two themes. While neither necessarily being either safe or risky spaces, home space often shared some concepts otherwise found in the safe space and risky space themes.

Home space was answer to a performance of space where one should belong, where one was expected, but also a space where one was not necessarily welcomed. Home space, perhaps more than any of the other themes in this chapter is paradoxical. The last theme, recreation space, notes the ways in which the performance happens as relates to the intended use of the space. I argue that recreation space cannot happen without the other spaces.

### Safe Space

Safe space is a phrase long used within the GLBT community to denote a space (often physical space) that is, literally, safe. The question of what the space is safe for is often more broad. Safe space, as defined by Buckland (2002) is “free of the external and internal restrictions and oppressions they lived under outside” of that space (p. 50). This definition implies not only safety from external factors, but also an ability to let go of any internalized homophobia within a space. While I think this definition is a good one, I also think it is lofty. While the visibility of external oppression or lack thereof can often be noted, the extent to which an individual is fully embracing their own power as an GLBT person is incredibly difficult to discern. Despite that difficulty in naming, Buckland’s (2002) definition is the basis for my discussion of performance of safe space. My use of safe space in this chapter goes further than just the GLBT community. This section of the chapter focuses on the performance of safe space and the ways in

which those performances of safe space have the fluidity to potentially create spaces that are unsafe.

As a GLBT identified person, I always look for markers that indicate safe space. When I was first coming out, I did it because it really mattered to me; now I think I do it just out of habit. There are those stickers that claim certain offices are safe spaces; though this does not mean that other spaces should automatically be considered unsafe (Lukes, 2007). I look for Human Rights Campaign (HRC) stickers on cars. I've always enjoyed the Budweiser and other major alcohol brands' marketing signs that hang in gay and lesbian bars to indicate how they want gay people, too, to drink their beer. The massive banner at one lesbian bar in the Midwest that had a huge rainbow along with the beer specials always made me laugh. For all the over-the-topness that these signs indicate, they are a very overt marker of what the space is, or at least aspires to be.

Club North has fewer markers of a GLBT safe space than do GLBT-specific bars. There are no big drink signs specifically targeted toward the gay community, nor have I seen a small safe space sticker at the window where I pay my cover and have my identification checked. There are markers though; I just have to look closer to see them. The signs with the day-by-day drink specials always note under the Tuesday heading, "featuring two drag shows." There are booklets on tables and around the bar that are the gay information booklets for the Northwest Ohio area, filled with ads for the gay clubs in the area as well as special events happening in the area. The clearest marker of all is, perhaps, the drag performers themselves.

The drag queens are performers. They are fluid, changing individuals who usually complete a total of four performances each within the two drag shows each



Tuesday. There is a way in which, however, for the purpose of making clear that the space is at least a gay-welcoming space, they might as well be those huge gay-friendly Budweiser signs from the lesbian bar in St. Louis. The drag performers, while walking around the bar, are often touched and hugged by patrons, usually without asking the performers' consent. They are used to bring in a specific audience and make them feel welcome. There are ways in which they are treated as objects more than individuals; the way in which the performer are touched by audience members is one of the clearer examples of this.

In addition to the markers that indicate a safe space, the degree to which certain types of interactions do and do not occur mark the space as safe as well. The use of touch within the club, particularly on Drag Night, is not limited to the lack of personal space given to the performers; it extends to participants in the space.

Going to Drag Night alone is always different than going with a group. It's always a little strange because I can't really talk to people in the same way; it always *looks* like I'm observing people when I'm alone. While tucked away in the back corner of the dance floor on Tuesday, sitting on the ledge that usually holds drinks, I was surprised by three men who ran up to me and hopped onto the ledge next to me. It took me a minute to realize that I had no idea who these guys were; the way they ran up to me made me think that I knew them. Through chatting for a minute I determined they didn't even know each other. Two of them were friends and the third guy (Brian) just met them. Just as I had grown accustomed to them being squeezed in next to me, Brian hopped off the ledge, grabbed me by the wrist and started walking through the club. As he first grabbed me I tripped (trying to stand up before I fell off my seat and onto my face) and had to

stagger a few steps to catch up with his quick pace. After wandering about for a few minutes Brian and I headed back to our original spot to await the second show. The two guys who arrived with Brian were still there; we stood there chatting. When I turned my back to them (to see what was happening on the stage) one of them grabbed my hip. It startled me enough that I literally jumped.

Brian's use of physical touch within the space implies that Brian and his friends feel that within this space that behavior is acceptable. Indeed, my own reaction, while one of being startled is not, throughout this interaction, one of fear. This is in direct opposition to how I have felt in this club while being touched by men on other nights. A great deal of this is the way I read these three men; I read all three harmless gay men. The space, as one that may be a GLBT safe space, allows for these touches to be (read as) harmless. My lack of concern about being hit on or in some way hurt by these men makes me read the space, and their touching within it, as not only acceptable, but safe.

Is a safe space in this instance a space where individuals can touch without asking? My first reaction is that a space that involves my being touched without having asked my permission is dangerous. From reviewing my field notes, I believe I felt safe not because of its being Drag Night, but because of Brian's size (a small guy) and apparent level of intoxication (high) allowed me to feel confident that I could extricate myself from the situation at will. My tolerance for this behavior on Drag Night is undoubtedly higher than on other nights; I am more willing to trust people on Drag Night due to my experience(s) at this and other (gay) clubs. Safe space, then, involves trusting individuals in a space, based on my perception of shared identity, that will allow that space to remain safe

The use of touch and engaging with individuals was not limited to patrons at the club. The staff, too, were teased, flirted with, and engaged in the space (though potentially, not always with their consent). Their reactions, as the following field note shows, can add to or take away from the performance of space as safe space.

Tonight, a man walked up to the bouncer in the corner [by the DJ's booth] and began flirting – eye contact, touching. The bouncer playfully, but reasonably firmly pushed the man away – he stumbled a step or two. Undeterred, the man went back to the bouncer who had been sitting and touched his arm again. The bouncer stood up and half kicked at him (not at all hard) while both of them laughed. One of the man's friends arrived and tried to get the man to dance. The man grabbed at the bouncer's shoe jokingly, and the bouncer turned on his flashlight at the young men, temporarily obscuring their vision due to the change in light. All laughing, the two men left to dance (field note 11/28)

This moment at Drag Night was interesting because while the interaction between the bouncer and the patron seemed playful, there was a degree of physicality in their interaction that made it clear that the bouncer was not interested in playing with the patron. This quote makes me ask, safe space for whom? This interaction is worthy of consideration on couple of levels: the ways in which each individual appeared comfortable in playing a particular role, and the power structure between the bouncer (who has specific institutional power) and the patron.

Though I don't know the degree to which the patron and bouncer knew one another, I read this interaction as playful rather than hostile. Even so, the actual things that occurred in the interaction are, like in the example above, something I would

usually categorize as dangerous rather than playful. The bouncer did not appear interested in continuing to interact with the patron, rather than telling the patron to move on he used nonverbal, potentially violent (pushing, kicking) communication to indicate his lack of willingness to engage. The patron did not appear to feel threatened or uncomfortable throughout this interaction. The power difference, too, is an important part of their interaction; nobody else is allowed to push or kick at people in the space without being removed from the space. The bouncer's ability to push at and kick without recourse also enhances the question of for whom the space is safe. Safe space, in this case, means safe from outsiders, but with the trade off of being watched by gatekeepers who limit the interactions in the space.

Safe space, while historically related to the GLBT community is not limited to that group. Beth talks about 80s Night not just as a night to have fun, but as a space where she is safe:

Beth: And I really like dancing, but it's hard when you live in a college town to go anywhere and dance without it being a bunch of drunk eighteen year olds molesting you.

AMD: Yeah.

Beth: Dancing shoulder to shoulder. People sweating on you. Like 80s Night is one of those nights you can just go and dance with your friends and be crazy and not have to worry about people trying to molest you, trying to make out with you, being wasted and falling all over you.

Beth, in this instance, is talking about a physically safe space from being "molested" by drunk college students. The crowding of the space on the weekend is well noted (see

chapter one.) As I mention in the next theme (risky space), particularly on the weekend it is easy to touch someone without them even knowing who it was, due to the crowding on the dance floor. Beth's experience at 80s Night involves less crowding, but also a space where there are different expectations of interaction (see the section on community in chapter three.) This example is the most literal of all the examples of safe space. Safe space, here, is a night that allows for Beth to interact, dance, and have a nice time with her friends free from the fear of being hit on and touched without her consent.

This last example of safe space focuses on space as it relates to identity. Particularly, it ties into the piece of Buckland's definition of safe space having an internal focus. The degree to which the space is read as a safe space is not limited to the comfort one feels in being in the space. Through reading what a space is (a gay space, a heterosexual space, something fluid, something static) individuals' performances match that space, thereby reinforcing the way in which that space is performed.

In talking with Rachel, a Drag Night regular with whom I became friends, I learned how she saw Drag Night as compared to the gay bars in Toledo. She suggests that the Drag Night at Club North is a safe choice for individuals who aren't gay, but are interested in gay culture and for individuals who are unsure of their sexual orientation. Four women walked by us (from the bar onto the dance floor) and as they walked by Rachel said, "maybe, maybe, maybe, maybe" indicating how it is harder to label people at Club North than it is at the gay bars in Toledo. For that reason, she explained, she prefers the gay bars in Toledo. She said that she doesn't like to hang out with people who are bisexual or, for that matter, people who haven't made up their minds.

Safe space, in this example, is not necessarily about a physically safe space. It is a space, due to the multiple theme nights and history as a “regular” nightclub that allows for individuals to try out different identities without being labeled. Interestingly, in creating this safe space for individuals trying on identities, the question of for whom the space is safe must be asked again. Indeed, in creating a space that is safe for individuals to try on other identities, the space is made less safe for individuals like Rachel who are uncomfortable in engaging romantically with non-lesbian identified persons. Safe space, here, is closest to meeting Buckland’s (2002) definition; through engaging in activities they would not “on the outside” individuals are letting go of their internal oppression. Buckland, in fact, might argue that it is Rachel who is not existing within a safe space due to the ways in which she is limiting her interactions based on identity claims.

When considering what safe space is, it is important to ask for whom (and for what) the space is safe. In what initially appears to be a safe space for a subculture, one must recognize that the space is not (necessarily) being patrolled by individuals who fit within that subculture. This is not to say the space isn’t safe for individuals who identify with a particular subculture (gay, goth), but that one must recognize that the subculture is not the only (or even primary) audience within the space. While creating a safe space for individuals who do not claim a particular sexual identity, are bisexual, or are unsure of their sexual identity; the same fluidity of space creates risky, and potentially unsafe spaces for others. As one of my friends said in a casual conversation recently, “Yeah, it’s great that there’s this visibility of Drag Night for gay people, but if

someone in BG wanted to bash some gay kid with a baseball bat they'd know where to look."

### Risky Space

Most of the literature available on risk in club space (see chapter two) is related to drug use and physical abuse. Throughout my time in the field on this project, I did see individuals who appeared to be high (and some who told me they were), but I never observed anyone actually getting high at the club. While I did see people removed from the club by bouncers occasionally, I also noticed very few physical altercations. Through my own observations in addition to data I gathered through interviews, weekends had more instances of violence than did the theme nights at the beginning of the week. The employees at Club North, in fact, seem to attempt to create a space that is not risky. Through minimizing illegal drug-use and violence on the premises, they are reasonably successful. Risk, however, cannot be contained by these two practices.

### Access

Club North is a risky space through the simple concept of access. Being on the second floor of a building, the only way to access the club is through one of two sets of stairs. The front stairs is one long flight. You can see all the way up (or down) the staircase. Despite the clear visibility involved in this front set of stairs, I have seen people slip down them. I've never witnessed anyone tumble all the way to the bottom, but I've watched (and heard) individuals skid part way down before catching themselves. The back set of stairs involves more physical risk. As described in the first chapter, the stairs are very narrow and winding; they very much remind me of attic stairs. You cannot see all the way to your destination from the top (or bottom) of these

stairs. I have witnessed, as well as been a part of, many collisions at the midway point of these stairs where you need to make a sharp turn. Inevitably, the individual who was going up as I was coming down (or vice versa) reaches the corner where s/he must turn at the same time as I do and we bump/brush/slam/step into/onto each other. Usually the collisions are minor, but depending on the speed one has gathered beforehand, the bumps have been known to push me back a step, leaving me off-balance, frantically grabbing at the handrail to avoid falling on the steps.

Having engaged with the stairs to gain entry to Club North, I seldom think about those who don't have the option. There is no elevator available for patrons at Club North. Individuals who are not able to walk up the stairs cannot gain access to the club. This inaccessibility should be considered an important part of the performance of the space. Intentionally or not, there is a clear message through this limited access of who belongs in this nightclub, and individuals who are unable to climb the stairs are being sent the message that they do not belong. Fassett & Morella (2008) state "That we perform our respective abilities with such frequency and skill allows us to take them for granted, leaving us with the impression that they are inevitable and reasonably constant" (p. 150). It is through the repeated action of climbing the stairs (or not being able to climb the stairs) that marks the body within the performative space.

Another of my participants, Christie, noted the difficulty of exiting the space: "I would not want to have to use those fire escapes. Have you ever looked at them? They're pretty high off the ground and I wouldn't even know how to get out on them." Like my conversation with Beth, Christie talked about getting in and out of the space, in an emergency, after we discussed how busy and full Club North gets on the weekend.



Access in this instance is not about getting into the club, but getting out of it. The crowding at Club North affects the space: access to the space (sometimes there is a line to get in), access to the dance floor (it's often full to the point of overflow), and when one is finally ready to go home, access to the exit.

Access can also include full-use of the club once you're in the space. Most nights at Club North are 18+, but of course they cannot legally serve alcohol to those under 21. Tim, the barback/bouncer I interviewed expressed frustration with other bars and clubs in town that told check id's as carefully as do the employees at Club North. One participant, now legal to drink, told me some methods he and his friends used to get drinks.

Jim: If you wear long sleeve shirts yeah. But...

AMD: Ok, because they're looking for the...

Jim: Yeah, because then you can put the wrist band up and I've noticed they've put them a lot tighter now so it's a lot harder to slide it up, but yeah. So those of us that can drink usually get a drink.

Jim said that he and his friends did not drink at the club when they were underage, but some of their acquaintances did, and that is how he learned about the process of sharing wristbands. Club North's strict policy on not allowing minors to drink in the space changes the space. Through maintaining legal practices (while some other bars and clubs are fairly well known for allowing underage drinking) the people in the space change, and the expectations of what can happen in the space change. Jim's experience of not drinking in the space until he could do so legally was reiterated by some other participants; it is difficult to do and not worth the trouble. Some participants

under the legal drinking age mentioned drinking at home (“pre-gaming”) or at another bar before going to Club North, but not actually trying to drink there.

Access is not limited to getting into the space, though that is a major consideration. Determining access is also inclusive of considering access to the exits when one wants (or needs) to leave the club and exactly what in the club one has access. The trouble with access implies that Club North, at least on the weekend, is in high demand. Individuals in this town go out with the intention of going to Club North; it means the space has a place in the nightlife of this particular college town.

### *Violence*

Much like in the discussion of safe space above, an important part of considering risk is determining for whom the space is risky. Many studies have noted the risk to women in public spaces as a means of punishing women for not behaving properly (Hutton, 2006; Thornton, 1995). To a degree, the nightclub is a risky space due to the history of who was expected to go to nightclubs and what sorts of behaviors were acceptable within them. Though over time the performance of nightclub has changed, and what it means to be in a nightclub has changed, I argue there is still a residue from older perceptions that marks the space as risky.

Additionally, the space can be viewed as risky through the ways in which space is used throughout the club. Club North is not a large club, and it can get rather full very quickly. In the bar area, which has the bar on one side and a series of hightop tables on the other, there is limited space to maneuver once there are a lot of people there. The dance floor, while spacious in comparison to the bar, often has as many people as it

can hold. In trying to move through the dance floor, often a lot of touching happens; most of it is incidental, some of it is not.

In creating safe space for some individuals, space is created for others that is risky at best and unsafe at worst. Consider the performers in the drag show that I discussed in the safe space section above: while they are visible in the space and mark the space as safe for GLBT persons, the degree of safety in the space for them is questionable. The drag performers walk around the club between drag shows on Tuesdays and usually again after the second performance is over. They talk with the patrons, and often the patrons fawn over them in an over-the-top way that can be fun to watch. In addition to this, however, the patrons often touch and sometimes even pinch and grab the drag performers. While it seems to be mostly playful, I can't help but wonder how safe the performers feel in what is supposed to be a "safe space." One instance, in particular, really made me question the safety of the space.

While shooting pool with Jen, William, and Matt (see field note in chapter three) one of the drag performers walked through the bar and into the pool room. As I was waiting for my turn, I didn't pay her much attention. I turned my back and started a conversation with Jen. I heard a loud crack and turned back around and saw Matt spanking the drag queen. Snapping my head around to Jen, she raised an eyebrow in response to the scene. As I continued to stare at Matt he started grabbing at her breasts. William, watching me watching Matt, walked over to explain that "that guy (the drag queen) is his (Matt) girlfriend's friend." I never actually said anything, because I wasn't sure how to respond, and William walked back over to his drink on the other side of the pool table.

William's labeling of the drag queen as "that guy" automatically places the drag queen in the position of other. William, as a self-identified heterosexual man, has determined that her identity is not an accurate portrayal of who s/he is. By giving a name to her of "that guy" William has taken it upon himself to clarify for both me and Jen who the drag queen is in "real" life. The risk to the drag performer is two-fold; first, she is in what appears to be a physically risky situation as Matt's touch appeared to be anything but gentle. Second, her very identity of who she is (at least in the space of Drag Night) has been not only challenged, but negated by William's easy comment about who "he" is outside of the space. Consider Butler's (1997) quote, "One comes to 'exist' by virtue of this fundamental dependency on the address of the Other. One 'exists' not only by virtue of being recognized, but, in a prior sense, by being *recognizable*" (p. 5). William's description of the drag queen as a "he" marked the drag queen's performance as unrecognizable as a "she." The performer was undoubtedly recognizable as a man in a dress, was likely recognizable as a gay man, but due to the way in which gender is "correctly" performed in society, was not only unrecognized, but unrecognizable as a she.

The space is an unsafe one based upon the violence (physical and emotional) enacted by other participants within the space. This moment is not just a moment that makes the space risky; it reconstitutes the space through his naming. The space is not the same space it was a moment before; it changes the way individuals understand Drag Night, thereby changing the way individuals interact at Drag Night.

Risk is not always about (physical) danger; it can also be a space that is uncomfortable and risky in regards to fitting in, to being mocked. In our interview Beth noted:

And I don't like feeling like I'm not in control or like know what's going on and I just... it was just extremely uncomfortable experience. So if I went back [to Drag night] maybe if I went with a bigger group of people who would protect me somehow.

Beth was not concerned about her physical safety. She was talking about how people at Drag Night were loud, over the top, and kept trying to steal her drinks. Her need for protection was not based on a fear of being hurt, so much as a fear of being irritated by the individuals at Drag Night. The different use of space (as compared to the 80s Nights she frequented) and the different way that space was performed made her uncomfortable within the space. Risky space is created, in this moment, through differing expectations. The space is risky because of its ambiguity; the fluidity of the space created a situation wherein Beth neither knew what to expect, nor was content with what she experienced. When someone has an experience with one night in the club, it does not mean that that experience will carry over to another night in the club.

Risky space is enacted through access, violence (physical and emotional), and lack of knowledge. The performance of the space occurs through the physical design of the space (the stairwells in particular), individuals in the space, and expectations of individuals who have previous spent time in the space. Risky space, like safe space above, is important to note due to its occurrence in moments; risk doesn't happen constantly across time. Safe spaces turn into risky spaces turn into safe spaces again.

## Home Space

“A home of one’s own is...valued as a place in which members of a family can live in private, away from the scrutiny of others, and exercise control over outsiders’ involvement in domestic affairs” (Allan & Crow, 1989, p. 4). While I use this definition because I think it encapsulates the general idea I have of home, I must note that the definition is by no means complete. Home can also a place where one is scrutinized and one might not belong. The original definition is one, I believe, that is the ideal; not all homes necessarily have all of those components. As Johnston and Valentine state (1995), “Home is one site where our identities are performed and come under surveillance and where we struggle to reconcile conflicting and contradictory performance of the self.” (p.111). This tension in defining home came through in this study of performative spaces. While none of the participants claimed Club North as a literal home, the performance of space shared many of the tensions as the above definitions.

Performance of space as home space occurred both in positive and negative ways at Club North: one was welcomed into Club North much like when one comes from a long day, but one was also treated like a child is while at home, being closely monitored and given limited privacy. The physical use of space at Club North suggested home a great deal, in that most of the participants claimed a literal spot in Club North as “theirs.” The participants seldom claimed a space in the bar or the pool room; most often a particular area of the dance floor was one they considered their own.

*Home as positive*

Mel, a bartender at Club North, talked about Goth night as having a home-type space. “My regulars, they come to see me every week. I know them and they look for me.” She went on to discuss that while she didn’t necessarily exchange a great deal of personal information with them, she noticed when they were missing. In turn, her patrons would ask her where she’d been if she had missed a week or taken a night off. She considered it to be a home space not only due to the check-ins between her and her regulars, but because everyone has a physical space that they could claim. For example, that barstool belongs to Tom.

Home was enacted through recognition and welcoming by the employees of the club as well. I, personally, had a moment like this. Bartenders know who to serve alcohol to based on the stamp on the patron’s hand. Everyone who goes to Club North gets a paper bracelet downstairs, but the hand stamp is different. For patrons over 21, there is a Club North hand stamp and then a mark with a yellow highlighter; those under 21 get an X on their hand with a marker. One night while wrestling with my shirt sleeve to show the bartender my stamp, she called out to me not to bother. “I know you,” she said. In that moment, the first time I was a recognized person at the club, I became not just a patron but someone who belonged in the space.

While at the time I would not have called it a home space for me, personally, the performance of the gatekeeper of the space (bartender) recognized me as a member, thereby including me in the space in a way I had not been prior to that evening. Home is performed not necessarily by claiming the space as home, but by being recognized as a fixture within the space.

Brooke, one of my participants discussed her experience from one night in the club. It began with a series of greetings and ended through a series of goodbyes; walking up to each of the bouncers to check-in with them, give them a hug, and ask what was new since she'd last seen them. As she described it, she mentioned each bouncer by name and described them to me so I would know who she was referencing. This idea of space through home was created through the literal space, but equally important, through the people within the space.

While you can have a physical space that belongs to you (or your family), your house is not the same as having a home – consider all the subjective terms we consider with home that we do not with house. Home is usually associated with family; while family was discussed in interviews with participants and noted in field notes, the use of family always referenced “family of choice” versus family of origin. Some participants noted that finding “family” made the place “home.” Home is where you can be yourself; with your family of choice you can perform your identity as you choose. While, for some individuals, the option to perform their identities in particular ways in front of their family of origin was not an option, one Drag Night brought a very different example of family and home at the club.

As the first performer strutted from the dressing room to the stage I noticed that she had never performed at Club North on a night that I was there. Just like every other Drag Night I had been to, patrons were cheering and giving her dollar bills, and kissing her on the cheek. There was a moment, though, where I realized it wasn't like every other Drag Night I had been to. As she worked her way around to the far side of the stage, there were a couple of women who were also cheering and kissing her and



taking her picture, but they stood out. Their cheers and kissing looked different, more intimate; they knew this performer. Before the end of the performance people were whispering that that was her family (of origin) in the crowd. It was such a wonderful moment; it was warm

Perhaps it was because it was the early show and there were fewer people there, but everybody knew that this performer was new and everyone saw that she had brought family members with her. The individuals in the area where I was standing just thought it was great; after her performance people were talking with the mother and the aunt about the performance and about the performance of the other performers. There was what felt like a real effort to reach out to these new people, welcome them, and make them familiar with the night at Club North. Though it was the exception at Club North, home space was performed by family (of origin and choice) coming together in a space to celebrate individual performance.

### *Surveillance and scrutiny*

Though there are benefits to home, some disadvantages include the fact that one is protected from the outside, but still has to function with scrutiny from those with whom one lives, those with whom one is closest. Any and all drama that occurs in the space stays within the space for a period of time because there are not a lot of new people. Rachel said, "It's a small pond. If I do something or say something it will always come back to me, if not on that night then the next week." While she noted that this was true throughout the [lesbian] community in Northwest Ohio, it was particularly noticeable at Club North on Drag Night because of the lack of other options for community. She did not seem irritated by this; she stated it simply as what "is." Performance of home can

include being watched too closely and by seeing the same people see you to a point that you pay little attention to it.

Brooke's familiarity with the bouncers meant that, in particular ways, they were keeping an eye on her. This surveillance made the space a comfortable one to her; she did not expect to have anything bad happen to her, even if she'd had too much to drink, because she knew they could keep an eye on her. Like having older brothers, she was protected in the space. The positive of being and feeling safe in the space is tempered by the knowledge that her performance (even more so than other patrons in the space) is being watched, and when necessary, controlled.

This surveillance also exists through the bouncers watching not only the patrons, but also the other bouncers.

A lot of times the manager will go in and instruct somebody, but generally they'll go through me and I'll take care of it. It just happens be that it's like a family environment. We all know each other so well that the only people that aren't part of the little cliquey family environment are the new guys. And those are the guys that I pretty much teach how to do everything. Then not everybody is the same.

There are some people that can react to situations right and some people...

that's why you put them in a rotation and let them watch (Tim).

Tim talks about home in multiple ways through this quote. The very clear use of the word family implies a certain hierarchy and additionally potential familial obligations to the space and those who run it. In describing the process he explained that the individuals who worked there were like a family and new people had to learn and would then be a part of that family. Secondly, Tim discusses the process of watching; having

the new guys observe the process before doing it, having the older (experienced) bouncers watching the new bouncers, Tim himself walking around watching to see that everyone is at their appropriate station. The (home)space exists through watching; patrons watching each other, bouncers watching patrons, bouncers watching bouncers, and potentially someone watching Tim watch the bouncers. This process of surveillance allows the space to “see” individual performances and correct them to fit within the space, when necessary.

Home space is both a positive and, though not necessarily negative, a challenge. The comforts, knowledge, and welcoming about/of a home make the space one where individuals not only are expected, but one they enjoy being within. The surveillance that occurs in home spaces, however, is different than the surveillance that happens in other social space. Home spaces are more intimate, so surveillance that occurs in this space is more detailed, and often more overt in the criticism directed at the individuals in that home space than outside of it.

### Recreation-space

Club North, in addition to functioning as a safe space and a home space for individuals, functions as a recreation space. While the space functioned as a safe space and a home space for only some, its purpose as a recreation space cut across all the theme nights. This theme of recreation can not exist without the other themes (safe space, risky space, home space). In other words, it is hard to have a space of recreation if it is not too a space in which one *can* feel safe, at home, and even sometimes at risk. There were two ways that the space was marked for recreation: through design and through music.

*Design*

Club North, being the second story of a three story building above a sports bar, has limited space to work within. Due to the size of the building, expansion does not appear to be a possibility. On weekends, extra space would be useful, but during the week the design and amount of space within the club seems to suit the number of individuals there. The club is divided into three distinct areas: pool room, bar, dance floor. The bar is in the middle of the three areas to enter or exit the dance floor, or to get into the pool room you must walk through the bar. The design of the club allows for (and encourages) particular performances in particular spaces. Through the three areas within the club, patrons are taught what is acceptable in a given space.

No matter how crowded the dance floor, I have never seen the dancing spill out into the bar or pool room. There is no rule that disallows dancing outside of the dance floor; it is just a norm within the space. While I've never seen dancing in the bar, there are many who stand around on the dance floor. Generally the people who are dancing are in the middle of the floor while those who are talking and/or watching stand around the edges. The pool room, other than being one of the entrances of the club, is an odd space. While I knew people who shot pool, more often individuals talked about it as a waiting area. When I asked Tara if she ever spent time in the pool room she said, "not unless I get a phone call." These three spaces that spill into one another have limited acceptable performances within them. This limited use, despite the relatively open design, means that individuals have learned over time (from other people in the club) what performances are acceptable. In avoiding doing activities outside of their allotted space, the normalcy of a given activity in a given space has been cemented over time.

The binaries of which Butler (1990) speaks applies to space as well as identity. In creating a space which has activities that are considered “normal” enacted within it, activities that fall outside of that norm are considered abnormal. Another way of labeling that abnormality is incorrect performance. As Butler argues, incorrect performances are reacted to with discipline. Yet, the only way to alter normative performances is through change. In short, the only way to undo that process of cementing normalcy is through altering the performances that occur in the space.

The fact that the club is on the second story of a building, particularly that it is above a sports bar, makes monitoring the space challenging in particular ways. There is a dress code at Club North; it mostly focuses on limiting particular urban-style clothing under the claim that they are monitoring for gang affiliation. As such, hats must be worn forward or backward; heavy chains with large symbols are not allowed; sports jerseys are also not allowed. While noting the way in which it limits particular individuals from attending the club, not so much gang members as much as individuals whose preferred clothing style is urban - often people of color – there is also a challenge of enforcing it from a club design perspective. As the sports bar and the club are attached through the back set of stairs, often people will flow from one to the other and then back. While team jerseys are acceptable at the sports bar, they are not allowed upstairs. Tim mentioned the difficulty in explaining to people the reason why it was acceptable in one place, but not in the other.

Sanctions for incorrect identity performance relating to the dress code are clear: being removed from, or not admitted into, the club. While this clearly demonstrates the punishments Butler mentions in relation to performativity, it is worth considering further.

The dress code does not allow for sports jerseys, but does, on particular nights, allow for drag performers. If we follow William's reasoning (see section on risky space), the club allows for men in dresses. As noted in that section, the drag performers, while allowed, are hindered in the space by compulsory heterosexuality. Individuals who prefer urban wear are not allowed, at least, until they correct their performance by performing club attendee correctly. Correct performance, in this case, involves wearing not what the attendee prefers, but what the club has labeled acceptable.

### *Music*

The music played in the club on the different nights relates to the creation of space(s) from night to night. Bennett (2004) states, "music, then, plays a significant part in the way that individuals author space, musical texts being creatively combined with local knowledges and sensibilities in ways that tell particular stories about the local, and impose collectively defined means and significance on space" (p. 2). Through the various theme nights very different types of music are played bringing an important piece of the space together.

80s Night plays 80s music. It allows for a space where "older" individuals can attend and not feel out of place in the way that they might on other nights. While most nights the club caters to the undergraduate community and there is usually a good turnout of undergraduates there on 80s Night, it particularly allows for individuals in their late twenties, early thirties to be at a club without feeling unwelcome. This slightly older age group only seems to appear on 80s Nights. Indeed, 80s Night attracts a somewhat broader cross-section of individuals than the other nights.

Before I started this study a friend told me that 80s Night was more queer than Drag Night. As I walked around 80s Night the night of the BCS Championship, I was thinking about that statement. Club North at the time (during the game) was half empty, but the people who were there made me reflect on that statement. As I walked around I saw people who appeared to be GLBT; I saw individuals who were older than the average undergrad; I saw individuals who had brightly colored hair. The vibe felt different on that night than on the other nights. It felt loose, for lack of a better word. There were people goofing around in a way that I seldom saw in the club. I nearly always enjoyed my observations of 80s Night because, on the whole, the field note from above held true across the months. A wide combination of people and a general live and let live attitude created a space that while not apolitical was certainly more easy going than Drag or Goth Nights. 80s Night was not the only night with distinctive music within the space. Tuesdays were claimed as techno nights, but this was not adhered to as strictly as was 80s music on 80s night; Goth Night on Wednesday, like 80s Night on Monday, is very dependent on the music to create space.

Even the use of music, outside of what is actually being played, affects the space. From my notes:

There seems to be music issues. There was really bad feedback a couple of times (the kind that sounds like nails on the chalkboard and made the whole crowd groan and wince). Additionally, once that was straightened out the bass felt too heavy the entire time – it was overdone to the point that it almost felt underdone – the music was almost tinny. Most people left the dance floor (some to the bar, some just left altogether) and it took awhile for individuals to go back.

Though this was a Monday night the sound problems created a particular space that did not match up with what Monday nights usually were or even what the management expects it to be. Though some people went into the bar or pool room to talk and drink, a number of people left the space entirely which involves, at the very least, lost revenue but potentially other lost customers for the night. While lots of people attend Club North in groups, often there are other individuals who meet up with them later; in losing some of the clientele for the evening, they probably also lost other individuals who would have been meeting the people who were already there.

Hodkinson's (2002) study of Goth culture notes the importance of music in creating a space for that particular subculture. In discussing the methods used to keep events exclusive to goth participants he wrote, "at the events themselves, music and venue décor were made consistent with the tastes of the goth scene" (p. 89). While the venue décor at Club North did not change much on Goth Night as compared to other nights, the use of music succeeded as a method of first claiming and then performing space.

### Conclusion

A key to performativity is the concept of discipline. Those who do not perform their identities correctly are punished. While the Club North is not punished in similar ways to individuals in their performances, it is not immune from punishment. Goth Night, after some problems with the regular DJ, changed DJs. The new music person did not create the same atmosphere as did the former DJ. Another bar in town then engaged the services of the DJ released from Club North. This bar then began hosting their own Goth Night on Wednesday as well. Since there are only a select number of people who



attend Goth Night in this town, the patrons were split between the two clubs. Club North has smaller turnouts, and it has affected Club North financially. More Goth Night attendees now attend the other club, so Goth Night is less profitable now.

Of course, revenue based on Goth Night is not the only thing at stake when discussing a performativity of space; that is merely one example. These performances affect who chooses to go into the space, the individual performances that happen within the space, and the revenue of the space. These three effects are related; individuals make choices regarding where they go out based on what they know the space to be, and what they as individuals can do in the club. The number and types of individuals who go to the club affect the revenue. The performances that can occur in a particular performative space are site-specific; being at Club North is not enough to allow individuals to perform a Goth identity. It is only within the specific site of Goth Night that performing Goth identity is acceptable; it is only on Goth Night that Club North is a safe space for Goth performance. These performative spaces change based on the site and individuals within the space.

While I discussed different performances of space in this chapter it is important to note that the spaces are fluid; my discussion of each type of space can be seen best as a snapshot within a moment. The space(s) blur together and examples from one type of space, in some circumstances, could certainly be labeled as another type of space. In performing space(s) the history of the space and the repeated performances within the space, in addition to the actual individuals in the space, all make to create what the space is on a given night.

The fluidity of space is important to note because it shows that space is momentary. Its fluidity is dependent not solely on ownership, management, or patrons, but a combination of all the individuals associated with the space. Consider the categories of safe space, risky space, home space, and recreation space: they don't happen night-by-night; they happen in the moment, dependent upon who is in the space, and what those individuals are doing. This lack of stability teaches us that the space, in whatever form it might be, is not to be trusted. While this is especially true within the space of Club North, I argue that the performativity (and thereby lack of stability) of space carries over into other spaces in society as well. This performativity will be discussed further in the next chapter.

## CHAPTER V. EXITING THE SPACE(S)

It seems to be common practice to ask the topic of a doctoral candidate's dissertation. (At least in my family, it's also common practice to ask how many pages I've written in a given day, but that's another narrative for another time.) Like everyone before me, I've been asked what feels like hundreds of times what I've done for my project. Most of my friends and family, including people who work in the academy and those who don't, have had the same reaction. "A nightclub? You're going to get your PhD for hanging out in a bar for a year?!" Now, I should modify my previous statement: all of my family and friends outside of academe have said it, and only some people I know within academe said it.

Of course, as I've explained to those individuals, it's not all about hanging out. I didn't go to the club, grab a party soda, and dance the night away. Okay, sometimes I did. Most often, I walked around talking to folks, listening to folks, and sending myself text messages so I would remember a particular moment when I went home to write field notes. This dissertation is about understanding the way individuals experience a night out at a particular nightclub.

When considering that I might be getting my PhD for "hanging out in a bar for a year," it is important to keep in mind that I don't dance; I can't dance. Nightclubs are fun, just not usually for me. I'm much more of a bookstore woman, or a ski slope woman, or even a coffee shop woman (even though I don't drink coffee). I'm not saying this to claim that I chose an awful, painful project for a year. On the whole I did have a good time throughout the study. At the end it is important to note that I chose to study this

space not because I had the opportunity to hang out in a club for a year, but because the space(s) of this club were a unique site in which to study identity, space, and power.

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I went back to Club North; it's the first time I went back there since I finished my data collection. I wish I could say I went back there because I missed it, but I can't. I went back there for closure. Beginning my last chapter of my dissertation, I wanted to go back to see what had changed: what had changed since I was last there, and what had changed from when I began this study.

I got there early. It was really too early in the evening to be there, and I knew it. Walking down Main Street toward the front entrance, I couldn't even hear the bass of the music before I got to the base of the stairs. That's a sure sign I was there too early; the music wasn't even turned up yet. Walking up the long front steps allows for an interesting view of the club. Keeping my eyes focused straight ahead of me, all I could see were stairs; then, my eyes were level with the floor of the club, then the bar, and then I was at the top of the stairs and I could see everything. As I walked ahead a few steps I was at the side of the bar where the one bartender and three patrons looked at me. After ordering a party soda, I grabbed a bar stool and watched the televisions that were mounted above the bar.

After sitting around for awhile watching other people trickle in, I decided to walk around a bit to see if I noticed any physical changes in the space. Throughout this study I've had three favorite spots on the dance floor from which I could watch people. With there being so few people there I walked from one to the next to see the different perspectives (literally) from which I observed the space. All three gave me great views

of the dance floor; one made it easy to focus on the main stage, from another I could see both the smaller stage and the front entrance to the club, and from the third I could see the entirety of the dance floor, but none of the bar. Moving from space to space, watching all five people on the dance floor, it was very clear to me how my own perspective (from the dance floor in addition to my own personal history) affected the way I completed this project.

I moved from the dance floor back into the bar area and sat at one of the high top tables watching people mill around the bar. It has always amazed me how quickly Club North goes from empty to bustling. I believe it's the two entrances: I could see a certain number of people entering from one side while not being able to see the people flowing in from the opposite entrance. While the bar is far from full, the difference of just twenty minutes was noticeable. The music had been turned up and people were filtering through the club.

I got in line to get a second drink and moved into the pool room. For all the time I have spent in this club, that was the room in which I was least comfortable. I found this especially interesting, since I can't dance, but I can shoot pool and I usually enjoy doing so. While I spent a lot of time in the pool room over the last year and a half, I spent very little time shooting pool. My discomfort, I believe, stems from the fact that the room is small. People walk through to get in and out the back entrance, but the only people who really spend a lot of time in the room are those shooting pool. As I was seldom one of the pool players there, and rarely knew the individuals playing, I always felt strange sitting there, watching them. That early on a Monday nobody was in the pool room. The closest person is the bouncer who is standing in the doorway between the bar and the

pool room watching the scene, as was I, looking for things that stood out as abnormal. My recent trip to Club North was different than when I was doing my field work. Then I was trying to see and understand, and during the recent tip I looked for specific change; I'm looked for difference.

As I wandered back to the dance floor I realized I couldn't see the changes: the same 80s tunes were blaring, there were a few people dancing (including that one guy who does the impressive dancing involving the glo sticks), there were a lot of people sitting around talking. I couldn't see the changes but it *felt* different. Perhaps as a result of my time and my thinking at Club North, the club is just not the same, even in its sameness.

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Performativity of space, like performativity of identity, occurs not through a single performance, but through the constant and consistent repetition of performances over a period of time. Through identity performances (see chapter three) and moments in the space (see chapter four) happening over and over again, we learn not only about the performativity of space as relates to Club North, but also in other social spaces. In other words, performativity of space does not just occur at Club North (or even within places that have obvious change). It is through the clear change from night-to-night at Club North that this performativity of space is most easily visible. In the following sections I explain how that performativity of space occurs, and how it might be noted within other sites. Through a discussion of history in the space, the stability of Club North, and site-specific normative performances, I argue that space is socially and materially produced.

### History/Sediment

The bar at Club North sits right in the middle of the club. There is relatively easy access to it no matter where one is in the club. The bar is made of wood; it's not one of those beautiful, polished, almost honey-colored wood bars. It's hard to tell what it is; it's painted black, and with the dim lighting of the club a lot of its details are hidden. The bar is an important piece of the club, and not just because it takes up the literal (and arguably metaphorical) center. The bar has been both a witness to and a part of the history of Club North. The bar is not the same bar that was built when Club North opened. Years of hands touching, drinks spilling, rags wiping, and other influences have changed it. Sweat, alcohol, grime, blood, water, and cleaning solutions for 80s Night upon Drag Night upon Goth Night upon the weekend for years and years has, in a way, formed that bar. Every chip, nick, and sliver has changed what the bar is, what the club is, and how the people who have touched that bar have recognized what Club North is. Based on these types of touch the bar is fundamentally different than it was at the start.

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Through the process of weathering, where rock is decomposed due to the everyday wear and tear of outside influences, sediment is created. Sediment is moved and deposited elsewhere, usually through some type of running water. Once the sediment has been deposited in a new place, it becomes rock through a process called lithification. One type of lithification is known as compaction; "As sediments accumulate through time, the weight of overlying material compresses the deeper sediments. As the grains are pressed closer and closer, pore space is greatly reduced" (Lutgens & Tarruck, 2003, p. 48). Rock, then, is created not just through the moving of sediment,

but also through time and pressure. This concept carries over to the performance of space as well.

Like the process of sediment becoming rock, the history of the nightclub from night to night has created something more than just a series of nights (more than just layered sediment, dust and bits of sand); it has created a solid history on which that space and this study have been built. Through time and the pressure of the night-after-night club activity, these spaces have created layers of 80s Nights, Drag Nights, and Goth Nights on top of which current and future 80s, Drag, and Goth nights will sit. These future nights (and any and all changes that might occur in the future) will filter down onto the already solid base built by Club North to create an even more solid history that ensures stability and legitimacy for the choices Club North's management makes.

Mel and Tim have each worked at Club North for a number of years. They have observed and talked about the changes that have occurred over time. While that history is important both to the club as a whole and the nightlife of the college town, the purpose of history for this study is viewed through a smaller lens. As one 80s Night happened after the last 80s Night, after the 80s Night before that, a history was created. Not only did those 80s Nights (and Drag Nights and Goth Nights) build on top of themselves; they also built on one another. Goth Night happened after Drag Night which happened after 80s Night over and over again. This process of stacking one night on top of the next, on top of the next, has given not only the larger space a sense of permanence, but so too the individual sites of the theme nights. Those nights building on one another, as they continue to do, has created a history, a foundation, for what has happened in that space, what can happen in that space, and what is "acceptable" to



happen that space. Queer theory reminds us that it is important to question not only sexuality, but that which often goes unquestioned (Dilley, 2000). This history, which gives a sense of stability, also builds a legitimacy; the longer a practice exists the harder it becomes to question it. As a stronger foundation is built through this history, more people are interested in maintaining it, more people become dependent on that stability, and the harder the punishment when that questioning occurs.

Consider some of the following moments from Drag Nights: the patron flirting with the bouncer (chapter four); the way in which individuals touched the Drag performers without asking (chapter four); Rho's experience of not being included while going to Drag Night (chapter three). These moments, and countless others, were not performances that just happened. These performances happened based on those individuals' prior experiences (in Club North, at other clubs) through which they learned to perform their identities as club attendees. They were also based on performances at Club North that had happened before those individuals got there, before those individuals had ever been there.

The performativity of space that has continued over time has not only given stability to the physical space, but also to the performances that occur within it. With the exception of people new to town, very few people question the Tuesday Drag Night or the Wednesday Goth Night; it is just something that *is*. Several of my participants, when I asked if they had gone to the club on a Wednesday, looked at me strangely. Everyone knew that Wednesday was Goth Night and the majority of my participants were not individuals who engaged with Goth culture. While this is beneficial to the individuals who participate in these theme nights, it could be a challenge for the space itself if

management wants or needs to make changes. In building a stable space based on practices that occur over time, changing those practices alters that perceived stability. This is not to say that if Club North ended Drag Night all of the history of Drag Night would disappear; it would not. The question of what Tuesday night would *be*, though, would be open to interpretation because that stability of the long history of Drag Night would not apply to the space in the same way.

The town in which Club North exists is a college town; there is a lot of turnover of patrons over the years. Even so, the four (or five) year cycle of college allows for individuals to be new to the space, to be taught what performances are acceptable in a space, to perform within the space, and eventually teach other individuals new to the space how to perform in the space. That history of performance within the space is one way in which the space is created, but is also one area where change can be focused.

### Stability of Space

I can't quite figure out why it feels so different as I walk around. Circling back into the bar, I sit down on one of the L-shaped benches near the front door. The place is really starting to fill up. Watching the people walking by and just standing and chatting, I see one of my former participants. As he waves to me and I wave back I try, frantically, to remember his name. How is it possible that this guy is a significant part of my dissertation but I can't remember his name? Lucky for me he doesn't actually come over; he's content with waving and leaving it at that. After I went home I looked up his informed consent sheet to check his name (and those of my other participants as well) in the hopes that if I had a similar situation again I wouldn't be so stuck. Perhaps that is why it feels so different; time has passed. Looking around, I recognize several of the

bouncers and bartenders, but most of the patrons don't look especially familiar to me. While 80s Night always has a crowd that comes from a wider cross-section of the town's population than Drag or Goth Nights, I usually recognized a lot of people; tonight I recognize almost none of the patrons.

Getting up, I walk back down the length of the bar scanning people's faces to see how many of them I recognize. A few of them stand out (including my participant and glo stick guy) but most of the faces are, to me, almost faceless. They look like any number of mostly White, mostly twenty-something, college students. As I reach the end of the bar I walk into the relative quiet of the pool room in attempt to figure out what has changed since I was last there, and what had changed since I'd begun this study.

After sitting in the pool room for about ten minutes and finishing off my party soda, I gave up. I figured I'd go back another night. I set my empty party soda on the shelf next to me and made my way out the back door down the back set of stairs. As I made it about halfway down the stairs, to the point where I need to make the sharp turn and avoid running into people, I hesitate. I can hear footsteps on the other side, so I just wait about two steps up. Two women come around the corner quickly and pass me on their way into the club. Not hearing any other footsteps, I turned the corner and made my way out of the club without running into anyone.

As I stood in the parking lot, my dissonance in the club made sense. My history (as well as the histories of my participants) has influenced the way I see the club. I had not been back inside the club since I'd begun doing interviews. In going back, with all of my newfound knowledge, themes, expectations, and concerns about the club, I could not view it in the same way as I had previously. The space had changed for me due to

my observations of, my experiences with, and the stories I had heard of performances within the space.

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Club North is what it was when I began this study, a night club with theme nights catering (mostly) to the general college population. Despite the turnover that happens in a college town, Club North remains stable. The gay patrons and the goth patrons who move away will be replaced by other individuals who identify with gay and goth cultures. If, for whatever reason, those individuals who are leaving the town are not replaced at Club North with individuals who identify with those cultures, Drag Night and Goth Night will fade away to be replaced by other theme nights with patrons who are willing to show their appreciation through their discretionary income.

The “regular” patrons who attend on the “regular” nights are, perhaps, even more expendable. There is no shortage of traditional-aged college students in this town. As Zach mentioned in his interview, the beginning of the fall semester (at 80s Night) is particularly interesting because all of the new students (and some of the not-so-new students who’ve never been) try on the different nights at the club, trying to determine how, where, and when they’re going to spend their time and money. This trying on is not limited to 80s Night, Drag Night, and Goth Night, but also Club North as a whole, compared to the club across the street, compared to the bar at the end of the block. Club North as a whole remains stable (and arguably gets stronger) through this turnover process. As the club has grown accustomed to the ebb and flow of business in a college town and the turnover of patrons associated with it, Club North has learned how to market itself to best reach their audience(s).

During the early stages of my fieldwork, another club opened in this college town; it's located directly across the street from Club North. It's larger, has two bars, an area with couches along with booths for sitting around. It's newer, easier to get in and out of, and very popular among the "regular" college students. Tim, one of the guys who works at Club North, will not go to this club because they take business away from Club North. The new club does not have nights that they cater to particular groups, as far as I have seen and heard. It is this club and not the patrons that really threatens the stability of the space. The goal of both clubs is to attract patrons and therefore money to their space. In so doing, Club North must compete with the new club. Though it has not yet happened, Club North might be forced to change its performance to remain competitive, or at least to remain profitable. It could be interesting to go back to Club North in a few years and compare it to the new club across the road, assuming both are still functioning as nightclubs at that point. Regardless, the history will remain even if the club has closed.

Club North has wisely, from a financial perspective, marketed itself to groups of people who, in this town, were otherwise being ignored by bars and clubs. Though other clubs are now trying to get their share of the Goth dollar, this market is still relatively hidden in this community. By tailoring specific nights to specific cultures, the management of Club North has created a benefit for itself in two ways: one, they are more apt to get these groups of people to spend money in that club; and two, they have managed to limit boundaries of normative behavior on other nights by directing non-normative performances to these theme nights.

### Site Specific Normative Performances

Drag Night was my favorite night at the start of this study. Even though I'm not much of a nightclub person I've always been a drag show person. As I noted in chapter three, I also like Drag Night because it's easy for me. Not only do I understand correct performance in that site, I am comfortable with my performance that marks me as someone who does Drag Night participant correctly. When I started this study, I didn't think about how my knowledge and analysis of Drag Night would alter my opinion of it. I think Drag Night is important for this town (as there are so few markers of GLBT space elsewhere), but it can no longer be a space where I spend my time without considering all of the factors that allow/encourage/stifle its existence. I'm still a drag show person; I'm just no longer a person who watches drag shows at Drag Night at Club North.

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Butler's (1990) statement that gender exists through "a stylized repetition of acts" suggests that we perform our identities each day, over and over again through individual instances based on a set of norms. Each iteration of identity performance is going to convey a degree of skill at performing identity (in this case of club attendee) to the degree that it matches up with the agreed upon set of norms by society as a whole (in this case individuals within the club on a given night). Inappropriate performance of 80s Night, Drag Night, or Goth Night performer results in a type of punishment for the individual whose performance does not match both the night and the performances by the other members. Rho's experience of feeling excluded from Drag Night, while actually being in the space, is one example of this punishment by the Drag Night crowd.

These moments do not happen in a vacuum. Through this research I argue that performance is not based solely from individual gender performances or even through correction from other individuals and society at large. The space in which these performances happen and the ways in which those spaces are created through those performances influences the individual performances that individuals do over time. For example, while Rho's experience at Drag Night was relatively unpleasant, I argue that the regulars' reaction could not have happened without the specific space of Drag Night. In a space that was acknowledged to be a gay-friendly space, Rho's performance of heterosexual tourist was not welcome *in that site*. Though her performance could be, and probably would be, acceptable on other nights (in fact, the Drag Night regulars would be punished for their performance on other nights) within the space created through Drag Night, hers is the performance that is read as violating the accepted set of norms.

Individual performances, to fit into the site, sometimes caused a degree of cognitive dissonance based on individuals' beliefs. Consider my field note entry from Drag Night when I met Brian (chapter four.) A man I had never met ran up to me and chatted with me; that's fine. My belief about who I am in the world, however, was destabilized once I got home and realized that I allowed someone I had never met to take my hand and take me who-knows-where. While Brian really seemed to be a nice, harmless fellow interested in walking around the club, my beliefs on who I am (a strong, independent woman) compared to my performance (allowing him to drag me around) did not match. In trying to fit into the space, into what I had determined was a safe

space, I performed uncharacteristic behaviors to fit into the space. Simply put, my performance was shaped by the space of the club.

Each night at the club has normative performances associated with it. Violation of those accepted performance results in some kind of punishment for the individual who engaged in non-normative behavior. It is only through these violations, however, that the space itself can be made to change. Rho's behavior was labeled as unacceptable due to the history of normative performances at Drag Night, performances that she did not match. Another example would be Dorothy's experience at Club North on the weekend as compared to her experience on Tuesday. She knows that going to the club on the weekend with her girlfriend opens her up to particular attacks based on her (perceived) failure of correct identity performance. Though Dorothy explained that she and her girlfriend altered their behavior to better fit in on the weekend, if she had not altered her behavior, the opportunity for change would exist. It is only through performing differently, violating those norms, which change in the space will happen. A single performance of violating those norms will not create change, they will just open the performer up to critique; it is through the continued, constant alternate performance (and continued punishment by society at large) that the alternate performance can break down the previously established norms. Not unlike the process of sediment turning to rock, this opportunity for alternate performance is like the weathering process that wears down the rock, creating the sediment that is carried off to begin the process of creating rock again.



## Conclusion

The space of Club North is ever-changing. In arguing a performativity of space within the club, I came to realize that it is not just night-to-night that the space changes. Instead, the performance of the space was different for individuals in the club on the same night. This is not to say there were not changes from night-to-night – there were, but in observing and interviewing individuals from the club, I learned that a great deal of how that performance was read was on more individual levels. Just because we're all at Drag Night does not mean there is one way of seeing another's performance. What, to me, may have been inappropriate touching of the drag performers to another was a display of how open the community is within that space.

Throughout this study I questioned if there was a residue left over from one night that would affect the other nights. There was a residue, though it was not initially clear if that residue resided in the space or with the individuals in the space. The space, of course must have a residue that carries forward from one night to the next. For example, Drag Night must be different because of Goth Night. Drag Night would not be the same without Goth Night (or without any of the other nights, for that matter). The visibility of the changes from night-to-night make the residue (and the performativity) easier to note than within other spaces, spaces that appear more stable, such as a post office.

While individual performances changed to fit the night they were at, in some instances they fit (by choice or by ability) better than in others. The patrons within the space, depending on their personal history both within and outside of the space, brought that history and the residue of prior nights, back into the space each time they

went. That history, that layering of multiple histories, is involved in the performance of space at Club North. Anything that happens in the space affects the space. Actions tonight will affect tomorrow, but equally important is that the actions that happened when I was there a year ago also affect tomorrow.

This dissertation focused on the co-constructed nature of identity and space. Though chapters three and four regarded identity and space as separate entities, one cannot be fully considered without the other. I made the choice to separate the two for clarity of discussing each concept. While focusing on the two concepts separately shows each as static, the two are fluid; they blur. This study is important because of its focus on identity performance not in any space, but in a space that changed theme nights which clearly had different practices that were acceptable in the space. Through studying one physical space that had multiple performances I was able to note the ways in which individuals' performances changed based on both the society who was rating their performance as well as the space in which that performance must occur.

Performativity of space is a process by which space is created through identity performances in a given space, the history of that space, and the norms of that space. Of course, neither the norms of the space nor the history of the space can be removed from identity performances within the space. Much like the discussion of sediment above, they build on one another. This means that social spaces cannot be trusted; the ways in which a space can readily change, not only based on its label, but on the happenings in it at a given time, mark space as unstable. It is this instability, though, that can give researchers (and those who question the status quo) cause for optimism. The instability of the space and performativity of space means that not can norms

related to identity performance be changed over time, so too can those social space that, at first glance, appear to be so fixed.

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I doubt I'll go back to Club North. After all, I don't dance; I can't dance. I'm getting ready to move away and I don't really feel that same sense of community that I did for awhile when I was going multiple times a week. The turnover that naturally occurs within college towns is affecting me this year in a way that it doesn't normally. This year, I'm leaving. This year, the people I recognize from the club are leaving (and lots have already left.) Club North will stay there on Main Street long after my class graduates.

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# APPENDIX A

## HSRB APPROVAL

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RESEARCH COMPLIANCE

PAGE 01



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September 25, 2007

TO: Andrea Davis  
COMS

FROM: Richard Rowlands<sup>az</sup>  
HSRB Administrator

RE: Continuing HSRB Review for Project H07D056GE7

TITLE: *Space Construction in a Transformative Club*

This is to inform you that your research study indicated above has received continuing Human Subjects Review Board (HSRB) review and approval. This approval is effective October 2, 2007 for a period of 12 months and will expire on October 1, 2008. You may continue with the project.

The final approved version of the consent document(s) is attached. Consistent with federal OHRP guidance to IRBs, the consent document(s) bearing the HSRB approval/expiration date stamp is the only valid version and, on October 2, 2007, supercedes all previously approved versions. You must use copies of the date-stamped document(s) in obtaining consent from research subjects.

Please communicate any proposed changes in your project procedures or activities involving human subjects, including consent form changes or increases in the number of participants, to the HSRB via this office. Please notify me, at 372-7716, upon completion of your project.

Good luck with your work. Let me know if this office or the HSRB can be of assistance as your project proceeds.

Comments:  
Stamped original consent document is coming to you via campus mail.

C: Dr. Lynda Dee Dixon

Post-It® Fax Note 7671		Date	9/25/07	# of Pages	4
To	Andrea Davis	From	Rich Rowlands		
Co. Dept.	COMS	Co.	ORC		
Phone #		Phone #	2-7716		
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## APPENDIX B

### INFORMED CONSENT LETTER

October 3, 2006



#### Space Construction in a Transformative Nightclub

You are invited to be in a research study on how the space is used at . . . . As part of my work as a doctoral student in the School of Communication Studies I am conducting a research study of space construction in a nightclub that has different theme nights. This study is being conducted for dissertation research. The purpose of this study is to understand how the space changes from night to night, and if the space is used differently on different nights.

This study will request you to participate in a one-on-one interview regarding your experiences at this club. This interview will take approximately sixty (60) minutes. I will audio tape this interview, and take notes during the interview. All interviews will take place in my office on campus, unless you prefer a different location. You must be at least 18 years of age to participate in the study.

The anticipated risks to you are minimal. Potential benefits of the study include the opportunity to assist in determining how space changes in a transformative club.

I will protect the confidentiality of you as a respondent and your responses throughout the study and publication of study results. Data will be stored separately from your signed consent form. Both data and consent forms will be stored in locked filing cabinets in my office. You will be given a pseudonym for the study, so any quotes used in my paper will not be attributable to you.

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary, and you can refrain from answering any or all questions without penalty or explanation. You are free to withdraw from this study at any time. Deciding not to participate will not impact your relationship to BGSU or

If you have any questions or comments about this study, you can contact me, Andrea M. Davis, at 419-575-6424, or [andmdav@bgsu.edu](mailto:andmdav@bgsu.edu), or you may contact my project advisor, Dr. Lynda Dee Dixon at 419-372-7172, or [lyndad@bgsu.edu](mailto:lyndad@bgsu.edu). You may also contact the Chair, Human Subjects Review Board of Bowling Green State University with questions or concerns about the conduct of the study or rights as a research participant at 419-372-7716, or [hsrb@bgsu.edu](mailto:hsrb@bgsu.edu).

By signing this form you are stating that you are 18 years of age or older and have been informed about the benefits and risks of participating in the study of Space Construction in a Transformative Club (September, 2006), and have been given a copy of this consent form.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Printed Name of Participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Preferred Pseudonym

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