"THIS IS A CLOSED SPACE FOR QUEER-IDENTIFYING FOLX":

Queer Spaces on Campus

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For Sam Price

i carry your heart with me(i carry it in my heart)

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Introduction

I was brought to this project by personal experiences, which I wish to share here as a way of grounding my positionality within the project as both participant and researcher. By positionality, I mean my specific position in relation to others- in this case, to the students I interviewed and the campus overall. First and foremost, my experience as a queer student at Oberlin led me to ask the questions that this paper asks: I came out as queer the summer after my sophomore year, and upon returning to campus, realized that there was a space open to me then that was closed to me before coming out. This space, a biweekly night at the campus bar/dance club ("The 'Sco") called Queer Beers, was a space for queer students to "turn up" (dance and drink) every other Tuesday night. My first time at Queer Beers was profoundly important for me, as I realized what it was like to experience queer community. Upon reflecting upon this experience, I realized that entering this space that was previously unavailable to me was a significant part of my coming out experience, and began to wonder how space and identity were mutually formative. Entering a physical space that is closed to students with a certain identity shaped my identity as a queer person. There was something elusive about this postulation though: this space was for queer students but there was no shared or decided upon definition of queer. Queerness is an invisible identity, so unlike a space for people with a more visible identity like race, queer space escapes the mere possibility of being policed. While it was clear to me that queer spaces could be incredibly validating spaces for students, the mechanics of these spaces remained unclear to me.

During these social experiences as a student, I was reading the great works of queer theory and studying queerness in the classroom. Yet another chasm appeared to me: that between

the way my peers (and myself) were using queer as an identity, and the anti-identitarian nature of queer theory. What was to account for this split between queerness as an identity so concrete that one can only enter a space if they possess it, and a theory of queerness that sought to flee such rigid identitarian constructs? These questions were further complicated by the conservative Right's new target: Safe Spaces. Throughout 2013-2017, my time at Oberlin, much of the country "feared schools were being reimagined as safe spaces for coddled youths and the self-defined, untested truths that they held dear," as Nathan Heller put it in an explosive article in *The New Yorker* about Oberlin in May of 2016 called "The Big Uneasy: What's roiling the liberal-arts campus?" In a September 2015 essay in *The Atlantic,* Greg Lukianoff and Jonathan Haidt wrote:

The press has typically described these developments as a resurgence of political correctness…The current movement is largely about emotional well-being. More than the last [the movement in the 80s and 90s], it presumes an extraordinary fragility of the collegiate psyche, and therefore elevates the goal of protecting students from psychological harm. The ultimate aim, it seems, is to turn campuses into 'safe spaces' where young adults are shielded from words and ideas that make some uncomfortable.

The students I interviewed about queer spaces demonstrated an understanding of the concept that is far more nuanced than that which is given by the media- an understanding of the ways in which a space that is safe for everyone involved, that addresses all of their identities and blocks out all oppressive forces, is impossible, but nonetheless something to strive for. It operates as a utopian ideal that can be used to attempt to create spaces in which people can be a little safer to express their true selves in a world that doesn't accept them. While the news and social justice rhetoric is ripe with think-pieces on safe spaces, scholars have remained relatively silent on the issue.[1] Here, I hope to fill that hole a bit, giving a voice to the students at the heart of these

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[1] With the notable exception of the works of Catherine Fox and Tracy Ore.

contentious social issues. My intentions here are political, and it would be irresponsible for me to not address this. The common conception that college students are "coddled," a sentiment shared by President Obama, who, in 2015, said the following: "I've got to tell you, I don't agree with that either -- that you when you become students at colleges, you have to be coddled and protected from different points of view," is paternalistic and offensive to me personally. Students who create safe spaces, advocate for the use of content warnings (a separate issue, but often coupled with safe spaces as the "coddling of the American mind," and underlined by the same sentiment) do not wish to close themselves off from the "real world," nor do they actually think a fully safe space can be created in an unsafe world. However, they use that as an ideal to work towards creating a more just world, and to create space in which they can relax their defenses, even just a little bit, even for just an hour or so, and fully express themselves with *less* fear of discrimination and prejudice. Students at Oberlin are grappling with the messy complexities of these issues firsthand, and here, in addition to creating a dialogue about queer theory, queer spaces, and activism, I hope to show the ways in which students are perhaps less "coddled" and more in tune with the "real world" than perhaps they are perceived to be. Safe spaces on campuses across the country are actively contested and defended in popular and academic discourse, and this paper seeks to understand how and why students are creating them for queer students at Oberlin College. Implicit in this question is what a queer identity means for students, which creates a paradoxical intersection of queer theory and identity politics. There is a dearth of research on queer spaces, specifically on campuses, and research into what constitutes a queer space and how it is related to identity, subjectivity, and politics would have important implications for queer spaces on campus and the field of LGBT studies. There is a lot of discourse on Oberlin College's campus about safe spaces and queer identities and this research

provides an analytical view of the thoughts and feelings of students utilizing spaces that are advertised as queer. In some ways, this is a question of epistemology: how is one's subjectivity shaped by entrance into a space that is closed to those who identify with a certain category? Additionally, what is the interplay between identification with and identity in the rhetoric about these spaces?

Using data from interviews and some online discourse, I will show how students at Oberlin College construct queer-only spaces as sites for formation of queer identity. This is done through the rhetoric of safe spaces and the ambiguity of queer as an identity label, as well as the positioning of a space as open or closed based on self-identification. Thus, in entering a space in which participation is contingent on self-identification with the category "queer" (as it pertains to non-heterosexual and/or cis identity), students at Oberlin College are forming their queer identities while simultaneously forming "queer spaces".

Methods

I originally intended on doing participant observation ethnography of queer space for this project, but upon further reflection, I decided upon an interview-centered methodology. This is for several important reasons, which extend beyond the simple reason that I enjoy talking to people. Participant observation would have created a piece that would rest upon my ideas, my perceptions, of queer spaces at Oberlin. However, I can only write from my own experiences, and my perspective, however well informed by my studies, is limited and guided by the environment of identity politics at Oberlin by which I have been surrounded for four years. While this would allow me to adequately observe the cultural norms at play in queer space, participant observation would not allow me to capture the intricacies of students' experiences

with queer spaces by just watching them, or even just by reading what they're posting online. But, of course, choosing to interview students came with its own complicated set of problems, not the least of which was the trust and subjectivity implicit in speaking with friends, acquaintances, crushes, enemies, and strangers about their experiences with queerness. I was asking people to talk to me about their coming out experiences, their social lives, their gender and sexuality, and their (often gossip-y) thoughts on campus climate. At a school of roughly 3,000 students, there was very little anonymity in this venture, and while interviewees had the option to use a pseudonym, change details, or omit sections of the interview from the final research, those protections do not apply to me, the researcher. It was bound to happen that someone was going to mention someone I had a personal relationship with, however positive or negative. In this project, I interviewed some of my closest friends and complete strangers, people of my class year and 18-year old first-years, people of my gender and people with entirely different gendered experiences from myself, white people and people of color. Within each of these markers of closeness or distance to or from my own experiences, I interviewed a large variety of people. Unlike a project which intends to capture the experience of one group of people, I set out to interview people with only one thing in common: a nominal queerness so fluid, vague, and undefined that many of my interviewees could be said to have nothing in common.

This required an immense amount of self-reflexivity on my part, and I decided early on to abandon any illusions of objectivity, and embrace the bias that is inherently unavoidable, plus the bias that one inevitably encounters when working within a small environment, where myself and interviewees share dorm, dining hall, library, party, and class space, in addition to sharing exes, friends, professors, partners, enemies, and the awkward smiles we exchanged when we

encountered each other after the interview. I tried to lean into this closeness, instead of attempting and of course failing, and I often ended up speaking with interviewees about people we both knew ("Oh, you're in this organization/went to this event/live in this dorm/ took this class/ know this person? Me too! I love *x aspect of that experience/person*/ Oh, how is that going?") Not only did this create camaraderie with the participant, but it also (hopefully) tore down any preconceptions of any opacity or scientific objectivity in the research process. I told the people I interviewed that the interview would be more like an informal conversation than a formal interview, that I would ask guiding questions but there were no right or wrong answers, nor was it necessary to have a concrete answer.

I often felt that in order to gain my participants' confidence, I needed to share myself with them. Throughout the interviews, I spoke openly about my experiences as a queer person that led me to this project. I often felt that, whether on a strategic or personal level, that I needed to do this to gain my participants trust. Often, interviewees would express notions of their own queerness that essentially excluded cis/straight identity, and expressed comfort with spaces without cis/straight people. When these ideas were expressed, I felt obliged to drop a hint that I am not straight, in order to recreate that experience of comfort and to let my interviewees know that there were aspects of the queer experience that perhaps we share. If an interviewee shared a story I related with, I would often comment "yeah, that's so real" or nod or laugh in understanding. It took a lot of introspection to come to the realization that I felt I needed to justify my interests in hearing people's experiences of queerness, to ally myself with them and demonstrate my understanding of the complexities of experience they shared. Essentially, I sought to ground the interviews in epistemology; to create a partially shared epistemology between interviewer and interviewee.

Participants were found through snowball sampling. The first group of people I contacted for interviews were people I knew were involved in queer life on campus, and were mostly friends and acquaintances. After each interview, I asked the interviewee if there were any other people they thought I should talk to. I repeated this process with those interviewees. I did not go further than this third level of snowballing, because at that point I was getting repeat names, and repeat answers and narratives, and decided to use that as a marker for when to stop looking for participants. Any participants I was interested in interviewing received an email about the project, and could choose to not respond to the email, or respond and set up a time and place for the interview. I allowed participants to choose any place they were most comfortable talking in for the location of the interview, as long as the audio quality would be decent. I conducted interviews in coffee shops, the library, the student union, outside, at my apartment, at the interviewee's house or dorm, in my scholar study in the library, and one on the phone. Overall, I interviewed 27 Oberlin students: one recent graduate, eight fourth years, seven third years, six second years, and four first years. I interviewed six cis women, two trans women, three trans men, five cis men, and ten non-binary/gender nonconforming people. Seven of the interviewees identified as people of color, twenty of them as white (Oberlin College's website says the student body is 20% of color, my interviewees were 25% of color.) Interviews averaged 35 minutes. Each chapter of this project will begin with several excerpts from interviews that encapsulate the experiences of many of my interviewees or represent viewpoints that were either exceptional and interesting, or responses which are representative of a number of responses. These excerpts will be unframed by analysis or comment, as my intentions are to fully allow the interviewees to tell their own stories, give their own opinions, and speak for themselves. This style is modeled after

that used by Anne Cvetkovich in her piece, "AIDS Activism and Public Feelings: Documenting

ACT UP's Lesbians," in which she expressed the following intentions:

I've started by quoting at length from the interviews in order to give as much prominence as possible to the words of the activists themselves. The interviews have a life of their own, and both here and elsewhere I include long blocks of quotations without commentary in order to convey a sense of the larger archive. I think of these sections as themselves an archive installed within the body of my text. Although the editorial process of excision and juxtaposition inserts my own agenda into this archive, the resulting montage creates many layers of meaning, and I especially like the way the quotations speak to one another not only in their agreements but in their disagreements. They have a cumulative force beyond their individual meanings. (Cvetkovich 2003, 384)

While I am not necessarily creating an oral history here, I want to let my participants speak for

themselves as much as possible. I want the reader to draw the outline of the picture I am drawing

before I color it in with analyses.

Outline

In Chapter Two, I will begin with an exploration into the ways in which students are

using "queer" as an identity that shapes the spaces in question. The importance of vocabulary is

not to be lost on the greater focus of this study. Words are used to reconfigure the boundaries of

gender and sexuality that denote certain identities: to construct identities as different from other

identities. Queer included, this process of delineation is a process of border-making. Not only do

spatial metaphors play a large role in these processes, but this linguistic space-making is, I argue,

reflected in the physical space making of young queer people at Oberlin.

In Chapter Three, I will explore the centrality of space to queerness, both in ideology and

history. Then, I will explore how queer space operates as a concept on campus, how it embodies

the definitions given in Chapter One, and how queer space is created at Oberlin. Finally, in this

chapter, I will re-introduce the concept of safe space, sharing the words of the interviewees

regarding this contentious topic, and the ways in which it interplays with queer space conceptually and spatially on campus.

In Chapter Four,I will argue that the complex interplay between queer theory and identity politics that defines the way Oberlin students use queer and queer space as identifiers and conceptual frameworks creates holes in queer community. Specifically, I will show how gay men and people of color occupy specific positionalities within these spaces, caused by the complex interplay of identity politics and queer theory enacted in these spaces. This thesis will end with some ideas on the potential of queer space to transform queer politics. Finally, in the conclusion, I will propose my own queer figures in the current political moment, and draw from the entire thesis to propose the liberatory potential of queer spaces as collective reflections.

Literature Review: Queer Figures

Before proceeding with the bulk of this piece- the interviews- I would like to begin with the staple of queer theory itself: a brief genealogy. Here I will use Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, Cathy Cohen, and Jasbir Puar to genealogically trace the configurations of gender and sexuality that Foucault uses, looking at them as the queer ancestors to the queer figures that appear in Queer Theory, and, later, the students I offer as my queer figures. The queernesses posited by these four authors illustrate the political contingency of queer: contingent upon the specific historical political concerns of the authors who see a need to reformulate the ideas of their predecessors. These four authors wrote from and in different historical contexts, and here I argue that the meaning of queerness is contingent upon the political moment in which it emerges, expanding Samuel A. Chambers' idea that queerness is relational, not identity, politics. I will utilize genealogical methods to illustrate how the "queer figure" is constantly worked, reworked,

identified, dis-identified, re-identified, expanded, narrowed, denied, affirmed, and/or reaffirmed, in response to the concerns and anxieties of a particular political moment. This will illuminate the ways in which students' utilizations of queer as an identity, the ways in which it works and doesn't work for them, and how it functions in relation to space (queer space and safe space), are also contingent and relational.

In fact, the entirety of queer studies and queer theory is situated as relational, which is exactly the point that Samuel Chambers makes in his 2009 piece, "A Queer Politics of the Democratic Miscount." Chambers uses Rancière's concepts of police and politics to differentiate between LGBT politics as identity politics and queer politics as politics of relationality. This relationality is twofold: occupying the space between the norm and the queer, on one hand, and the political context and the queer, on the other. That is, the queer subject is positioned (by the author) in relation to the "normal" subject (relationality #1), and the author's production of that subject as a queer subject emerges from the author's relation to a political moment (relationality #2. This political moment is, as any moment is, a product of the theory and practice that came before it. There is, perhaps, a third relationality here: a genealogical relation. Each author takes the queer figures of the previous authors and creates a new queer figure that stands in relation to the previous subject(s), usually as a reimagining or critique (relationality #3). I will use this model of tri-relationality to trace the theoretical queer figure(s) of queer theory in conjunction with that which Chambers utilizes: Rancière's conception of identity and politics. These relationalities can be imagined in a Rancièrian way, in that each of them is constituted in reaction to a wrong. For Rancière, "It is in the name of the wrong done them by the other parties that the people identify with the whole of the community… They are a class of the wrong that harms the community and establishes it as a 'community' of the just and the unjust." (Ranciere 1999, 9).

Relationality #1—the relation between the queer figure and the norm against which it is posited—is the embodiment of this, in that the queer figure, as a symbol of a community, does not exist without the wrong, the unjust, the norm. This is what creates politics, for Rancière, in that "…politics comes about solely through interruption, the initial twist that institutes politics as the deployment of a wrong or of a fundamental dispute. This twist is the wrong…." Thus, the second and third relationalities constitute politics, in that they are both the "twists" of their historical context and of the queer figures previously theorized. In this paper, I will examine these processes at four chronological moments in time, beginning with Foucault in 1976.

For Foucault in *The History of Sexuality Vol. 1* (1976), the institutionalization of sexuality in discourse, through which sexuality moved from the moral to the medical, created several (queer) figures. For Foucault, "four figures emerged from this preoccupation with sex, which mounted throughout the nineteenth century": the hysterical woman, the masturbating child, the Malthusian couple, and the perverse adult (Foucault 1976, 105). These figures were "four privileged objects of knowledge, which were also targets and anchorage points for the ventures of knowledge" (105).

Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, as a cornerstone author of queer theory (namely, of *Epistemology of the Closet*, 1990), follows in the genealogical order of understanding the transmutability of Foucault's queer figures. For Sedgwick, "a tiny number of inconceivably coarse axes of categorization have been painstakingly inscribed in current critical and political thought: gender, class, nationality, sexual orientation are pretty much the available distinctions" (1990, 22). She goes on to describe how mechanisms that construct and reproduce these categories (i.e. gay liberation discourse, on one hand, and sociology as a discipline, on the other)

create differences between people, and in doing so create queer figures. For Sedgwick, new queer figures are necessary beyond those inscribed by Foucault.

Cathy Cohen's 1997 "Punks, Bulldaggers, and Welfare Queens: The Radical Potential of Queer Politics?" argues for another formation of queer figures, formed by a potentially radical queer politics. These figures include the Punks, Bulldaggers, and Welfare Queens, and suggests that the queer figure can be characterized as more than deviations in gender and sexuality. This formulation occurred throughout my research as a space of contention for students.

Jasbir Puar, in her 2005 "Queer Times, Queer Assemblages," produces two queer figures, again, relational to the norm: the suicide bomber and the Sikh. She uses Deleuze's conception of an assemblage in her "examination of queerness in various terrorist corporealities," to illustrate how "queernesses proliferate even, or especially, as they remain denied or unacknowledged" (2005, 121). Here, Puar takes up the canonical queer figures and argues that queerness has proliferated into a sort of "queer exceptionalism" that does not allow for the inclusion of queer figures outside of a specific American conception of queerness.

None of these authors wrote in a vacuum, and their works are intimately associated, such that each author is writing a variation on a theme (of queer figures) of the author before them. Foucault was writing in opposition to Freud—a variation, if not an opposition, on his theme of the repressive hypothesis. Sedgwick, in turn, takes Foucault's queer figures and decides they require more nuance: that gender cannot be the sole epistemological line in the sand for queerness. Cohen takes this idea, and delves into it further, questioning what a queerness not predicated upon solely gender looks like in the 21st century, on the ground and in people's lives (in the realm that "practice" always stands in opposition to "theory"—this is a somewhat false opposition that will not be explored here, but deserves a mention). Finally, Puar takes Cohen's

work to another realm: almost completely dislocating queerness from gender and sexuality as an analytical framework that can be used to understand something like international conflict. For each of these authors, some more than others, certain figures emerge. These figures are not only the embodiment of a queerness that is relational, they are also identities formed in reaction to a wrong, in the words of Rancière. At Oberlin, I believe this "wrong," is one of two things (or perhaps both). Firstly, it is the experiences of students before college. Students come to Oberlin from all over the country and the world, and many of the students I interviewed spoke of either not coming out until feeling comfortable and safe enough to do so at Oberlin, or having experienced their queerness as awkward and isolating in high school. For example, several interviewees talked about their experiences with their high school's GSAs (Gay Straight Alliances), wherein they were the "straight" member (who later came out). The second (and possibly concurrent) possibility of this "wrong" is that of straight hookup culture in college and the dominance of heterosexuality in spaces on campus. This is explored further with the discussion of hookup culture and Splitchers in Chapter Three.

Michel Foucault's Queer Figures

Foucault's figures emerge from the increase in discourse about sex, an obsession with it, that occurs throughout the nineteenth century. These personages are the embodiment of four processes: the hystericization of women's bodies, a pedagogization of children's sex, a socialization of procreative behavior, and a psychiatrization of perverse pleasure. According to Foucault, these processes were not merely attempts to regulate or categorize sexuality, but rather are "the very production of sexuality" (Foucault 1976, 105). Foucault was among the first, and certainly the most noted, to recognize the production of these figures as "the very production of

sexuality," where sexuality is historically constructed.[2] Here we see the first of the relationalities: the four figures, the hysterical woman, the masturbating child, the Malthusian couple, and the perverse adult, have specific adjectives and gerunds attached the them that render them more than just a woman, child, couple, or adult. Each of those subjects is specifically linguistically removed from the norm—the sane woman, the child who doesn't masturbate, the Catholic couple, and the "vanilla" adult—who can be identified simply by the noun because they fulfill the norm. According to Stuart Elden's account of Foucault's course, *The Abnormals,* disciplinary organizations are "the frame or apparatus (*dispositif)* of 'normalization'… [the] power of normalization is a crucial part of the way in which society is defended...The realm on which the *dispositif* of 'normalization' is brought to bear is that of anomaly or abnormality (*anomalie)…*normalization was 'attempted in the domain of sexuality'" (Elden 2016, 11). It is precisely these processes, of normalization and the subsequent creation of the *anomalie* that are the locus of the ways in which later queer theory takes up and transforms Foucault's conception of deviance (the queer figures) in relation to the norm, which is in turn constructed by apparatuses of normalization.

Michel Foucault published *History of Sexuality, Vol. 1* in 1976. A mere eight years before his death, Foucault wrote this piece, volume one of a series never to be finished, at the beginning of his period of activism in gay liberation, after his work with the *Gauche Prolétarienne* and the Prison Information Group he helped found. According to James Miller, "In San Francisco in

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[2] It is, however, worth mentioning that Mary McIntosh can be said to have posited the social construction of sexuality several years earlier in her 1968 piece, "The Homosexual Role." For McIntosh, homosexuality is a societally constructed role which is made up of expectations and institutional arrangements that reinforce expectations and subculture, and the ways in which we categorize and understand sexuality is in fact a role, made up of expectations, institutions, and subcultures. McIntosh suggests that this role shapes, but does not completely create, behavior and that this role emerged at the end of the 18th century.

1975, he discovered that exploring the body and its pleasures could be a shared public venture - that is, a political project. Gay liberation, as it was practiced in America, was, after the Gauche Prolétarienne, the second decisive political experiment of Foucault's life" (Miller 1993, 40). Foucault's queer figures are responses to the particular political concerns that preoccupied him and the world in the mid 1970s. For Foucault and much of Queer Theory that follows, queerness is about deviance, and his queer figures are marked as deviants through their integration into the system that creates them as what they are. Or, in the words of Rancière, these deviants/figures become people with identities, a community, when their speech becomes more than just noise. When the actions of a deviant become perceptible, or rather the system sees the need to make them perceptible, their "noise" is turned to discourse, and they become recognizable. This is how politics is produced within a Rancièrian schema, and how sexuality is constructed for Foucault. These queer figures, the embodiments of the now-legible discourse and the products of the very processes that create sexuality, are contingent upon the political situation in which Foucault conceptualized them. As Miller noted, the emergence of gay liberation played a role in Foucault's politics (and not always a positive one, as Foucault was, to say the least, suspicious of liberatory rhetoric and the "coming out" narrative), but perhaps even more important are the ways in which Foucault's activism re: prisons and child sexuality frame the articulation of his four queer figures.

Chloë Taylor's "Foucault, Feminism, and Sex Crimes" links Foucault's earlier work on prisons, specifically *Discipline and Punish*, to the creation of the sexual deviant, later subdivided into Foucault's four queer figures. Taylor asks, "If *Discipline and Punish* shows that the prison and its criminological discourses produce delinquency, and *The History of Sexuality* demonstrates that the discourses of the sexual sciences trap the modern subject into sexual

identities… the sex criminal is now constructed to re-offend twice over, both as a consequence of his delinquency and of his sexual truth" (Taylor 2009, 8). For Foucault, this is because institutions of punishment and sexuality create an essentialized figure, defined within the system only by that which engages her with it: her perversion, her resulting delinquency. Why, then, is the prisoner not one of Foucault's queer figures? This is where deviancy becomes linked to sexuality in ways that the other three scholars in this venture attempt to parse out. The sexual deviants are so specifically delineated in relation to the apparatuses that produce them that their relation to the norm is far more specific than the prisoner. These communities, those represented by the queer figures, are created by the specific processes of sexual production that renders them recognizable, whereas "prisoners" are not formed as a community, but are rather disparate subjects who are inculcated into a system of power. However, an understanding of *Discipline and Punish* is necessary to address feminist critiques of Foucault, especially when it comes to the sexually deviant: "Foucault's critics thus fail to recognize his central concern with how the current penal system *constructs* (rather than represses) sex criminal, inculcating recidivism, and, we might add, with how it also constructs sexual victims" (Taylor 2009, 14).

Throughout the 1970s, Foucault increasingly incorporated sexuality into his political activism, and his work regarding child sexuality especially stands out. Foucault's defense of pedophiles and his concern with the proliferation of regulation of child sexuality are perhaps less frequently evoked than his work within gay liberation or prison information, but Foucault was heavily involved in work that put pressure on the French government to relax its punishment of pedophiles. While much of this, including a petition to the French government concerning the age of consent and the incarceration of three men who had violated them and the following conversation with Guy Hocquenghem and Jean Danet on "Sexual Morality and the Law,"

occurred after the publication of Volume 1, it is still within the realm of consideration here. Afterall, "All of Foucault's work hinges on an idea of experience" (Miller 1993, 31). Foucault is engaged with what he saw as "a new legislative system, whose function is not so much to punish offense against these general laws concerning decency, as to protect populations and parts of populations regarded as particularly vulnerable… there are people for whom others' sexuality may become a permanent danger" (Foucault 1988, 276). This serves as an important backdrop to the creation of his queer figures: especially that of the perverse adult and the masturbating child. For not only was the perverse adult now a danger to children, but children were now also deviant if they were to engage with sexuality themselves. As Julian Gill-Peterson notes, the discourse on child masturbation was not originally sexual, but rather social and physiological, and, according to Foucault, became a technique for producing child sexuality. (Gill-Peterson 2013) Thus, it is against this political context of France's legislation in the 1970s and Foucault's political defense of the pedophile, that his queer figures emerge. These figures are highly contingent upon this background. Queerness does not exist in any sort of essence, it exists in relation to a norm and is articulated by a person operating with specific political concerns in a certain historical moment.

As for relationality #3, Foucault is of course working up and against the scholarship before him. Specifically, *History of Sexuality, Vol. 1* is a refutation of Sigmund Freud's ideas about sexuality, which functions as essentialism *par excellence,* just as Foucault stands as the constructionist *par excellence.* Foucault, and *History of Sexuality* specifically, have been taken up as canonically foundational for queer theory, and serve as the starting point for this piece. As Francois Cusset explains in his oeuvre on French Theory in the US,

With the common aim of thinking through sexual subjectivation instead of pointing to an enemy defined in terms of gender, feminists and homosexuals were able to join in a new type of collaboration. In other words, the success of Foucault's later works meant that the previous prescriptive approach, which characterized both feminism and traditional gay studies-pitting an

oppressed identity against a dominant one-was replaced by a postidentity archaeology whose aim was to uncover the mechanisms of gender norms analyzed as being a specific political and historical construction (Cusset 2003, 151).

Here, Cusset renders legible the processes by which Foucault has become canonical for Queer Theory, and, more importantly, how his queer figures function as not only ancestors but methodological models for the following three authors, in that Foucault's queer figures are conceptualized as "specific political and historical constructions" instead of merely oppressed or dominant. Thus, Foucault's constant aim to "overthrow the subject as pseudosovereign," and bring to the surface the processes of subjectification that produce the figure is palpable and, I will show, genealogically key to queer theory and the queer figures it produces.

Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's Queer Figures

Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick published *The Epistemology of the Closet* in 1990, thirteen years after the English translation of *The History of Sexuality, Vol. 1* was published. While not that much time, the world drastically changed in that time, especially for homosexuals, queer communities, and sexuality scholars. The AIDS epidemic began in the 1980s, and its path of destruction was quick and merciless. Foucault died from AIDS-related illness in 1984, when the disease was still quite new and by 1990, it was in full force. AIDS had a profound impact on Sedgwick's work; it tends to operate as a specter, if not a principal subject, in much queer theory work, especially that written between 1980 and 2000. Sedgwick's involvement in AIDS activism, including her close relationships with men who died from the disease, factors into her work. This is the introduction to Sedgwick in Robyn Wiegman's "Eve's Triangles, or Queer Studies beside Itself" (2015)—the "normalization" of HIV that began in the late 1990s and continues today. This normalization contains great irony in two ways, one of which Wiegman points to: "it is a strange feature of our present that the route queer inquiry would take after

Sedgwick has largely turned its political gaze against normalization of every kind, becoming less and less interested in which norms a minoritized community can and cannot live without, and why the choices are never its alone" (Wiegman 2015, 49). Normalization, for Wiegman, is a process that becomes the preeminent subject of critique of queer theory after Sedgwick, while Sedgwick had a more nuanced view of things. However, Sedgwick's conceptualization of queerness in "Queer and Now," becomes a little bit closer to the queer that functions throughout these pieces. That is, relationality #1, in which queer functions always in relation to a norm. The use of normalization in Wiegman's description has a double irony, though, in that normalization functions as a principal apparatus of the creation of queer figures in Foucault. Wiegman takes issue with what serves as the first relationality that I posit in this paper: "the field that has emerged to claim an institutional domain called queer studies is surprisingly confident that the critique of normativity that now defines it is adequate to the political complexities of the contemporary world" (2015, 49). However, I find it implausible to not consider normativity, or rather, the "political imaginary that anti-normativity yields as the defining politics of queer studies," for these four authors, as it does function as a formative process in their works.

In "Introduction: Axiomatic," of *Epistemology of the Closet* Sedgwick's first Axiom is "People are different from each other" (1990, 22). She goes on to list thirteen different ways in which people could possibly categorize their sexuality apart from the homo/hetero- binary, each of which contain "(for) some people/ for others," except for the first, which is simply "even identical genital acts mean very different things to different people" (1990, 25-26). Thus, enumerated, Sedgwick posits 25 queer figures in this list: unlike Foucault, they are not named as specific figures, but rather each is either a "some" or "other" who experiences sex differently than the "some." For all of the figures, sexual preference is organized along lines other than

sexuality or sexual orientation. Sedgwick seeks to remove, or at least decenter, gender from that which constitutes a queer figure. Here, we see how normalization actually factors in Sedgwick's work as not the central defining enemy, but relationality #1 is still in place: the figures she posits are in opposition to a norm that already exists, but it's not the norm that Foucault's figures work against. In fact, it is the very norm of Foucault's figures: that of a queer figure entirely established along lines of gender. While Foucault's four figures are not necessarily homo/hetero, the speciation of the homosexual factors prominently in *History of Sexuality Vol. 1,* and has been the primary takeaway for many. Sedgwick's second axiom, that "the study of sexuality is not coextensive with the study of gender; correspondingly, anti-homophobic inquiry is not coextensive with feminist inquiry. But we can't know in advance how they will be different," posits a norm, that of gender's prominence in queer studies, and works against it with her queer figures, whose sexuality is not organized along gender lines (1990, 27). Interestingly enough, each of the authors in this chronology attempts to move their queer figures' defining characteristic away from gender and sexuality, while still expanding the definition of queer. Chambers asserts his frustration that queer is increasingly inclusive and tied to the homo/hetero binary:

This is the notion that 'queer' is a term of inclusivity – that what queer designates is an overcoming of everything that might divide lesbian women, gay men, transgender and transsexual individuals, bisexual men and women, and all of those who are unsure about their sexual orientation. Queer has become the 'etc.' that used to appear in feminist analysis when authors – often still working within a second- wave epistemological frame committed to and presupposing a certain universality of women's experience – wanted to avoid leaving anyone out. I contend, however, that queer does not and should not name an attempt to include anyone and everyone (2009, 2)

The trajectory of queer figures that I trace here straddles this line that Chambers draws very carefully: as Sedgwick tries to disentangle queer from gender, Cohen tries to detangle queer from sex and gender, and Puar tries to detangle it from sexuality/gender studies altogether. Race plays

a big role in this: Puar intends to bring Muslim people into the definition of queer, much like

Cohen brings poor black women into the purview of queer. Through these detanglements, queer

becomes more and more inclusive, even as it separates from gender and sexuality. Whether this

trend is a problem for the field is neither here nor there, but it complicates Chambers' conception

of the ways in which queer has changed since Foucault.

When considering relationality #2, how Sedgwick's queer figures are contingent upon

and relational to the political context in which they emerged, we return once again to the AIDS

epidemic. The AIDS crisis, under which Sedgwick was writing, reconfigured queerness in

several important ways, which begin to show us the ways in which queerness is always

contingent upon its political context and the political concerns of the author. AIDS began as a

disease that disproportionately, and overwhelmingly, affected gay men. I theorize that it

reconfigured gender and sexuality and queerness in the following ways: it isolated the gendered

aspect of same-sex desire, as lesbians were far less impacted by the disease themselves. It also

centered sex and sexuality in the discourse of queerness. Additionally, it created even more

distance between queer and the norm, as it ostracized the gay community. Finally, it created

coalitions such as ACTUP, which brought lesbians and gay men together in the struggle, which

centered sexuality as the common link between them, decentering gender. Clearly, these

processes are paradoxical and operated simultaneously in ways that render them difficult to

ascertain. Chapter Four explores the role of gay men in queer spaces, as it is affected by these

genealogical configurations and informed historiographically. Here, the effect these factors and

configurations of gay men's lives had a palpable effect on queerness, especially in Sedgwick's

work, and I argue that they led to the following construction by Sedgwick: "the question of

gender and the question of sexuality, inextricable from one another though they are in that each

can be expressed only in the terms of the other, are nonetheless not the same question, that in

twentieth-century Western culture gender and sexuality represent axes that may productively be

imagined as being distinct from another as…distinct, that is to say, no more than minimally, but

nonetheless usefully" (1990, 30). Sedgwick's queer figures reflect this: the somes and the others

experience sexuality in ways that some "experience their sexuality as deeply embedded in a

matrix of gender meanings and gender differentials. Others of each sexuality do not" (1990, 26).

The lack of clarity that emerges from Sedgwick's conceptions, and even from the influence of

her political life on her queer figures, is characteristic of her work: "In *Epistemology of the*

Closet, Sedgwick challenged the political imaginary of left criticism altogether by honing an

appetite for the double bind, which meant learning how to withstand the insecurity of a present

that offered no epistemological grounding from which to adjudicate the contradictions that

characterized it" (Wiegman 2015, 65).

 Epistemology of the Closet opens with the assertion that a homo/hetero binary is simply

not enough to aptly contain the nuances of the world, the "double binds" of politics, the

amalgamations and configurations that form as a result of desires and pleasures, power and

identities. Again, Cusset gives an apt summary:

Drawing on Nietzsche and Proust, and examining the norm of monogamy, and the AIDS crisis, she uncovers the fragility and instability of gender, combats the categorizations of sexuality with the "pleasures of the body" using a very Foucauldian viewpoint-and criticizes the separatism of the previous decade's identity politics. Sedgwick proposes that we unearth the sexual disorders and conflicting inclinations within identity (masked by compulsory dualisms) with the ultimate objective of exposing an entire episteme: "many of the major nodes of thought and knowledge in twentieth-century Western culture as a whole are structured-indeed, fractured-by a chronic, now endemic crisis of homo/heterosexual definition, indicatively male, dating from the end of the nineteenth century," she begins, referring to modern homosexuality's "date of birth," as proposed by Foucault. (2003, 153)

In relating Sedgwick to Foucault, we find that Cusset lays the groundwork for relationality #3,

concerning the ways in which Sedgwick departs from Foucault in her conceptualization of

queerness. This is, of course, because the political stakes have changed. They are changing in specific relation to Foucault, the previous cornerstone. Wiegman directly relates the queer figures of Foucault to Sedgwick's project: "Sedgwick was chiefly concerned with the fact that, among the many divergent figures Foucault discerned in the nineteenth century rise of *scientia sexualis*—the masturbator, hysteric, fetishist, pedophile, and homosexual—it was precisely one, the gender of object choice, [that] emerged from the turn of the century, and has remained, as *the* dimension denoted by the now ubiquitous category of 'sexual orientation'" (2009, 51). Sedgwick works to further deconstruct Foucault, or rather, the ways in which Foucault had been taken up by queer theory. The queerness that she posits is a relationality, a reaction, to that which Foucault asserts. This is not a new line of connection I am drawing, of course, between these two authors, but what is perhaps slightly profound is the ways which there are three lines to be drawn for each of the groups of queer figures these four authors posit, and the ways in which those lines weave through each of their works.

Cathy Cohen's Queer Figures

Cathy Cohen's queer figures are not difficult to discern: "Punks, Bulldaggers, and Welfare Queens" are named in the title of her piece, in which she argues "that a truly radical or transformative politics has not resulted from queer activism" and envisions a politics "where the *non-normative* and *marginal* position of punks, bulldaggers, and welfare queens, for example, is the basis for progressive transformative coalition work" (1997, 75). Cohen's piece begins with a summary of the field as she sees it so far, and the politics it has created. In doing so, she articulated the first relationality used in this piece: "queer theory stands in direct contrast to the normalizing tendencies of hegemonic sexuality rooted in ideas of static, stable sexual identities and behaviors" (1997, 75). For Cohen, heteronormativity is the *dispositif,* or apparatus, of

normalization that creates the queer project, but the reach of heteronormativity as a normalizing force extends beyond the realm of the sexual. Here, we can see the ways in which Cohen maintains Foucault's conception of the creation of anti-normativity by the apparatuses of the system, but she extends it beyond sexuality, and even beyond gender. The politics that puts this into practice is a politics that refuses integration and assimilation, much like Chambers, and seeks transformation instead. However, she doesn't see this as nearly enough; for Cohen, when queer functions simply as "not straight," its politics cannot be transformational, because it doesn't acknowledge "the ways in which identities of race, class, and/or gender either enhance or mute the marginalization of queers, on the one hand, and the power of heterosexuals, on the other" (1997, 82). This thesis will show how "not straight" as a definition of queer is salient, and both creates opportunity for resistance as well as closes off possibilities of organizing. Cohen's assertion creates the space for a transformation of Sedgwick's queer figures: for Cohen, queerness cannot only encompass sexuality, as it could be said to do for Sedgwick, and gender must be re-integrated into the queer equation, accompanied by other factors that complicate the lives of those marginalized by the forces of *normalization.* Therefore, Cohen's queer figures satisfy relationality #1, in that they stand in opposition to the norm, but she looks to transform the ways in which they relate to the norm, or rather, the conditions of that oppositional stance. In fact, that is what the authors in this Literature Review do: they seek to vary the ways in which queer relates to the norm, but it always maintains that relationality. The political circumstances under which they emerge and the configurations by the authors before them affect how exactly the relation to the norm is constructed.

As with Sedgwick and Foucault, Cohen's queer figures are contingent upon the political environment in which they emerge. Cohen is writing in a political moment where queer has

gained enough traction to have its own politics, and these politics are enacted through a series of organizations that Cohen looks at as exemplary of queer politics and its shortcomings. Once again, HIV features in the discourse: Cohen begins her piece with reports of racism within Gay Men's Health Crisis, the largest and oldest AIDS organization in the world. Cohen points to this story as it "highlights the limits of a lesbian and gay political agenda based on civil rights strategy, where assimilation into, and replication of, dominant institutions are the goals" (1997, 75). Cohen's interaction with groups such as the GMHC, Queers United Against Straight-acting Homosexuals, Queer Shopping Network, Suburban Homosexual Outreach Program and others, is indicative of her political moment. Cohen's queer figures emerge under the guise of a queer politics that are simultaneously not inclusive enough and are seeking inclusion into heteronormativity. Cohen points to heterosexual figures whose sexuality has been "prohibited, stigmatized, and generally repressed," as the theoretical door to better queer politics, and one that does not operate upon a "dichotomy of heterosexual privilege and queer oppression" (1997, 86). Cohen's political project is different than that of Sedgwick or Foucault, in that she seeks to expand queer beyond its limits in sexuality, but isolate it from assimilationist politics. Here, the norm against which Cohen's queer figures operate is, as in Sedgwick, a queer politics that lacks intersectional analysis and inclusion that focuses on non-heterosexual sexuality as the defining feature of queerness. Now that we have accumulated three authors, the threads of continuity against and upon which Cohen is working become increasingly clear.

Jasbir Puar's Queer Figures

Jasbir Puar uses genealogy, two genealogies in fact, to assert something slightly parallel to the project this paper undertakes: she identifies a "queer liberal subject," produced through the "rise of the queer consumer-citizen" and the "queer liberal subject before the law" (2005, 122).

However, unlike this paper, Puar takes issue with the creation of a queer figure, arguing that it creates an American exceptionalism, "through a rhetoric of sexual modernization that is simultaneously able to castigate the other as homophobic *and* perverse, and construct the imperialist center as 'tolerant' but sexually, racially, and gendered normal" (2005, 516). A genealogy of Puar's project provides evidence of the pervasiveness of the political backdrop upon which she is theorizing: that is, past queer theorizing has in essence produced the figure that she criticizes, through processes of capitalist, imperialist cooptation. Linearly, Puar takes Cohen's queer figures one step further, completely decentering queerness as homosexuality. In the 29 years since *The History of Sexuality, Vol. 1*, the political project drastically changed, to the point where queerness has, for Puar, transformed into "queer narratives of U.S. exceptionalism," a cooptation of queerness by liberalism that created a sort of "queer liberalism" that subsumes the queer figure into a liberal subject under the state and is used to justify and bolster imperial projects (2005, 516). This queer exceptionalism is most explicitly exemplified in "numerous instances of the responsive commentary to the Abu Ghraib 'sexual torture scandal,'" in which the various assimilationist organizations used a veil of U.S. tolerance and acceptance to explain the actions of soldiers who mercilessly sexually tortured prisoners at Abu Graihb (2005, 517). Here, the political contingencies of Puar's queer figures (relationality #2) is palpable, in that the war on terror and specific political position of queerness has created a new norm, against which "an orientalist notion of 'Muslim sexuality' that foregrounded sexual repression and upheld versions of normative masculinity" stands (2005, 517).

Puar's queer figures extend beyond the American context, flipping the perspective such that the reader can see the ways in which the American queer theory which they presumably engage with is "reproduced in the service of discourses of U.S. exceptionalism" (2005, 516).

Puar uses Deleuze and Guattari's theory of assemblages to create two new queer figures: the suicide bomber and the turbaned Sikh. The use of assemblage in Puar's work plays a specific role, in that it "moves away from excavation work, deprivileges the binary opposition between queer and not-queer subjects, and, instead of retaining queerness exclusively as dissenting, resistant, and alternative (all of which queerness importantly is and does), it underscores contingency and complicity with dominant formations" (2005, 516). Thus, relationality #1 emerges: Puar's queer figures, which are queer Deleuzian assemblages, are in relation to a norm which Sedgwick and Cohen also resist—that of the hetero/homo, queer/not-queer binary. For these authors, the relation is not with one side of the binary but with the dichotomization in the first place. As their projects develop, relationalities #1 (the queer figure's relation to the norm) and #3 (the author's relation to previous queer theory) converge, as the norm becomes the queer figure of the previous authors. The suicide bomber and the turbaned Sikh as assemblages operate against the queer figures of the authors before. Additionally, for Puar, the two figures also interrupt notions of time, space, nation, and security, where queerness is delinked "from sexual identity to signal instead temporal, spatial, and corporeal schisms, queerness is installed within as a prerequisite for the body to function symbolically pedagogically, and performatively as it does" (2005, 522). Puar's queer figures are the most radical yet, not only standing in opposition to any queer ancestors and American queer politics, but also deconstructing life itself.

Through an analysis of these four texts, chronologically and genealogically, a meaning of queer based in Foucault and transformed recent developments in American and global social and political history and new theory emerges. Foucault's theories of the ways in which sexuality is institutionalized created a basis for queer theorists to conceptualized queer figures in their time, given the protean nature of queerness (for which Judith Butler advocates in *Critically Queer*).

The queer figure always stands as an inversion of the norm, a norm which is established through the institutionalization of sexuality, capitalism, and discourse. This norm is produced via processes of normalization parallel to those which produce sexuality in Foucault, and queer figures, as figureheads for communities, emerge in opposition to these norms. This genealogy serves to foreground the definitions of queerness utilized by the students I interviewed, which will be enumerated and analyzed in Chapter Two.

Chapter 2:
Defining Queer

The queer figures I introduce here are not exempt from the contingency of the queer

figures above. I began all of the interviews by asking the interviewee if they could name the

identities they hold; they ways in which they identify[3]. This primary question held a dual

purpose: one, for me to classify my participants based on salient identities such as race,

sexuality, gender, and socioeconomic class, and two, to get an understanding of the ways in

which students at Oberlin are both highly fluent in and sometimes highly uncomfortable with

identity politics. Upon being asked this question, many of the interviewees answered slowly,

measuredly, with a lot of "hmm"s and "umm"s. As expected, the more privileged identities a

person held, the shorter their list was: many white participants forgot to mention being white

until I asked them. People almost always began their lists with the identity that affords them the

least amount of privilege, at least at Oberlin. While this is not surprising, it is worth mentioning.

This indicates the level to which Oberlin students, and people in general, I imagine, prioritize

their identities in terms of the privilege they are afforded for various aspects of their identity.

Additionally, this question allowed me to understand, without any prompting, whether "queer"

as an identity factored prominently for participants. Twelve (of twenty-seven) participants

identified as queer with no questioning: the remaining participants, except for one (who used

"gay" instead) answered yes when asked "Do you identify as queer?" Participants saw their

sexuality and gender identities as falling under the term queer, if not already sufficiently

described by it. While the focus of my project is not necessarily to identify why and how

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[3] The full, quoted responses to this question can be found in Appendix II, in which the
interviewees are listed. This index will serve to help the reader differentiate between the twenty-
seven interviewees throughout this piece.

students are using queer, this always seemed to me like the place to start. After all, one of the things that intrigued me most was how exactly a space could only be open to people who identify with an identity that a) seems to lack a shared meaning, and b) theoretically transcends any labels to begin with. If queer is the nebulous identity that defies the boxes one is put in when they identify with an identity, how is it being used to decide who can and cannot enter a space, who needs that space, and what happens there? While a taxonomical understanding of "queer" is not the primary goal of this project, "we can at least insist on taking our categories so seriously as to magnify their inner contradictions to the point where those contradictions turn out to be analytically informative." (Halperin 2002, 107)

Here I draw from my genealogical Literature Review in examining the ways in which queer students at Oberlin define queer, especially as it operates relationally. Primarily, for most students, queer is an oppositional term, the broad negative to something that concretely exists. For many, queer means "not cis. not straight." (Kaitlyn), "not cis-het," (Mysha) nor simply, "not straight." (Emma). While the articulation of this sentiment varied, many participants used this terminology to define queer. Other answers included:

Leah: a broad general term to refer to *non-normative* sexual orientation and gender identity.
Alton: anybody who's life, I guess, or identity is *not* supported by the world are considered *askew, askance, or out of odd.*
Renee: Identifying as queer is saying what you're *not in the norm* or buying into some part of compulsory heterosexuality or heteronormativity in the world…
Kiley: An identity that *isn't aligned* with what society expects of you**.**
Jasper: Any gender, romantic, or sexual thing that's *not* on the straight cis scale.
Annie: I guess just anybody of a gender or a sexuality that's sort of *outside* of the main, the dominant societal narrative of how that sort of thing is supposed to work.

I noted a very particular trend among these responses and the many others they represent: the use of the *negative.* Above, I italicized the ways in which participants defined queer as an opposition, a "not" or "non", outside. As previously asserted, queer figures emerge as embodiments of the ways in which queer operates as a relational term. Carla Freccero uses a definition that aptly

encompasses this aspect of interviewees' identification: "Queer, to me, is the name of a certain

unsettling in relation to heteronormativity." (2007, 485). For young queer people, queer identity

is used as a way to emphasize the ways in which they do not fit into a norm, the way they stand

in opposition to the standard. However, it should be noted that many of the interviewees came

down to a definition of queer that was simply "not straight." Cathy Cohen noted this trend in

queer activism in *Punks, Bulldaggers, and Welfare Queens*:

In many instances, instead of destabilizing the assumed categories and binaries of sexual identity, queer politics has served to reinforce simple dichotomies between heterosexual and everything 'queer.' An understanding of the ways in which power informs and constitutes privileged and marginalized subjects on both sides of this dichotomy has been left unexamined. (1997, 75)

This phenomenon described by Cohen is squarely articulated by the interviewees. For Cohen,

this is problematic for the creation of a radical queer politics, because it takes heterosexuality as

the locus of heteronormativity:

Experiencing 'deviant' sexuality as the prominent characteristic of their marginalization, these activists begin to envision the world in terms of a 'hetero/queer' divide. Using the framework of queer theory in which heteronormativity is identified as a system of regulation and normalization, some queer activists map the power and entitlement of normative heterosexuality onto the bodies of all heterosexuals. (1997, 81-82).

Very few interviewees adopted this relationality to the context of Oberlin, but two interviewees

expressed any ways in which something can be outside of the norm but still cis-het:

Anthony: I remember I went to one [meeting of Oberlin Christian Fellowship.] The youth leader was a senior voice major and she's like, "I know what's probably going on. Your parents are like, 'You're going to Oberlin with all the hippies, and the danger, and the drugs.'" She's like, "You will be safe here." That's literally what happened. She left the group because she had issues, but it was right. There's a whole other part of this whole place… I also know a lot of more conservative people who are just like, "This college is evil. This college is horrible." OK. Your safe space and this campus is probably very different from mine. Maybe it's queer too. It is in a way, because it's subverting a norm. I'm always thinking, "What is a safe space? What is a queer space?"

Peyton: I also see queer in terms of politics and an expression of something that isn't a part of the norm for that specific category of things. In terms of politics, it might be, if you're, in Oberlin -- if you are let's say super, super right-wing conservative then that's- to me, that feels like it is queer for the campus. It's not the norm here. I've been thinking about that recently. I'm like, "That is actually what queer..." In terms of if you identify as queer as an identity, it is more aligned with sexuality and gender. Whereas, when it is specific actions, behaviors, any expression of art or anything like that, I see queer as something that's not a normal form of whatever is being expressed.

Peyton and Anthony entertain the possibility of queer identity as a norm, which creates the conditions for something normative to become queer. However, it is not taken as the end-all-be-all of defining queer, and for Peyton especially, queer takes several forms: one, as an identity that subverts norms of sexuality and gender, and two, as a relation to a contextual, or situational, norm. Anthony has a similar understanding, and emphasizes a definitional quandary in conceptualizing how something normative in society can become "maybe…queer too" if set contextually within queerness. However, for the majority of participants, and even those who have studied queer theory, queer functions as a fixed identity. Thus, the central conflict: how is it that queer functions as an identity for these students- an identity stable enough to create a space bounded by it- when queer's origins in queer theory supposedly defies identification via category? And, when these students hold varying definitions of queer and who can be included as queer, how is queer space possible, and what functions does it serve?

The divide between queer's utilization and the theory in which it originated, and the conflict over who it applies to is not a new conflict. In this chapter, I will outline the ways in which queer theory has identified its "queer figures": the embodied forms of theoretical queerness. Then, I will identify the ways in which participants encounter paradoxes and struggle to delineate queer in ways that allow it to be bounded by the spaces which they will discuss later in this piece. The Oberlin students I interviewed and the many others they represent, both across Oberlin's student population and likely students at liberal arts colleges across the country, who are now the "coddled" targets of the right, are my queer figures. They are grappling with queerness in all its forms and complexities both through their identities and the spaces they create and utilize.

Some interviewees very accurately articulated the ways in which queer is contextually dependent for them, which serves as an introduction to the key role that context plays in queer identifications and communities:

Brendan: It sort of depends on like what context. In terms of like groups at Oberlin and stuff I tend to use queer just because like queer beers or like other queer people, it's just kind of a nice term, and a kind of nice way of building community. It's a little broader and it's also not just about sexuality and that stuff. But I guess like I use gay when it comes to dating and hooking up in that context I might say it, and I guess like who I'm around. Instead of using queer.

Peyton: In my home community, I would say as a high school student, I had definitely -- before I even came into college I just thought of queer as -- actually, I thought it was a derogatory term and that's how it was used in my home town. It wasn't really brought up very often. Like the word, "gay," the word, "lesbian," those were the only words that were really being discussed at all. I guess, even while I was questioning my sexuality, gender, and everything, probably in my senior year of high school, I was even like, "Oh, I must be a lesbian, that's what it is." In Sturgis, it was definitely more queer was used as a derogatory term for individuals who weren't heterosexual, essentially… Now, when I go home and I identify myself as queer, it's more coming to understand what the word means to me and everything. It was queer essentially, in that context, it's diversion from the norm, or it's not what people are used to. Something that people don't...It's not the automatic. It isn't the norm, essentially. It feels like a more prominent thing for to go back home to Sturgis and identify as queer because it has a more powerful meaning there, because it is a very heterosexual, normative community. Coming here, it's like almost everybody is queer. It's almost the norm.

Mysha: I generally use bisexual when I'm talking to women. Then, when I'm talking to straight men I say queer because the word bisexual, it's very much sexualized. It's like, "Oh, like a threesome." That's what comes to mind with cis-gendered heterosexual men's mind. I definitely use queer more around that. I think it's more an ambiguous term.

Tori: I guess I use lesbian if I'm talking specifically about my sexuality. I use queer if I'm just talking about putting myself in that community or distancing myself from cisnormativity.

Rita: I use queer for myself more often when I'm talking about belonging to a larger group. For example, if we're talking about, again in the most general sentence, non-straight people, I'd say, myself as a queer person. I think of myself as bi, definitely and that's really important to me. I don't use it to describe myself that often. I guess probably mainly because I've been bi for so long now, that it's just there. [laughs] I use Aro more often than I use Ace. I don't know why.

Here, interviewees expressed how queer operates contextually for them, and several patterns emerged. Several students expressed the ways in which queer operates on the level of sexuality. Mysha, for example, uses queer to avoid being sexualized for her bisexual identity, and uses bisexual with women to be sure it is clear that she is interested in women, and because the risk of sexualization for her bi identity is less present. Not only does the meaning of queer depend upon

the political situation and time in which it is emerging, it is dependent upon the receptor of the

discourse. The meaning of queer is contingent upon the politics of desirability that emerge in

different gendered situations, in addition to the dynamics which create the possibility for the use

of queer as a certain connotation. For Tori and Brendan, queer identification is contextual upon

individual sexuality and group identification. For Brendan, Tori, and Rita, queer is a term more

based in community than individual identity, and it becomes a relevant identifier in terms of the

ways in which it aligns one with a specific community. Kiley expressed a similar sentiment:

Kiley: Queer to me is community, community that...I would say queer is a community of people who identify along LGBTQA spectrum. It's many different identities, it's a safe space for all of them… It doesn't matter where along the spectrum you fall, just as long as you feel like the queer community is somewhere that you feel welcome…
TS: Can you talk a little bit more about what you mean by an identity as a safe space?
Kiley: People who share similar experiences, whether it's sexuality, or gender, or whatever, need other people to contextualize that. Having that community, especially at Oberlin, it's quite strong. Having that community that's very similar, but also different. You can be your own person in the community and also gain strength and confidence from knowing others.

It is important to notice the way in which queer is contingent upon the surroundings of the

person in question: "People who share similar experiences…need other people to contextualize

that." This contextualization is key in the consideration of Kiley as a queer figure: she, and the

interlocutors before her, introduce an analysis of queer that not only requires non-

straight/cisgender identification, but also the *requirement* of contextualization for queer identity.

While I could probably theorize an entire thesis on this contingency, I insert these articulations of

the role that contingency, community, context, and relationality play as a basis. Contingency

operates on multiple levels, as indicated by the ways in which queer is politically contingent for

Puar, Cohen, Sedgwick, and Foucault. Students' definitions of queer are contingent upon

situation, community, location, and space. These definitions create a basis that illuminates the

ways in which queerness at Oberlin and the physical manifestations of it (queer spaces) are able

to emerge in the particular configurations that they do.

I asked interviewees what queer meant for them and how they would define it more broadly. The definitions, reasons for use, and troubles that interviewees encountered with queerness emphasizes a sentiment articulated by Judith Butler in "Critically Queer": "As expansive as the term 'queer' is meant to be, it is used in ways that enforce a set of overlapping divisions" (Butler 1993, 21).

The reasons my interviewees choose "queer" can be grouped as followed: fluidity, privacy, community, and convenience. Additionally, interviewees identified troubles with the word for the following reasons: generational differences and the politics of reclamation, the inclusion/exclusion of asexual and aromantic identities, and, lastly and perhaps most importantly, the issues men face in choosing between queer and gay as identifiers. This last point will lead into a much larger point of this study: the ways in which identity politics at Oberlin have interacted with queer theory to create two distinct groups of queer students who do not fit: gay men and people of color. Queer spaces on campus, as the last chapter will show, are the physical manifestations of these issues and reasons for use of queer that interviewees articulated.

A large majority of interviewees told me that the fluidity of "queer" is what appeals to them about the word:

Megan: Through the help of people I was romantically attracted to, but also friends, I've realized that not wanting to put a label on it, or feeling like I didn't have a right to put a label on it, was stupid. If I felt like this term was how I wanted to describe myself it wasn't up to anyone else to tell me how I felt about that either way.

Mason: I would say in terms of sexuality, it defines for me not setting myself up to say that I'm attracted to a specific type of person, which is really important in current...Even with the expansion of being more open to same sex relationships, there are still mentalities that you have to be attracted to a specific type of person. Like I'm gay, but I'm only attracted to this specific genre of human being. Queer represents the push back against that as far as identity goes. For me, I haven't been with a man in quite a while. In a sense, I'm generally attracted to women, but I also don't want to put those identifiers on myself, because it's super loose. It exemplifies the fact that you can be attracted to who you're attracted to. In that sense, I would say that everyone was queer.

Alexa: I definitely feel like it's a lot easier to explain queer than it is to explain pan. I feel like it allows for more space in group spaces more than it...It does allow for a certain amount of fluidity. I first felt

queer was comfortable when I didn't have a solid grasp on my own sexuality. I was still like, "I don't know, but I don't think I'm straight." It's like, "Yeah, I'll call myself queer because I can fluctuate and decide within that." I do like it for those purposes as well.

Kai: [Queer] means for me, it's a label where I don't feel I keep questioning or doubting myself, whereas before, if I tried to identify as trans-masc, I didn't feel that was very authentic eventually because I felt I was more variant than that and that was putting me in more of a box that I wanted to be in. Queer for me is just kind of like a place where I can just have some kind of affirmation of my identity that's different from what people might assume but not have to put confining labels on it, besides that. As more and more boundaries are getting broken down, I feel like it's more and more of something that brings comfort and is, in a way, a label that diverts labels.

Renee: I like it for its fluidity. It's open and that it changes. Yeah, I like it for its fluidity and it can be a loosely associated group. Lots of people can identify as queer, but no one really knows what it means, and it's different for everyone, and I like that about it.

Leah: [It] doesn't really need to be pinned down just because I've realized that my sexual orientation and just sexuality in general, in terms of times when I feel more asexual and then other times where I feel more sexual. Overall, queer is nice because it simplifies the whole thing. It makes me stop trying to pin myself down.

Here, students reflected a use of queer that aligns very well with queer theory, and the origins of

the reclamation of queer, in that it is used by these interviewees (and many others) to defy labels

and leave room for fluidity and change. However, this was not the only definition or reason for

use that interviewees expressed. Many of the same interviewees who expressed liking the anti-

labelled, fluid nature of queer, also defined queer as a concrete identity: in essence, a label. And

it is upon the basis of this label for self-identification that entrance into queer space is predicated.

It was this definition of queer, an escape from labels, that seemed incompatible with the response

these same people were telling me: responded that queer is an "umbrella term" or a "blanket

term" that encompasses identities that are not cisgender and/or heterosexual. A large number of

interviewees responded that queer is an "umbrella term" or a "blanket term" that encompasses

identities that are not cisgender and/or heterosexual:

Seraphina: I would say, yeah, I think queer is more of an *umbrella term* for me in this way, it encompasses. It's a super category, the more specific identities that I also have.
B.K.: For me, the identity queer is just an *umbrella term* to encapsulate all of my experiences in terms of what I like and how I feel.
Raven: I think of queer as an *umbrella term* and an intentionally vague one in that it allows for people to identify with whatever part of non-normativity they want.

Tori: For me, queer is both just in general, a descriptor of not being straight. I do enjoy it as an *umbrella term*, but also, I'm very much into the sort of cultural connotation of it.
Andy: Yes, like that's a really helpful *blanket term.*

This is an extension of the use of "umbrella" in gender/sexuality politics, historically: T.

Benjamin Singer (2014) writes that "the umbrella metaphor emerged along with the category

transgender in the United States in the 1990s" as "the product of classificatory imaginaries

produced by 'trans 101' trainers, nonprofits, government-funded social service programs, and

international human rights organizations" (259). For Singer, the umbrella metaphor performs an

aggregative function, in that it "visually casts an aggregative categorical imaginary that includes

all sex/ual and gender-nonconforming identities and expressions. In doing so, the umbrella

implies that *all* formations of sex and gender are not only possibly but also taxonomically

containable" (Singer 2014, 259, author's emphasis). Here, "umbrella: and "blanket" operate as

metaphors that not only aggregate, but also protect and cover. When Emma and Megan evoked

"blanket" as a metaphor, it was to evoke privacy:

Emma: [Identifying as queer] just means that I'm not straight. I like it specifically instead of bisexual because, that's what I am but I prefer using the *blanket*, larger term queer because it leaves a little more room for privacy. I'm attracted to my gender and other genders, in terms of the person, but the term queer does address that well without having to explain myself.
Megan: It is a safety *blanket*. It prevents people from asking questions, I don't have to explain anything.

These key terms used describe how queer encompasses other, more specific identities, evoked

not only aggregation but also images of protection. Umbrellas and blankets protect and cover.

Here, safety enters into the rhetoric of queerness, and thus the politics of metaphors are extended

beyond Singer's historical definition.

For many interviewees, "queer" operates in a way that both eases tensions over the

identity politics of identifying as "L, G, B, T, or Q" and also reinforces those categories, because

they are taken as criteria for inclusion.

Le'Priya: Queer...I think it's more accessible, I feel you could use it more as an umbrella term, just

because if you identify as whatever that's in the LGBTQ, it's kind of just like queer because LGBT cuts out a lot of different things. It's kind of like an alphabet soup that's just cut off, so I feel like queer can overshadow everything and like include everything. Maybe you identify as multiple things within that community, so why just pick two letters if you can have one word to describe?

Kiley: Using the acronym, I guess, that's an easy way to break it down, but we're constantly adding new letters to it so eventually it will be the entire alphabet, and we're just going to be the alphabet group... If you yourself are not queer, you're not going to be in the acronym, like fuck off. Get the fuck out of my acronym. Go to someone else's alphabet. I'm also not saying that we don't need allies and people standing in solidarity, but if you're not part of the community, you're not part of the [oppressed]. You're part of the oppressor, so stop it.

Andy: [Queer is] an accepted term. It's easier than being "LGBTQIA*+." The acronym has just gotten way too long which is good, because inclusion is good. Like when asked, "Are you familiar with the LGBT thing? Are you familiar with the LGBTQIA* thing?" You realize that it keeps going on. It keeps going on and on, and queer is just an umbrella term.

Carlos: In Texas, queer is still used as an insult, so I think I've just always kind of...I personally use it as a shortened form of the full LGBT acronym, so to me, identifying as somewhere on that spectrum means you're queer.

Rita: There were also people saying, "I don't like an acronym. Because the acronym inevitably leaves something out." Or puts a certain ordering which is sometimes fine, and sometimes like, why did you do that? The full acronym is so long. [laughs] That it's not reasonable if you use the entire thing. Particularly for queer event. The title, it gets so long.

The sentiments expressed above operate dually, both illuminating that "the acronym" is insufficient, inconvenient, and yet also necessary for reasons of identification. Secondly, the umbrella/blanket metaphor is also simply used for convenience: Carlos, Andy, and Rita expressed that the acronym "is so long," and queer operates as a "shortened form of the full LGBT acronym." There is a "politics of alphabet soup" that operates underneath the term "queer" for many queer students. "Queer" operates on multiple levels that connect these letters, and for many, it is used as an encompassing term for reasons of convenience, as the interviewees above expressed. However, it does more than put an umbrella over the acronym: it allows for multiplicity within it, as Le'Priya articulated: "Maybe you identify as multiple things within that community, so why just pick two letters if you can have one word to describe?" This is a significant step towards inclusion, and, as Andy said, "inclusion is good," but it operates just as efficiently as a tool of exclusion. Kiley articulated this quite explicitly: queer is a fluid term, a

term with multiplicities, but any umbrella can only shield a certain number of people from the rain. The umbrella term metaphor is apt, as umbrellas are concrete objects that only protect a finite area of space from the rain, and queer has boundaries. Then, of course, there are people who are left in the rain, who get wet, and still others who are sometimes allowed under the umbrella and sometimes left in the rain. E. Patrick Johnson uses Gloria Anzaldúa's analysis to address this limitation: "Gloria Anzaldúa explicitly addresses this limitation when she warns that 'queer is used as a false unifying umbrella which all 'queers' of all races, ethnicities, and classes are shored under. While acknowledging that 'at times we need this umbrella to solidify our ranks against outsiders,' Anzaldúa nevertheless urges that 'even when we seek shelter under it [queer], we must not forget that it homogenizes, erases our differences" (Johnson 2005, 98, quoting Anzaldúa 1991, 250). These "umbrella politics" will play a larger role in the ways in which they get played out physically; how the ideological border wars become manifested in space.

Students are using queer, and creating queer spaces, in ways that fall between identity politics and queer theory, teetering awkwardly between the two, creating shaky boundaries that manifest physically in queer spaces. One specific border war that several interviewees articulated involves the inclusion or exclusion of aromantic and asexual identities into "queer":

Kiley: I use that definition to include aromantics and asexuals which many people don't, but as a queer person who is also asexual, that's very important to me that the A stands for asexual and aromantic, not ally.

Megan: I think I had a weird transition into identifying as queer because, being asexual, there's a part of this, you never really feel like you're included in the spectrum. Being ace, especially being ace at Oberlin, is a weird thing. Even at Oberlin, people have this view of asexual people as monks or people who just are strange, or that...I've really noticed, even amongst very accepting Obies, this perception of me being othered, like I'm an "other" by being asexual.

Abraham: I would define queer as anyone who is not straight or is not cis or is not either. Anyone who...maybe this is an unpopular opinion, I don't really vocalize it a lot, because I think it's an unpopular opinion, but I don't think straight...I don't consider straight asexual or hetero-romantic asexual people to be a part of the queer community, even though oftentimes they consider themselves to be part of it…. I feel the same way about poly-amorous people who only date...are only in heterosexual relationships with

each other. While that does have its own struggles, again, it's not the same thing as whatever. If you're not cis or you're not heterosexual, then, I would consider that to be queer.

Interviewees Leah and Seraphina also expressed that asexuality falls under the queer umbrella. However, it is clear from Abraham's statement that asexuality is a contentious issue in the border wars, and for Abraham, if there is a hetero-romantic, asexual identification, entrance under the umbrella is not open. Asexuality is not brought into the analyses of any of the authors in my literature review, and I think the introduction of asexualit(ies) opens up a really important space for analysis of what queer means for different people (and the queer figures in this piece), especially as it navigates the grounding of queerness in sex/sexuality by positing that the lack of sexual attraction is queer. The issue of asexuality and queerness is a clear example of how the fluidity that people like so much about identifying as queer creates ambiguities: questions of exclusion and inclusion that blur the lines between straight and queer. In the next chapter, I will show how queer space is a spatial manifestation of these issues, especially as they collide with issues of gender and race. The identity politics that so messily combines with queer theory for students at Oberlin becomes materialized in the creation of queer (safe) spaces.

Chapter 3:
Queer Space

Now that we have established the ways in which Oberlin students are utilizing queer as an identity, we can explore how they are defining "queer space." In this chapter, I argue that space and identity are inherently connected in both theory and queer history. I then go on to show how the interviewees define queer space- in essence, what makes a queer space, a queer space. I will then introduce one space that is a central focus of the study, Queer Beers, and elaborate how it fits into campus culture, queer community, and how it interacts with other queer spaces on campus. Finally, I will elaborate upon and interrogate the notion of "safe space," arguing that liberal arts students have a far more nuanced understanding of safe space than is frequently invoked by those outside of campuses, and further ask how queer space and safe space interact as concepts and spaces.

Queer Space and Queer History

Oral history projects about historical spaces contribute a genealogy of non-heterosexual space that serves as a historical background for this project's focus. Kennedy and Davis explore the ways in which lesbians in 1940s and 1950s Buffalo, New York "search… for and buil(d) communities… in which they (can) be with others like themselves" (1993, 1). Their research is situated in a context far different than that of Oberlin College in 2016 but touches on the need for non-heterosexual individuals to create spaces for themselves, which is at the heart of this project. Kennedy and Davis write that "although securing public space was indeed important, it was strongly motivated by the need to find a setting for the formation of intimate relationships…created to foster intimacy among its members and was therefore built on a dynamic interconnection between public socializing and personal intimacy" (1993, 5). This is what I hypothesize is motivating the formation of queer spaces at Oberlin College as places to

own and create and negotiate queer identit(ies) and subjectivit(ies).

What is especially notable about the formulation of queer expressed by the interviewees in Chapter Two is the distinctly spatial nature of it: division, "dividing lines," and "outside" are some of the ways in which these boundary wars are collectively imagined as spatial. Here, I contend that queer identity formation is inherently connected to space. George Chauncey's *Gay New York* does an excellent job of exploring this historically. Chauncey's insistence that gay male subculture existed before Stonewall is based entirely in space; he proves the existence of it by enumerating the ways in which gay men carved out space and created physical sub-cultural spheres in New York for themselves. The spatial nature of this identity formation is further exhibited by Chauncey's discussion of the closet: "all three myths[4] about prewar gay history are represented in the image of the closet, the spatial metaphor people typically use to characterize gay life before the advent of gay liberation as well as their own lives before they 'came out.'" (1994, 6). According to Chauncey, this spatial metaphor operated within the subculture as well: "The gay life of many men was so full and wide-ranging that by the 1930s they used another- but more expansive- spatial metaphor to describe it: not the gay closet, but the *gay world*." (1994, 7, author's emphasis). The importance of space in queer history is key to this work, but will not be elaborately articulated due to lack of space. However, it shall be noted that space plays an extremely important role in the creation of gay consciousness, especially throughout the twentieth century.

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[4] For Chauncey, the three myths of Pre-WWII homosexuality are the myth of isolation, the myth of invisibility, and the myth of internalization. See Chauncey 1994 for more on this.

Theorizing Queer Space

For Foucault, space plays an integral role in the formation of Western consciousness. In "Of Other Spaces: Utopias and Heterotopias," Foucault explains the central role of space to Western society: "The present epoch will perhaps be above all the epoch of space. We are in the epoch of simultaneity: we are in the epoch of justification, the epoch of the near and fear, of the side-by-side, of the disperse." (Foucault 1984, 1). The centrality of space and relationality to society is in perfect alignment with the ways in which queer operates relationality. In Chapter 1, I articulated that queer figures, throughout a genealogical span starting with *History of Sexuality Vol. 1*, are identified as such because they stand in relation to a norm. The interviewees frequently evoked that their identification with queer is predicated upon this relationality: queer, for them, is always a "not," and it's always "outside." This is inherently connected to space, as Foucault writes, and "our epoch is one in which space takes for us the form of relations among sites" (Foucault 1984, 1). Thus, I contend that queerness for the subjects of this project "take[s] for us the form of relations among sites": in this case, those sites are queer spaces.

Foucault's conceptualization of heterotopia serves as an apt foundation for understanding queer space and J. Cottrill, in "Queering Architecture," articulates this:

Heterotopias, unlike utopias, are "a sort of place that lies outside all places" and yet is actually localizable. Either crisis or deviance of heteronormativity creates heterotopias. Foucault cites women's houses for menstruation and gay enclaves as examples of the heterotopic physical space. These spaces have "the power of juxtaposing in a single real place different spaces and locations that are incompatible with each other." These incompatible spaces and locations allow for fluid queer critique of both spaces and locations. (2006, 361)

Using Foucault's conceptualization of heterotopias, we can see the ways in which queer space exists as a space that is at once a part of and outside of heteronormativity. Queer space is a part of heteronormativity simply because it would not exist without it. Here, again, the relationality of queerness comes into view as the singular defining feature of it.

Others have questioned the mere idea of the possibility of queer space. For example, Christopher Reed in "Imminent Domain: Queer Space in the Built Environment" questions the possibility of queer space as both a physical and metaphysical concept: "Queer space may be a contradiction in terms. Some would argue that queerness, as an ineffable ideal of oppositional culture, is so fluid and contingent that the idea of a concrete queer space is an oxymoron." (1996 64). Cottrill elaborates, "These spaces are not solely about the body, but have political implications. It is a claiming space against the dominant frame of heteronormativity." (2006, 363). The next chapter will show the ways in which this potential impossibility informs the experiences and ideologies of the students I interviewed, for whom queer space exists as both a bounded physical space and a free metaphysical space.

In addition to using Foucault and historical examples of the importance of space, there are several theorizations of space that inform the analysis of space I will undertake in this chapter. Within the realm of politics and society, Frances Polletta's "'Free Spaces' in Collective Action" (1999) lends insight into the use of "space" as metaphor in social science. Polletta defines "free spaces and their analogues" as "small-scale settings within a community or movement that are removed from the direct control of dominant groups, are voluntarily participated in, and generate the cultural challenge that precedes or accompanies political mobilization" (Polletta 1999, 1). This is an extremely applicable definition for the ways in which queer spaces are conceptualized as, ideally, free from domination and politically grounded. Queer spaces, and all safe spaces, theoretically, are based in this definition, and Polletta's conceptualization of "free space," and the questions she asks about it, give a foundation to the rhetoric of my interviewees. Interviewees expressed a desire to create "free spaces" while also questioning their possibility: Can a space be free from "direct control of dominant groups"?

What are the effects of efforts to create such spaces on the lived experiences of students? How are spaces policed in such ways that they can become "free spaces"?

Defining Queer Space

The importance of definitions is not to be lost on the greater focus of this study. Words are used to reconfigure the boundaries of gender and sexuality that denote certain identities: to construct identities as different from other identities. Queer included, this process of delineation is a process of border-making. Not only do spatial metaphors play a large role in these processes, but this linguistic space-making is, I argue, reflected in the physical space making of young queer people at Oberlin. Queer space operates as a salient definitional marker at Oberlin, denoting, to a point, who can enter a space or what the space is arranged for and around. For example, a discussion occurred in "lil gay things," a Facebook group for queer Oberlin students, in January 2017, when a student asked for "ideas [for] queer spaces that aren't bars and don't necessarily revolve around queerness (i.e. queer book club, queer art parties, queer recipe sharing, etc.)" The post received 27 "likes" and 11 comments, including ideas for queer Zumba classes, queer tea parties, queer zine making, and queer running/workout clubs. In December 2016, a student hosted a workshop called "Disability Advocacy & Accessibility in Queer Spaces." Due to the salience of this term on campus, I asked interviewees to define queer spaces. Participants offered several definitions of queer space, which traverse a variety of definitional boundaries. Some said that a queer space can only be a queer space if it is specifically named as such:

B.K.: What makes a queer space is someone deciding to say, "This is a queer space," and, then, inviting a bunch of queer people there**.** Honestly, any space could be a queer space if people are open minded enough and willing to recognize that there are other people whose identities matter as well. A few individuals who identify as queer who say, "This is a queer space. We are free to be queer. Anyone else who wants to be free to be queer can come join us." A space where people are unabashedly queer,

prideful about being queer, and welcoming to others who need a chance to be unburdenly (*sic)* queer as well.

Leah: For me, the definition of a queer space, the intentionality of someone officially designating it as a queer space is important. I'm not sure whether I could say that all of these spaces in practice, function as a queer space just because that word is so messy. Everyone has their own definition to a certain extent. They begin with the intention of being queer spaces.

Brendan: That's interesting because like I guess you kind of have to say it is. Because sometimes people say like "Oberlin is a queer space" just because there's so many queers and like well not.. no. Just because there's a lot of queer people, then you could say DC is a queer space, you know like it's…. so I guess you have to have people identifying it as that. I think that's probably the most important.

Annie: I feel like those are queer spaces because they're...I mean, I thought of them that way because they were officially designated queer spaces™ but I think you don't have to have an official designation from somebody at the MRC to be a queer space.

Clearly, for some people, the designation of a queer space as such is extremely important. Nusser and Anacker note that "space and identity are important for queers as most public space is heterosexualized, and queer expressions are often contested by the heterosexual public." (2015, 95). Therefore, the naming of a queer space is what differentiates it from an unmarked space, which, in most contexts, is a heterosexual space. Here, again, we see the ways in which queer is defined by its opposition to something else- something that is unmarked entirely.

For other participants, queer space is more of a feeling or an atmosphere, that goes beyond the process of delineation, but rather requires a shared understanding and a level of acceptance:

Le'Priya: Yeah, it would be a space for queer students where queer students come together, but it's much more than that. I feel like that's the big part of it, but you can also have a space where there's a lot of queer people and you all just do nothing, which is fine. A queer space would be a space for queer students who want to come together to help each other. To build community, to support each other, to motivate each other. Make sure they're doing what they need to do to feel supported. Be able to talk to, be vulnerable if you want. Just talk about different issues that either relates to the queer community or even other identities, because all your identities, they don't overlap but they affect each other. A space where you can have those deep conversations about, what is queerness? What do we feel about that? Do we even like the word queer? Do we want to use something else? Having those tough but impactful conversations, I feel like that what's makes a queer space a queer space.

Emil: Queer people probably. Yeah, I think, part of that is also like a shared language in an interesting way. For me like especially being Latinx it's also an interesting parallel because within Latinx experience, there is a lot of variety, so people haven't been able to side step that, and so you have to kind of embrace that as part of what it means to be Latinx at all. That some people look super white and some

people are darker, and some people speak Spanish and some people don't and I think in terms of queerness, it's about that kind of like… but at the same time I think queerness is similar in that it can be so different but at the same time there are things that kind of connect. I think a queer space is one in which those connections aren't being restricted in the way that they are in a straight space or in a dominant space. Like in my high school in which like you can still be queer, be gay, be trans, in those spaces but your queerness isn't, you have to kind of keep it in check in a way that I think you don't in a queer space.

Andy: On the very top, you could say that for surface level, that people like cis hets are either not allowed or reminded nicely to check their privilege, their assumptions, whatever. At deeper, it's realizing that the people here aren't going to assume anything about you. If you use she/her/hers, they're not going to assume that you like boys. They're not going to assume that you like cooking really, you enjoy wearing dresses or something. You actually can be male without being assumed to be toxically male, without being assumed to look down on other people. In that way, almost, you can be more accepting of traditional gender shit. If you use she/her/hers and you only wear dresses and you love doing dishes, it's assumed that you've done that voluntarily. That's genuinely who you are rather than what you assume society wants of you… Yeah, because the people that you know that you're around, you know aren't judging you or understand that you have given thought to your identity. They take it at face value rather than assuming that there's anything connected to that.

Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick once asked, "What if the richest junctures weren't the ones where

everything means the same thing?" (1993, 6). Emil, Andy, and Le'Priya ask the same thing, in a

way: what if a queer space is a space where "queer" doesn't mean just one thing? What if it is a

space in which the meanings of queer identity and queer life can be contested, negotiated,

discussed, or even exist concurrently in ways that may even contradict? Emil gave an interesting

parallel to this in his discussion of Latinx identity, highlighting the ways in which queer spaces

are spaces where "queer" doesn't have to mean just one thing, but the unifying force of the word

which creates connections is not restricted. Andy expressed a similar sentiment in the ways in

which one can exist in their gender identity without assumptions around gender expression or

behavior, and that multiple meanings can attach to a gender identity concurrently. This sentiment

aligns most closely with queer theory, especially when considered alongside Sedgwick, who

argues that queer can refer to "the open mesh of possibilities, gaps, overlaps, dissonances and

resonances, lapses and excess of meaning when the constituent elements of anyone's gender, of

anyone's sexuality aren't made (or *can't be* made) to signify monolithically…" (1993, 8). I

invoke queer theory here to draw attention to the ways in which the discourse of this entire

project draws blurred lines between queer theory and identity politics, as will be shown below

with the words of other interviewees. For the above participants, though, this "open mesh of

possibilities" means that queer space is not something that is necessarily able to be bounded

physically. Alton articulated queer space as "like a vibe, or feeling" and Andy said "we carry

them [spaces] with us." This ethereal conception of queer space was in no way uniformly

expressed by interviewees, but it evokes the idea that queerness, instead of being a concrete

identity, is ephemeral, fluid, affective. Interviewees also defined queer space as an attitude of

acceptance:

Alton: When you enter that space and you see that people react to you in a way, like a "free to be you and me"...[laughter]...sort of deal. … It's just like, you see a bunch of people doing different things than you would at a straight place. It's more of a feeling. You're like, "I probably am more accepted here. There are people that are more like myself than the average straight folk," Which, in a sense, I don't know, normalizes queer. [laughs] … I want to say the queer space is like a vibe, or feeling. It's sight, as well. You're like, "Hey, I'm not the only one that looks like me here. There are other people, and I am not the outlier," which is really interesting, because being queer is being the outlier, being askew. Then you want to go to Queer Beers because you don't want to be that outlier, so that's interesting.
Seraphina: I think that, you know, the simplest answer that comes to mind is having a majority or at least substantial quantity queer people, which is clearly not enough to define it, because that exists in places that I would probably not call queer spaces. So, that's part of it but I guess I would describe the feeling as, it's just as okay to be queer in whatever ways that is for you, as it is to be cis or hetero or stuff like that. And that applies both to queer people and to straight people in that space. There's definitely like an attitude of like, you know, I'm straight, but if I found I were bi, I wouldn't care, or I don't have to worry about what it means that I like a trans person, like that doesn't affect my sexuality and if it does I don't care. So it's, I mean so acceptance, I don't know, this seems like a very basic answer, but I think that's pretty much what it is.
Peyton: I would see a queer space as... I don't know. Some place that I could exist and be comfortable, but also understand that it's not exclusive, understand that queerness can manifest itself in so many ways. It's not just with sexuality or gender. But for safe spaces, it's not really like, "I'm politically queer." What I would like to see in queer spaces is a community that is very inclusive, and definitely addresses issues that are still present in the queer community such as misogyny.

 These conceptualizations of queer space define it as a space where a multiplicity of meanings of

queerness can exist as manifestations of queer that are seen and felt as acceptable to others in

space. Reed writes that queer space "exists potentially everywhere in the public realm… it is the

individual's appropriation of the public realm through personal, ever-changing points of view."

(1996, 64). Is queer space possible without a physical place? Is it simply the attitudes of

acceptance of those in the room that make a space queer? If so, how does one curate these

spaces? My analysis of Queer Beers as a case study later in this chapter will ask these questions

in a more concrete, and possibly answerable way, but these definitions of queer space not only

highlight the potential problems and questions that arise when queer spaces are created

intentionally on campus, but also create a foundation for the ideological underpinnings of these

spaces. As the below quotes show, ideologies and theories of both queer theory and identity

politics are used concurrently in the definition of queer spaces at Oberlin. The below

interviewees heavily relied upon identity politics in their definitions of queer spaces:

Carlos: A space that's limited, or I guess led by queer people with the intent for a safe space to openly express whatever you want to talk about when it comes to your queer identity.
Interviewer: Can there be non-queer people in that space and can it still be a queer space?
Carlos: I think so, if it's a queer-led thing. Allyship is great, and I've had some really nice ally leaders, but it gives the space a different meaning if it's being led by someone who's not queer. It's like being babysat by our straight overlords.
Interviewer: [laughs] So it has to be queer-run, if there's going to be straight people. If there's going to be not-queer people there, it has to be at least queer-run?
Carlos: I guess.

Anthony: Oh gosh, a queer space a queer space? I've always found it to be that if the loudest people in the room say it is, there's no choice for it not to be. [laughs] I've been in spaces where, "We're queer, and we're going to do this, and we're like this." I tell people in private, I know people who disagree, or feel some type of way about that word, or don't care about the politics, but they don't speak up. The more powerful people in the room, they control the narrative, they control the dynamics. They're like, "We're queer, and we believe this, and if you don't believe this, then it's not queer, and it's against us, and it's blah, blah, blah." I'm like, "OK, if the loudest people in the room identify as queer, and want to be a queer space, and no one else challenges them, then it's a queer space." [laughs]

Emma: I participate in a lot of queer spaces, in that all my friends are queer. When we hang out, that's a queer space. Most of my house is queer, so my house is a queer space, but I don't really hang out in a lot of intentional queer communities…. I feel like if I'm in a space, and most people are queer in a space, and people that are straight aren't taking up a ton of space in the room, then it feels like a queer space. But if the straight people are, there's a lot of them, and they are talking a lot… in a social situation… then it wouldn't be a queer space.

Tori: I think very much it doesn't have to be the intention of the space so long as it's the population of the space. For example, say a group of allies organize something that's gay right or whatever. I would consider that very much not a queer space, despite the intention being so strongly towards that. Something as simple as working the shift at Dairy Queen, populated by queer people, made it feel safe.

Seraphina: I think that, you know, the simplest answer that comes to mind is having a majority or at least substantial quantity queer people, which is clearly not enough to define it, because that exists in places that I would probably not call queer spaces. So, that's part of it but I guess I would describe the feeling as, it's just as okay to be queer in whatever ways that is for you, as it is to be cis or hetero or stuff like that. And that applies both to queer people and to straight people in that space. There's definitely like an attitude of like, you know, I'm straight, but if I found I were bi, I wouldn't care, or I don't have to worry about what it means that I like a trans person, like that doesn't affect my sexuality and if it does I don't care. So it's, I mean so acceptance, I don't know, this seems like a very basic answer, but I think that's pretty much what it is.

Thus, above, it is clear that for some, the identities of the people who are in the space, in charge of the space, or taking up the most (verbal and otherwise) room in the space are what make the space a queer space. This is a complicated combination of identity politics and queer theory, of rigidity and fluidity, that combine to create the dynamics that I will describe in the following sections.

Queer Beers

Now that we have established both how and why students are defining and using "queer" and "queer space," we move to the case in point of this study: "Queer Beers." So, what is Queer Beers? Raven, a former organizer in charge of the space (and the only graduate interviewed for this project) defined it as "a designated space for queer folks to come together in the 'Sco and dance and hang out, and just sort of be in fun party community with each other." The 'Sco, short for "Dionysus Disco" is Oberlin's student dance club/bar. It is a small place in the basement of the Student Union, and consists of a dance floor, a few tables, a small stage, a DJ booth, some pool and foosball tables, and a small bar which serves beer to students who are 21+. The Sco is the site of several weekly events, including "Splitchers" on Wednesday nights (half off pitchers, student DJ'ed), Professor Beers (where students can go with their professors on Thursday afternoons), TGIF (a Friday afternoon hang-out, which is wildly popular when it is nice out and takes place on the central quad, and is poorly attended when it is held in the actual Sco and it's

not nice out), and performers that come through Oberlin and are best suited to a club space for their performance. Most evening events at The Sco go from 10pm to 1am, and only really fill up around 11:00 or 11:30pm. The Sco has an energy of its own: it is either empty and extremely awkward or so packed you can't move. This is self-perpetuating: if the 'Sco seems too empty, no one goes in. If it is full, more people come. On a successful 'Sco night, it will be entirely empty from 10pm-11pm, and filling up from 11pm-12am, and then very full from 12am-1am. I hypothesize that this is because many students who go to the Sco never actually drink there because they are underage, so they "pre-game" the event, which is to say, they drink in groups in their dorm rooms before they come. This dimly lit space of crowd-oriented group dynamics is where Queer Beers takes place.

Queer Beers, at the time of the interviews for this study, occurred every other week on Tuesday nights. It follows the timeline of many other nights at the Sco, meaning that some nights were full (of course, not until 11pm), and others were entirely empty (people usually only go to the Sco if they hear others are going, so unless someone starts the waterfall of "are you going to Splitchers/Queer Beers/etc.?" the 'Sco can remain entirely empty for an entire evening, which, of course, occurs frequently on a campus with a high level of academic rigor and stress). Queer Beers is the focus of this study for several reasons, but the primary one is that it is the only queer social event on campus that occurs more than once a year (this is excluding student organization meetings, which I will discuss later in less detail, as they are a common and widely discussed space of political organizing and queer socializing[5]). It is not insignificant that Queer Beers is in a bar space, and operates largely as the event that turns the Sco into a gay bar once every

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[5]It is worth mentioning that there is a once-per-year campus event called "Drag Ball," which some interviewees named as a queer space they have been to. See Witheridge 2010.

fourteen days. Unlike gay bars, which remain gay bars all the time, Queer Beers is fleeting

(except, of course, the "gay nights" at bars, which are the non-Oberlin parallel space). It utilizes

a space that is the site of public heterosexual hook-ups the other 29 days of the month. Queer

Beers is a (mostly) closed space, open only to those who possess an invisible identity that is so

fluid that it has no shared definition on campus or otherwise. Queer Beers is advertised almost

exclusively through Facebook- two students are in charge of the event each year, and they make

the event, book the space and the DJ, and create a Facebook event for each Queer Beers. Here, I

will outline the ways the event is framed on Facebook to center the processes by which a pseudo-

closed space is constructed. The following are excerpts from the Facebook events for Queer

Beers over the span of two years:

September 8, 2015:
"!!!!This event is public. If you click 'attending' it may show up in your newsfeed! Just a heads up. <3
!!!!!
THE CLUB IS INDEED GOING UP ON A TUESDAY.
Come out (no pun intended) to the Sco this Tuesday for the first queer beers of the semester! Queer Beers
is a place to meet other queer folx and get down on the dance floor. (and to enjoy 50 cent cups of beer if
you like to drink!)
~Music will be provided by the incredible DJ MyOwhat and DJ ILLumiNaughty~
Tuesday September 8th. 10pm-1am @ the Sco.
[Note: queer is an umbrella term. This is a space designed for LGBTQIA and questioning folx, whether
you'd like to label yourself that way or not. Allies are welcome! But please be respectful of the fact this
space is for queer folx, not you.]
Can't wait to see you there!!"

February 16, 2016:
"THIS EVENT IS PUBLIC. PLEASE BE MINDFUL OF THE FACT THAT IT CAN SHOW UP IN
YOURS [*sic*] NEWFEED IF YOU SAY YOU'RE ATTENDING. Be safe, y'all. <3
Queer folx, let's take over the Sco! Featuring 50 cent cups of beer if you're into that and lots of good
music and fun times even if you aren't.
*---- This is a space intentionally set aside for queer people Please be mindful of why and how you
occupy this space if you do not identify as queer in any way. ----*
FEATURED DJs TBA
Tuesday, February 16th 10pm @ the 'Sco.
Come thruuuuuuu. (And stay tuned for future dates! Queer Beers will hopefully be happening pretty
regualrly [*sic*] this semester!)"

March 7, 2017 (this is the format used for all of the events since September 2016)
"Queer Beers Tuesday March 7th.
DJ HYPNO

Theme: House Party
This is a PUBLIC event, meanting [*sic*] your friends and family will see if you RSVP. Just want you to know becuase [*sic*] this is a safe space and we want you to have fun, but we want to respect if you aren't out fully or not quite sure about things! We want to keep this space safe and comfortable for all. Hope to see you all there! :)"

The above descriptions demonstrate how the organizers of the event (two of whom I interviewed: Raven, 2015-2016, Le'Priya 2016-2017) navigate issues of visibility, safety, questioning, allyship, and drinking, all of which came up as significant talking points for the students I interviewed. That these are addressed by the organizers in the description of the event indicates their importance as sites of contention in the creation and use of this space. Additionally, the ways in which the language around these issues (and which ones are addressed) change over time indicates the extent to which they are sites of constant negotiation and renegotiation. These processes of navigation through the deep waters of organizing that is both social and inherently political are indicative of how contentious and fragile the construction of queer space is.

While I will focus on these sites of (re)configuration of Queer Beers to show the complications of queer space on campus, it is extremely important that the only reason these contentions are important is that the space works despite them. That is to say, it is important to emphasize how emphatically the students I interviewed appreciate the space. In exploring the issues and confusions with Queer Beers, I do not want to obscure the positive, affirmative power of its very existence. It is, after all, my first experience at Queer Beers as a liberating, validating experience that led me to this project in the first place. In fact, the issues I outline below are not issues, really, but the sometimes contradictory nuances that exist alongside of and despite the fact that this space, in many ways, is doing exactly what it sets out to do. That is, in the words of Le'Priya, a space where "whatever they need out of the space, they'll [students] be able to come and take that." It is the very necessity of the space, and the joy and community that it forms, that creates contention in the first place:

Raven: When you don't have a lot of space carved out for a community, the one space has to become everything, and queer beers is never going to be able to satisfy everybody, but that pressure gets put on it because we don't have all these other spaces laid out for us. There are definitely people who are frustrated with queer beers because it has become a pretty party space, like people pre-game it. People want more than that, and I think that is very very valid. That to me is more the problem than necessarily what queer beers is, people need and deserve other spaces because not everyone is happy in a party space, and that's real as fuck.

What Raven is explaining should serve as an important underlying thought when considering the rest of this paper. However, the unfortunate lack of other recurring queer social spaces on campus provides a fruitful opportunity for analysis of what queer space means on campus and what students need from it. It should be noted, as well, that there are several student organizations on campus that meet regularly and frequently, and serve as spaces for planning of events or discussion and socializing. These include Zami (a student group for queer and trans students of color), Lilac (transgender student support group), Lambda Union (general LGBT student group), and Reading Rainbow (queer book club). I focus primarily here on Queer Beers because it is an open social space and not a student group. While many colleges and universities have various queer student organizations, it is the uniqueness of a space like Queer Beers, and the configurations of identity that undergird it, that leads me to centralize my analysis around it. Nonetheless, many of the interviewees mentioned the student groups listed above when speaking about queer spaces, and thus they do play a role in my analysis, sometimes explicitly evoked, sometimes as background comparisons.

Thus, as Raven describes, the onus placed on Queer Beers brings "need" and visibility to factor prominently in the discourse around Queer Beers on campus. Queer social space, as shown in the last chapter, plays and has played a prominent role in queer identity formation and politics for at least a century. Interviewees expressed several ways in which the understanding that entering these spaces mirrors coming out of the closet and forming queer identity is complicated and continuously negotiated. One of the most important nuances to this understanding comes in

the form of discussions of who "needs" the space and the visibility that is inherent in the public

nature of the space.

Renee and Andy expressed that the students who "need" Queer Beers, and queer spaces

more generally, are those who are firm in their queer identity:

Andy: To a prospee [prospective student] I'd say like, "Don't go [to Queer Beers] until you feel comfortable with yourself." Until you feel like you have something to show off...like until you feel like you got something to shake, no need to go. It's kind of a weird dynamic looking at everyone else I wouldn't say parading themselves, but getting there. Dancing on, feeling good about the way that they look. Queer beers is good, because you can express your gender and sexuality, fine. It's easier to express your entire aesthetic. Knowing for sure that that part of you will be accepted means that you can put everything out there. I'm not the kind of person who really wears that kind of stuff on my sleeve or wants to show myself off. I'd rather passively get to know someone rather than being like, "Here are all the things that are great about me." For some people who are good at dancing, people who are sexy as fuck, have fantastic bodies and know it, it's a perfect venue because it's totally socially acceptable...They're like "I'm queer. I'm hot. I'm full of myself," in the best way. I don't mean the bad kind of egotistical, but have self-value which is something I struggle with, for sure, as a musician and as a queer person.
It was weird for me seeing all these people. I could be there. It's possible to feel that good about yourself, but I'm not there so it was a little weird.
T: It's more of a space for people who are really solid in their queerness in some ways?
A: Just as they're in their identity as a person, in general.

Renee: I definitely see that there is a queer community at Oberlin. It exists. I have never been to an event that's been explicitly labeled for queer students or queer-identifying students. I'd wanted to go, but I've been reluctant. I do think the queer community at Oberlin is large. Some of it's super visible. They dress in queer-coded ways, queer-coded haircuts. Everyone knows you're queer by the way you dress. I don't feel like I really fit into that. Also, I only discovered and I came out as queer about a year ago. I've been a part of it for the last... It's like over there people who are very openly queer and very cool about showing it and talking about it, and I'm not. In that way, that's been a bit intimidating for me

In this sense, it is a space for visibility of queer identity, and in order for one to be in a space

where one's queer identity is so visible, one must be fully solid in their identity and ready to be

visible in it.

Conversely, for Abraham and some others, queer spaces are necessary for those who are

coming into their queer identities:

Abraham: For me, I quickly learned that I didn't need queer spaces, because when I was in high school, I did need them, because that was the only way that I was going to have any sort of community. I very quickly learned that that wasn't the case here, but there are some people who, they didn't identify as queer in high school, and so, they're confronted with this panic, "Oh shit, I'm queer," when they're here. Which is definitely a better place to have it than in a conservative Christian high school, but it's still hard. I'm at the point where I've been queer long enough that it's like, "OK, I don't need this. I'm fine on my own, and

I have enough queer friends on my own." When I was starting to come to terms with being trans, and trying to figure out resources and that kind of stuff, I needed trans spaces. Now, I'm at the point where I've been trans long enough that I don't need them, but I very much recognize the need for these kinds of spaces.
Mason: It would be a problem [not liking the club atmosphere of Queer Beers] if I didn't have queer friends. I'm inclined to say yes, but also, it's not an active issue in my life that I don't really go to queer beers. I can get drunk with my queer friends without being in queer beers. I definitely understand that mentality. It's important to have different spaces in which people can interact in a way that's similar to that. I'm not a huge partier, and it's not an issue to me that queer beers isn't my things. The fact that my friend group is so obscenely queer makes it easy for me to not attend queer beers and feel like that's not the only queer interaction that I'm able to have all week. In the case that, that was someone's situation, I would totally understand being frustrated or uncomfortable.

For Mason and Abraham, Queer Beers is more of a necessary space for those who are just beginning to understand their queer identity, who are looking for queer community and need it to become firm and validated in it.

The discourses of the four above participants reflect a certain contradiction in queer space, and especially public queer space. When entrance into a space is predicated upon identification with a certain identity, when one enters that space, they are, essentially, coming out. They are making their identification with an invisible category visible. In many ways, this is the foundation of this project, and an illustration of the importance of space to queer identity.

Another point of contention emerges at the intersection of accessibility and necessity of the space. If, as Mason and Andy assert, the space is necessary and important for those coming into their queer identities, then it must in some way be accessible for those who are not entirely out yet. However, if entering the space is, in some ways, a spatial manifestation of coming out, and is supposed to be open to those who are queer, how can it be what it supposedly can be or needs to be for those who are questioning? The role of questioning identities in this discourse was of some importance to the interviewees, but inevitably came in conflict with opening the space up to straight people and "allies." Annie and B.K. (both underclassmen), emphasized the importance of having the space opening to questioning people, while also acknowledging that straight people's presence in the space has potential to cause issues:

Annie: I feel it is important to have queer spaces be accessible to questioning people. Even if the questioning people turn out not to be queer at all, it's important for them to be accessible because there's just not a lot of support for that in the rest of all of society. I think that people who can be in queer spaces...I actually really don't mind if there are straight people in queer spaces as long as they're not being weird. [laughter] If you're a chill straight person, I don't mind if you're hanging out with me and all of my queer friends while we talk about queer issues, but if you're going to be super...I don't even know how to describe it, just super weird about it, then no.

B.K.: I would say that there's no reason why you can't go to any of the queer spaces, especially if you're questioning. If you don't identify as queer, just remember, when you're in those spaces, don't try to *take up space from queer people* who are trying to be around other queer people to heal or to mend some kind of community. (my emphasis)

B.K. utilized the concept of "taking up space," which carries a lot of weight on a campus that

traffics so heavily in identity politics. Raven used this language in discussing organizing the

space:

Raven: I go out of my way to say this is a space for queer and questioning. Ugh, I include the thing about allies which, I don't think the space is for allies, I don't at all. I think also people want to go out with their friends, and that's real. The thing that I've always said is 'if you don't identify that way, please be *mindful of the space you're taking up'* and to me that means if you are straight, do NOT play with people's emotions, do NOT be dancing crazy on the stage- you know, like you shouldn't be the center of the party, because we're not celebrating you right now, we're celebrating queer people… Like, if you are straight and you're coming to queer beers, 1- why? 2- think about the way you're interacting with the space, like *don't take up too much space*, be mindful of interacting with people who maybe are interested and should not have to feel ashamed of hitting on someone in this space that's designated for that. In terms of enforcement, I think it's more like I have asked people to be like mindful internally because I do want this to be a space for people to be able to like just be in a queer environment. (my emphasis)

Abraham and Kiley used this language as well:

Abraham: It can be weird on spaces on this campus, being a passing trans guy, going into them, because there's a lot of, "Oh, well, you're a passing trans guy. You have a lot of privilege, and you don't deserve to be in this space," or "You should stop *taking up space in this space*," which is a weird thing to happen in a trans space that is mostly not people who are transitioning.

Kiley: [in queer spaces] we can joke about things that straight or cis people have done in our day. A couple days ago, [my friend] and I had a good twenty-minute conversation about these athletic bros that were *taking up a lot of space* in Slow Train. They were like shouting... We were like "Ugh."

This is an important way in which spatial metaphor is mobilized for identity politics: the space

that a person with privilege "takes up" is not necessarily the physical space of the room they are

occupying. Rather, the phrase renders physical the space, verbal and otherwise, that could be

more equally distributed among the social actors in the space, but is instead "taken up" by people

who, because of their identity privilege, are societally allowed and encouraged to insert

themselves more assertively and aggressively into conversation. The salience of this metaphor is

palpable in the discourse of the interviewees, who, in explaining queer space imbibe space with meaning that goes beyond just the physical.

Participants expressed the contention that occurs when faced with the dilemma of allowing allies, straight people, and questioning people into spaces. In many ways, these three groups of people are not distinct: allies may be straight and/or questioning, straight people may be questioning and/or allies, and questioning people may be allies and/or straight identified. However, while these are not mutually exclusive categories, they get treated as such by the participants, who had varying feelings about the presence of those three groups of people in queer spaces. Carlos encountered this syllogism:

Carlos: I'm all for inclusion. If anyone wants to come, they're more than free to come, but I feel like it takes away from the safe space a little bit if there's people who don't identify. But they could be questioning and not even know it, so who am I to judge?

The way Carlos resolved it was to ask, "who am I to judge?" In doing so, they recognized the blurred lines between these three groups of categorically "non-queer" people. They stopped themselves after the statement about "people who don't identify," recognizing the inherent invisibility of questioning identity. That is, if it is an identity at all- rather, it is a distinct lack of identity. I hoped to interview questioning people about their experience with Queer Beers, but encountered the very paradox that I describe here: questioning people are, by definition, not identifiable. However, Peyton shared their experience with being questioning:

Peyton: Queer Beers is essentially a space where individuals can go and feel like the people around them share this non-normative identity. Not necessarily non-normative in Oberlin, but non-normative in their home towns, or what's been socialized to be the norm. It can be genderqueer, anything that's not cis binary. It can be questioning. I definitely stress the questioning aspect, because I feel like a lot of the spaces that are essentially labeled as queer aren't very welcoming to questioning individuals. I remember from my own experience, being a freshman in the first semester and seeing all these queer events and organizations, and everything like that. I was just like, "I'm questioning but I'm definitely not set in my identity, so I can't attend these because I'm still thinking of myself as the cis straight person and I don't know." Even though queer for a lot of people is, "Yeah, questioning is also included," it's a very set term for, you have identified as this way. You have identified as queer. That's how I see that.

Emma was able to resolve this identitarian conflict that Peyton experienced in an interesting

way:

Emma: At queer beers, that's a space specifically for people who have felt marginalized in straight spaces, which are all spaces. I think queer beers should stay a queer-only space. Queer questioning, you don't have to be like, "I am this thing." If you're like, "Well, I don't really feel straight," go. I just think like, allies, it's not really a place for straight people who want to be supportive. I just don't think it's the space for that… I think straight people get a lot of spaces, and what makes queer beers so great is that, it's not confidential, but it's a special space for queer people to gather. Not everyone is totally out all the time, and I think that's really important to keep in mind, for the same reason not everybody will RSVP to an event on Facebook, if it's a queer event and they're not out. Some people are out to some people in their lives and not everyone. It changes the space a lot even having a straight person there, knowing who is queer and who is not, or who is queer on campus. Not that that's a huge issue, like 'oh, the straight person is going to out everyone in the space' because that's not a thing that really happens at Oberlin. It's special because it's every other week, it's a special space, it's like a community gathering and in some ways, a healing space.

For Emma and many others, it is extremely important that Queer Beers, and queer spaces in

general, remain intentional and prioritize queer people. Emma allows room for questioning

people by adding that one does not have to identify as queer to enter a queer space, just that one

has to be uncertain about a strict identification with heterosexuality. Raven discussed this from

the point of view of organizing:

Raven: So the space is designated for queer people and also, I always, at least in the way that I phrase it, queer and questioning- because we want to make sure, 1 that this is a space where queer people can be sort of like away from the perils of the world, a little bit at least, be in this space where you should be able to make the assumption that people that are here are queer, or are going to at least not be queerphobic, or like outwardly… it's supposed to be somewhat of a safer space to just sort of be yourself and gather in community with people who are like you. And so, the whole issue of questioning- I remember talking about this when I was organizing and thinking about wording, and if someone is questioning, unsure, we don't want them to feel like they can't enter the space…people were just talking about like "I'm not out, am I going to be kicked out of queer beers?" and I was like "Fucking A, like absolutely not!" Like how can you make space for that, right? How can you make space for people who are still figuring it out? And so I think that having that queer and questioning thing is really important to also allow people who aren't out to still be able to be there, but it also does bring up the whole like, if you see someone who as far as you know is straight, and being like "Why are you in my space" and that's like a hard thing to navigate. I go out of my way to say this is a space for queer and questioning, Ugh, I include the thing about allies which, I don't think the space is for allies, I don't at all. I think also people want to go out with their friends, and that's real. And so when it comes to enforcing, there's no policing, there's never ever anyone standing there being like "Are you straight? Get out!" It's more of like I try at least in the way that I word it and publicize it, to be like people need to be checking themselves, and that's as far as the policing of the space should go…I think, for people who are questioning or still trying to figure their stuff out, that space needs to be as unintimidating as possible, and it can just be such a nice thing. Even interacting with people just to be like "Whoa, look at all these other queer people who exist on campus! Maybe I'm not going to talk to anyone here, but maybe I can strike up a conversation with someone in the library" you know?

The question of who can use the space conflicts with the way the space is used when visibility is taken into account. This, which I term "queer inventory," involves the identitarian taking of inventory of who is in the space, and how they must identify as a result of that presence. On a small campus like Oberlin, with a small student body, one's presence at Queer Beers could be said to indicate to the campus that they are, in fact, queer. Raven makes this point, that one can assume most people at Queer Beers are queer, and therefore find community, validation, and safety. "Queer Inventory" is also a part of this, though: it allows for students to determine who is queer. According to Raven, this has implications both in and out of space: one can know that they won't need to "feel ashamed" about hitting on someone in the space, and they know there are people they can potentially feel community with when they are not in the space ("in the library," perhaps). It is in this that one finds commonality:

Emma: It's a really nice place. In a way it's like see and be seen, who else is part of your community. Honestly, it's a real thing. You see someone at queer beers, then you see them around and you're like, OK. I might have nothing else in common with this person. We might be like, they're in the con, I'm in a college. We do very different things and I never see them. They're a first year. I'm a senior, but we're both queer. That at least creates some sort of a connection.
Jasper: One thing that I generally do is, when I see someone in a queer space I memorize their face, so I keep a mental database of who's queer. Queer Beers is where I go to update that…I definitely try to remember people's faces. [laughs] I'm evaluating my relationship with people, like whether I know them or should I talk to them, more frequently than I am at Splitchers.
Rita: Where it's like, this is the majority and we are not part of that. We can come into the space and know that. Now when we see each other we can be like [laughs] I know that you and I have something in common, in the sense kind of thing.
Brendan: I guess sometimes on a personal level, if I'm like interested in seeing what other guys are there who are queer, sometimes it's confusing, like oh well is he, like, you know, or is he just coming? But I mean I guess there's always that ambiguity.

From the perspective of commonality and community coming from the visibility one gains being at Queer Beers, there are two perspectives on the position of people who are questioning. In some ways, Renee's sentiment that, for people who are questioning, Queer Beers is an intimidating space, makes sense in this context. By entering that space, one is essentially coming

out to the campus, making themselves visible because they are entering a space that prioritizes

queer identity. For Emil, going to Queer Beers was coming out:

Emil: Yeah, space is pretty interesting. That's actually kind of the way that I came out here, was I went to queer beers by myself. I think that last year, early early first semester, I was just wrestling with it a lot. …I think I just got into my head that when I was sure, if I knew, that's what I was going to do, go to Queer Beers. That was like my way. Even at that point, I knew I wasn't going to do like the facebook status, call my parents, like that wasn't really an option for me. And so, it was what seemed kind of the most accessible in a weird way.

Despite these issues of visibility, participants like Emil expressed how validating it can be to

find that commonality with other people; how that affirms (and even creates) identity in many

ways.

The idea of "queer inventory" and visibility also brings the sexual nature of the space into

conversation: as Raven mentioned, primarily limiting the space to queer people prevents

embarrassment upon hitting on them. Mysha shared an anecdote that illustrates this:

Mysha: One time I went to Queer Beers, and it was me and my other bisexual friend, who's very pretty. Everyone thinks we're dating. It's so funny. We're not. One of our straight friends was like, "Can I join? Can I join? Can I join?" We're like, "Well, we'd rather not." She ended up coming, regardless. When it's your friend you're like, "Um, but there's a problem because..." Do you want them to come because it's your friend, but also you know it's not right. Our straight friend ended up tricking up this queer basketball player. She gave her her number, and the basketball player started texting her. Our friend goes, "Oh my God, she is texting me. What?" I'm like, "Well, you were at Queer Beers, and you were being sexual with her. What else was she supposed to assume?" Things like that make me feel unsafe, sometimes. Even in queer spaces, I'm like, "Are straight people sneaking into here, and am I going to get played by a straight person?" [laughter]

With this anecdote, Mysha indicates that Queer Beers is a space that is used for finding partners,

which is complicated when the space is open to non-queer-identifying people. This is another

catch-22: if the space needs to be open for questioning people to be able to enter, and for people

to bring their straight friends, how do issues of uncomfortability and unsafety get resolved?

Additionally, a contention about the function of Queer Beers is brought to the surface: how much

is this space for finding community and commonality, and how much is it for finding a partner?

Abraham had a strong opinion on this:

Abraham: The reason I go to Queer Beers is not to find a queer community, but is, rather, to find other queer people to hook up with, which is why everyone goes to Queer Beers. [laughter] Nobody goes to Queer Beers, because they're like, "Wow, I just really love this queer space where everyone is under the influence of alcohol, and sweaty, and rubbing up against each other in the Sco." No, people go to Queer Beers because they want to get laid, if I'm going to be real.

Abraham's blunt honesty on the topic has two possible indications: either he is right, and

students do just go to Queer Beers to find partners, or some do actually go for community, while

others go for a hookup. Regardless, Abraham's assertion raises the question, are queer spaces

inherently sexual spaces, because queer is a sexual identity? The answer to this question is

complicated and multifaceted. As shown in Chapter One, queer is not always about sexual

orientation or identity, it just always exists in relation to a norm. However, Chapter Two also

showed how, for a great deal of the students I interviewed, queer means "not straight" and not

much else. The debate about the role of sex, sexuality, and the erotic in queer theory and queer

studies is one that has raged on for some time now, and the interviewees here show how it is

playing out on the ground, at Queer Beers. Heather Love has been an important voice in this

"debate" (perhaps better termed a continuous amalgamation of polemics about how the field of

queer studies should and shouldn't conduct itself, and upon what foundations). Love writes that,

for her, "it is hard to imagine a form of queerness that does not maintain its ties to a specific

experience of sexual identity" (2011, 180). Tori echoed a similar sentiment:

Tori: [Queer Beers is] definitely full of drunk people and it's a very sexualized space, which I actually appreciate. I really disagree with the people that...I do agree that we should have more queer desexualized spaces, but I feel like having an avenue to express queer sexuality is really important. Especially because where I'm from, where a lot of my friends are from, you can't do that anywhere.
TS: The almost hook-up culture of Queer Beers is important to you?
Tori: Yeah. Not to say that hook-up culture isn't fucked up in a lot of ways because it is. In a lot of ways it's also really important and affirming to me personally.

For Tori, like Love, keeping the sex in queer is important. Seraphina, Carlos, and Rita felt

differently:

Carlos: I usually only go the first [Queer Beers] of the semester, and maybe one of the last ones. It's a nice space in that you can feel comfortable being openly queer, but I think it's just the environment of the

Sco, where it's very hookup-oriented, which is fine if you're into that, but I am not someone who tends to hook up. It's a little bit of an uncomfortable environment, but it's fun to dance.

Seraphina: There is some kind of like queerness to like hypersexuality and substance use, the headline example is queer beers. To some degree that's like not thoroughly a problem, but like it's a problem if you feel like those are your only queer spaces to access. I wasn't here before, but like queer chill sessions are a good alternative activity for like "I just want to hang out as queer people but I don't want to like…" Well there's also the aspect of like those two things don't have to be tied together, so like sometimes we need a queer space that's substance free and nonsexual, but those are two different attributes. Of course you can only create so many things, so it's understandable because those are two common problems.

Rita: It's been uncomfortable a few times, because sometimes you're just there dancing and you look over and there's someone with boobs out groping. Or just grinding into a point where you're like, "Oh my God. You're basically having sex in public right now." [laughter] Which, fine, but that's not really what I went to queer beers for. That type of a party environment. It's not totally my thing. I like it every once in a while but not a lot.

The five interview excerpts and the opinions they reflect above are, I argue, the pragmatic manifestations of queer theory's struggle over the centrality of sex in queerness. Furthermore, they parallel the definitions of queerness given in chapter one in how queerness gets coupled and decoupled from sexuality. Abraham takes a no-holds-barred approach to placing sex at the center of Queer Beers. Tori recognizes that others may want a less "sexualized" queer space, but emphasizes the importance of a "sexualized" queer space. Rita and Carlos acknowledge that a hook-up[6] oriented queer space is "fine if you're into that," but generally prefer to steer clear of it. Seraphina emphasizes the need for queer spaces that don't involve hypersexuality. Given that most students interviewed defined queer as a non-straight or non-normative sexuality, what is left in a queer space when the sexual aspect of queerness is set aside? As mentioned before, this has been theorized at length, as queer and its disciplinary field have become more and more expansive, which is both exciting and dangerous, as Love explains: "The semantic flexibility of queer— its weird ability to touch almost anything— is one of the most exciting things about it…

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[6] The definitions of "hook-up" in this context were not explored. For more on defining "hook-up," see Currier 2013. Danielle Currier argues that the lack of a shared definition of what exactly constitutes "hooking up" is, what she terms, "strategic ambiguity," wherein the vagueness of the term is intentional and useful, and serves different purposes for men and women.

Before we get too excited about the expansive energies of queer, though, we have to ask ourselves whether queer actually becomes more effective as it surveys more territory" (2011, 182-183). Given the discomfort with the overtly sexual nature of queerness that many participants expressed, it seems that queerness has taken on a meaning for students that is quite a bit deeper than the definition they gave initially. Many of the students in Chapter Two defined queer as "not straight," setting aside any other definitions of queerness that involve non-sexual non-normativity. However, many of those same participants wanted queer spaces that were less hookup-oriented. This, and the other attendant issues that occur when an ideological definition becomes physically spatialized (which results in the prioritization of some identities over others) and a boundary made fuzzy by the expansiveness of queer, will be explored in the next chapter.

Here, I ask, is a space ever "desexualized," especially when it is a queer space? What makes a space "sexualized"? Before exploring this further, it must be mentioned that for several of the interviewees, asexuality was, in fact, a part of their queer identities. Dominique A. Canning writes in "Queering Asexuality: Asexual-Inclusion in Queer Spaces" that "because asexuality is defined as the absence of sexual attraction, and often described as the absence of sexual desire, it could be considered threatening to a political movement that has been fighting for the right to be sexual in its own way" (2015, 67). The possible inclusion of asexual identities into the general "umbrella" of queer identities desexualizes the identity insofar as it integrates the lack of sexual attraction. This creates more difficulty in centering or decentering sex in queer spaces. Kiley commented on this:

Kiley: I'm not super vocal about it, but being asexual in the queer community, [my friend] and I we were in Portland for January, and we went to this queer poetry night that was literally just erotic poetry. Just that being a space that was defined as being a queer space, that's fine. I get it. I truly get it. Sex is very important and it's part of being queer in many cases, but it just felt like once again I'm in this space and all we're talking about is sex.
Kiley's opinions on this demonstrate just how tricky it is to navigate the issue of sex and the

erotic in queer spaces. If asexuality is queer, then does queer become less sexualized? Or does it, in fact, remain just as centered in sex, if not more so, because an asexual identity is centered upon the lack of sex, and thus still "sexualized"? For Canning, the inclusion of asexuality under the "queer umbrella" threatens the sexual nature of queerness, and could add to the "desexualization" of queer spaces, or at least the attempt to. However, I do not fully believe that the issue of asexuality and queerness entirely accounts for the rhetoric of a need for a "desexualized" queer space and the contentions that emerge from it.

A sexualized space, for many of these students, means an inherently unsafe space: not only because the expression of queer sexuality is so often and so ubiquitously policed and judged, but also because of what Armstrong et al term "party rape" and the general lack of consent in party spaces with alcohol. Armstrong et al. theorize that party rape occurs because "the concentration of homogenous students with expectations of partying fosters the development of sexualized peer cultures organized around status" and "cultural expectations that partygoers drink heavily and trust party-mates become problematic when combined with expectations that women be nice and defer to men." (2006, 484). This theorization was proven correct by many of the interviewees:

Leah: Queer Beers is nice because random cis boys will not come and dance on your ass and you have to look around and be like, "Who even are you?" I feel that happens way less at Splitchers than at any other club and any other place. It's funny that it still happens a little bit. It's not funny, like ha-ha. I was surprised when I came here that that was still a thing just because I assumed that people were a little bit more aware of their sexism or something… I think that [Queer Beers] feels safer. Particularly in other places, compared queer clubs versus non-queer clubs in other places. Also here, it feels like there's less male "predatoriness." That's interesting also because theoretically there could also be trans, masculine people or masculine-centered people who could hypothetically be serving that same role.
Alton: When I looked femme, men would always grab my hips at disco at Splitchers, but it never happened at Queer Beers when I looked femme. I don't know if that's a generalizable experience, but yeah, I would say that there's definitely less sexual pursuit, like aggressive sexual pursuit at Queer Beers, and more respecting people's bodies.
Many interviewees expressed that Queer Beers feels safer: in the words of Raven, that "the

energy, the raw patriarchy [laughs] of straight men is just not as present, which is wonderful."

This "raw patriarchy" is linked to party rape, and interviewees felt safer when it wasn't present. While several students acknowledged that internalized misogyny can and does play a role in queer spaces, the overall impression I got from the interviews was that Queer Beers felt like a sexually safer space than its heterosexual equivalent, Splitchers. However, party rape can and does occur without the presence of straight men: as Armstrong et al. define it, all it takes is "a party space with alcohol" for "sexualized peer cultures organized around status" to emerge. Thus, the push for "desexualized" queer space comes from the leftover aspects of party rape that still remain when the heterosexual men, but no other elements, are (theoretically) removed from a space. Therefore, many students look to gather on the basis of their common queer identities, which may be based on sexuality, but in a space where the potential for party rape and the attendant dangers of its atmosphere are removed. Tori summarizes this:

Tori: I would say for what it is, it's the safest possible space for queer people that involves a lot of substance use and that involves this sexualized atmosphere and that involves really loud music in often a physically inaccessible space. There are all of these things that are a problem with it, but I still feel like the nature of it makes it more safe than something that was like a non-queer alternative.

What Tori described explains the apparent paradox between the increased safety of a queer space and the description of the space as "sexualized." The party atmosphere and alcohol in the space leave some the danger for sexual assault in place, while the lack of heterosexual men makes it safer. This leads us to the important discussion of safe spaces that undergirds this analysis.

Safe Spaces™ and safe spaces

As mentioned in the Introduction, safe spaces are a hot topic right now, especially for those involved in the debate over "trigger warnings" at colleges and, as writers in the New Yorker and even President Obama put it, the "coddling" of young minds. An Op-Ed in the New York Times called the process of creating safe spaces, "self-infantiliz[ation]." Oberlin has been

at the center of many of these debates, including Nathan Heller's "The Big Uneasy," which caused waves in Oberlin, academia, and the Right. It is important to note that the "coddling" rhetoric comes not only from the conservative Right, but also from within the left itself. Heller described this as "at some point, it seemed, the American left on campus stopped being able to hear itself think." The terms of these debates are framed as solid, black-and-white declarations of spaces as safe or dangerous, triggering or not. I will show here that students have far more nuanced understandings of these issues. Safe space has operated as a specter in the preceding chapters, an underlying concept invoked by participants but not defined. There was a point in every interview where I asked specific questions about safe spaces, and below, I will present the discussions that proceeded and the attendant issues.[7]

In fall of 2015, a user of YikYak (an anonymous Twitter-like social media platform that, for a time, was used across campus) asked "Is Queer beers a safe space?" The anxiety about entering a safe space where one may not be welcome is a common one on a campus where "safe space" is a frequently used term. However, like "queer," "safe space" revealed itself through the interview process to be a term that, while frequently used, lacks a clear definition on campus. Therefore, as one would expect, the question of Queer Beers' classification as a safe space elicited varying answers. It should be noted that the Facebook event description since September 2016 has included "this is a safe space" (see section on Facebook event descriptions for previous language around safety). The organizer of Queer Beers, and also one of the writers of that description answered,

Le'Priya: Yeah, I believe Queer Beers is a safe space. It's kind of tricky just because the attitude towards the Sco and what that is, being a club, and all those things that's entailed in that. So me and [the other organizer] really tried to make it a safe space, make sure everything's appropriate, so yeah, I feel like it is a safe space. I know before I actually ran Queer Beers, I felt safe in that space when I used to come.

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[7] See Appendix III for the full interview schedule.

Le'Priya recognizes the complexities of naming something as a safe space, but feels that the

intent and effort put into making it a safe space has rendered it such, or at least hopes so. What

emerges from Le'Priya's response and those of many others is a discrepancy between naming

and feeling. That is, students tended to view a safe space as two things: as a tool for describing

when a space feels safe to them, and as something that is or isn't named a Safe Space (which,

from here forward, I will be denoting as Safe Space™, because it seems to have taken on its own

trademark.) This double usage of the phrase results, most likely, from the history of the term,

which has been said to either come from gay urban politics (see Hanhardt 2013) or academia

itself (see Vaccaro et al. 2012). Thus, the term, and the resultant discourse and polemics, have

created Safe Space™, which will reveal itself below to take on a different meaning than simply

feeling safe in a space. For example, when asked if Queer Beers was a safe space, Alexa

responded, "Not to my knowledge." This answer clearly utilizes the definition of safe space as

one which is very specifically designated as such (or, one could even say, trademarked), because

Alexa is unsure if anyone with power or an organizing position has named it. They went on:

Alexa: It's interesting because I feel like [calling something a Safe Space] is, in some regards, just a formality, but it does have impact.
TS: Which is?
Alexa: It makes it a rule that the people entering that the space are queer people as opposed to a norm.
TS: At Queer Beers, it's more like a norm that it's queer people?
Alexa: Yeah. My impression and my experiences are that the norm is people in that space are generally queer, or friends, or have been invited. A specific safe space is that everyone entering that space is queer. Not that there's a checklist. That's ridiculous. But it's a very respected norm that if you're going to enter this space, you are queer. That people who do not identify as queer do not get to enter that space, whether or not they are invited, unless it is a group consensus to invite that person.

Here, Alexa explains Safe Space™ as a designation that creates a rule of whether the space is

open or closed, whereas Queer Beers (and presumably other queer spaces) which, to Alexa's

knowledge, lack the trademark, are based around a norm. Unlike Alexa, Megan understood the

question to be an invitation to assess their personal feelings of safety in the space, as opposed to

an inquiry into the trademarked status of it.

Megan: I don't think I have been there enough times to determine that fairly, honestly. I also think that in those kind of things the vibe changes every time, the people change every time. I think that it absolutely can be a safe space. When I went there last... it was totally a safe space. I felt very, very, very safe but I also can see how in certain situations it may not be a safe space. I feel like what makes it unsafe space is when there are assumptions made.

Leah recognized the line between these two types of safe spaces, and expressed discomfort with

it:

Leah: I think that's a really difficult question because it makes me feel who am I to be the one who decides that.

Leah implicitly pointed to the power dynamics at play, which invoke Foucault's definition of

discourse as necessarily coming from institutions or those with power. The process of

trademarking is one which imbibes one with power, the power to speak something into being by

naming it. Abraham also straddled the binary between trademarking and feeling:

Abraham: I don't define Queer Beers as a safe space, mostly because the reason I go to Queer Beers is not to find a queer community, but is, rather, to find other queer people to hook up with, which is why everyone goes to Queer Beers.

Abraham's definition of safe space and designation as such is not dependent upon

discourse, nor feeling, but rather the personal choice to trademark a space oneself on the basis of

the intended use of the space. This is a negotiation with the systems of discourse that create the

trademarking system of the rhetoric of safe spaces. This trademarking process has come about, I

argue, because the media trademarked the term first. By trademarking, I mean the process

wherein the term has become something that does not exist in a certain form without the naming

process that creates it: Safe Space™ is not a representation of an actual space, it is a function of

the power it holds. In the Foucauldian sense, the media attention around this issue is the

discursive formation; that is, the conditions which make it possible for Safe Space™ to emerge

as a concept which carries behind it the entirety of the media discourse that has created it. The

discourse of Safe Space establishes a way of speaking about a particular space, which makes it

possible to produce knowledge, but it only remains within the discourse's frameworks and

categories. The responses of interviewees about questions of safe space only exist within the

terms of the discourse of Safe Space™. For example, in describing Queer Beers, Mysha said that

"it's a safe space for queer people to express their sexuality and not feel judged about it." But

when asked specifically if queer spaces at Oberlin were safe spaces, she responded, "I definitely

think that they are safer spaces...As a queer person you may feel safe there, but if you're trans

and it's all cis-gendered queer people you wouldn't feel as safe, or it's all queer white people and

you're black and queer." Mysha was able to describe Queer Beers as a safe space, but not as a

Safe Space™, because of the attendant expectations of the formulation of the concept of Safe

Space™ and the power relations it ascribes.

Many younger participants (first and second years), when asked about safe spaces

specifically, thus invoking Safe Spaces, had idealistic and somewhat vague definitions:

Annie: I think a safe space is a place where you can feel safe expressing a certain part of your identity that you're not able to express as well in mainstream culture. For a lot of people, safe spaces is, you're only around people who are of the specific identity group, which I think is very valid. That's a very valid way of arranging groups, but that's not a requirement for me personally. I'm sure there are people, because people suck, but nobody needs to...It feels like you don't have to constantly educate people, which is really nice. In the spaces themselves specifically, definitely these are real safe spaces where people actually have a lot of knowledge, also just in general in Oberlin, too
Kaitlyn: A place where you can go and be your identity without people asking you questions about it specifically…The campus overall, pretty much.
Seraphina: A safe space is usually explicitly a space designated as, a place where it's safe but it's more than that, it's safe and accepted and understood and… hm… this is a bit of nebulous concept. I guess, I would say it's a place where like the problems of specific groups in society are like explicitly acknowledged and as much as possible vindicated within the space.
B.K.: I would say what makes a safe space safe is that people are able to freely be themselves without any worry about who's watching, who's judging and what's going to happen afterwards.

These students (three first years, one second year; three trans women, one cis woman; all

white students) had somewhat nebulous definitions of safe spaces that centered around ideas of

acceptance, lack of judgment, and understanding. Many of them also expressed that Oberlin

overall was a safe space, which complicates the idea of safe spaces and their necessity on

campus: if the entire campus is a safe space, why are designated safe spaces needed? While the

data did not clearly and unambiguously divide upon age lines, this was a present trend. Older

students, especially third and fourth years, gave definitions of safe space that were a bit more

complicated:

Leah: I think the difficult thing about defining a safe space is probably the best way to define a safe space is to ask everyone who's coming to the place, what do you want out of this? What would make this a safe environment for you? Then to find some way to achieve all those guidelines and parameters… [Queer Beers has] felt safe to me but I'm definitely hesitant to define anything as a safe space at this point.
Anthony: Oh. I don't know what a safe space is. I'm being flippant about that, but I don't know what a safe space is.
TS: Literally?
Anthony: Yeah. I don't, because I've been in a lot of spaces where it's just like, "Yeah, we're so queer." I still have a lot of things I hold from my religious background, and they're pretty anti that. I've never been in a space where I'm fully able to be everything that I want to be. If that makes it a safe space, I think that's physically impossible.
TS: Unless it's you in a room by yourself.
Anthony: Exactly. That's my safe space. Even then, sometimes I'm in my bed, "I can't do it." That's not safe at all.
Peyton: I feel recently queer spaces on campus and anything that's been labeled as queer on campus-- I used to see it as a safe space. Recently, with reports of sexual assault and a lot of things happening with that, I don't necessarily see it as a safe space, necessarily. I would definitely say that while this community, while certain events and organizations and everything can identify themselves as queer, that doesn't mean that there's no misogyny or no assault, no making people uncomfortable. It's still a human space. There are still humans existing in that space. It's not as if it's this perfect queer community kind of thing. It's definitely my view of queer spaces on campus was originally safe spaces, but it has definitely changed with understanding a lot of the dynamics that come into play with a lot of internalized, and socialized misogyny. Particularly with masculine presenting individuals or trans-masculine individuals, I've seen that as a very uncomfortable space, when that is happening.
Emma: I don't understand always what a safe space is. I don't really...Queer beers, it's a queer space. But what makes it safe or not safe? Often there is inclusion in the community of known people who've committed sexual assault. But sometimes those people exist in the queer community, and it becomes a really complicated thing. We've had this issue in the past at Oberlin. Do people who are known not to be great people, who've done things that are bad, are they still welcome in queer communities? …The idea of being in a space with people who....you agree, you have the same identity, but you might have completely different opinions on things... It's complicated because, a safe space...I just don't really know if I understand the term "safe space" and think it really is real. I don't really.
Mason: Safe spaces are, again, a newer concept in my life. It's not that I have anything opposed to the idea of a safe space. It's just not something that I have been really introduced to yet in life…. The general idea of a safe space to me is centered around the fact that a space is specifically designed or at least kept in that moment for a group of people that needs to have that area for whatever they're doing. The idea of it being a safe space means that someone who might be offending that group of people couldn't just waltz in and either harsh the sense of community or make someone feel uncomfortable in their identity. That being said, unsafe feelings can still occur in totally queer spaces or totally POC [People of Color] spaces… Safe spaces really do have to be thought through. You can't just take a room and say, "We're gonna fill this with people who look the same," and then say it's a safe space because another person who doesn't look

like them can't come in. It's a lot more complicated than that. I'm still becoming more attuned to the idea of safe spaces.

Brendan: I don't really…I don't know. I don't really know if its possible for anything to be like totally a safe space… I mean, I'm not like a huge, I'm not like one of those people who are like "safe spaces are stupid like there shouldn't be any" but I'm not like a huge like… I think they're sometimes overused a little bit at Oberlin. Or like sometimes people try to make everything a safe space.. I don't know and I feel like sometimes it creates this like almost exclusionary culture so I think it's a hard balance but like… it's also hard. I think I haven't felt like, by like the non-queer community at Oberlin, personally I've felt like everyone's been very tolerant and accepting, but like I do know from some friends that like you know there still is some transphobia and homophobia like all that at Oberlin. So like, you know, just saying like "oh everyone's accepting like that's fine we don't need like…" And you know because like at Bard kind of like "Oh we're a liberal place we don't need like space for queers." Not that things weren't but there's definitely like, I don't know, I've felt more like pressure to like hook up with girls and like… I don't know. And I feel like at Oberlin because people kind of use it as like a very pride, like you know people are like "Yeah fuck yeah I'm queer" it's almost like a cool thing, it's helped a lot.

Emil: I think a safe space would need to be intentional. I think you just have to be really purposeful about what goes into that. And so you go in, you know you want to do this, there's this purpose, our purpose is X, Y, and Z. And because of that we are going to make this a safe space, for the purpose of blank.

Kiley: Not all safe spaces actually safe spaces. Sometimes they do a really shitty job at being safe spaces because they also not only have to act as safe spaces but also have to act as, especially on this campus where we're so scrutinized for being such a radical left leaning place, our safe places have to be extra good because we go here if that makes sense.

I include these long and multiple excerpts very intentionally: the voices of students using and creating Safe Spaces and safe spaces, while also navigating the discourses that create them and the expectations placed on them by both the conservative Right and the liberal Left, have often been absent from discussions of Safe Space™, both academic and journalistic. Clearly, there are several things that can severely complicate the safety level of a queer Safe Space™, including the presence of sexual assault and misogyny. Here, we see how identity politics perhaps falls short on its own: as Emma, Mason, and others explained, the simple presence of people with the same identities does not automatically create a space that is safe, nor a Safe Space™. However, interestingly enough, this was their criteria for a queer space, and this is where it is clear that queer space, safe space, and Safe Space ™ don't necessarily align along the same criteria. Emil and Mason advocate for the intentional nature of a safe space, a negotiation of the identitarian nature of the concept. It is clear from all of these responses that students are, in some ways, queering the identitarian concept of Safe Spaces™ as they've been trademarked;

Safe Spaces™ as they are produced by the discourse about them, are extremely binaristic in their formation. For example, Catherine Fox examines the discursive act of labeling a space as a Safe Space, and "how this performance reproduces a heteronormative order through conflation of safety with comfort, through reproduction of a hetero/homo boundary, and through elision of the 'queer' work that needs to occur in order to consider the complexity of queer people" (2007, 497). Fox's argument is exactly that which students are pushing against when they are grappling with the idea of Safe Space, and through the words of the participants in and creators of safe spaces, queer and otherwise, it is clear that attempts at the "queer work" that Fox describes are occurring. One example of this "queer work" occurs in the formulation of a concept of "safer space": in response to these complexities, Catherine Fox and Tracy Ore argue for a reconceptualization of LGBT safe spaces as "safer space", a shift that "moves us away from the belief that safe spaces can be secured in a manner that they are free of struggle or discomfort" (2010, 643). This idea of safer space has gained some traction, and was evoked by Alton:

Alton: I honestly don't like the word safe space at all. [laughs] I just didn't get it. It doesn't really make sense, because if you had somebody moderating them, being that policeman lookout person, that's going to feel uncomfortable to somebody. Then, if you have people that are just doing whatever they do, you really can't insure comfort in any space, and you can never insure safety. You can be like, "I'm trying to make a safer space," but to be like, "This is a safe space," I don't think there's any control for that because you don't know who can walk in the door. Also, there's an element of, if you're checking people's identity, that doesn't feel safe. I just think it's impossible.

This is another place in this piece that we can see the messy negotiation of identity politics and queer theory in an attempt to remedy the shortcomings of each ideology by Oberlin Students. The next and final chapter will show where this is still falling short, where the messiness of this navigation is spilling over the sides in terms of gender, class, and race.

Chapter 4:
Queer Space and Its Discontents

"'Dissenters draw attention to the border zones where… norms are negotiated,' subjecting 'the terms of membership' in a political community to 'continual revision,'" writes Alison Kafer, quoting Ranu Samantrai, in *Feminist, Queer, Crip* (2013, 150). In this final chapter, I will show how the "discontents" of queer space—those who feel it somehow falls short in addressing their needs for community, identity, and space—are the key players in understanding the borders that are conflated and reconfigured by students' attempts to reconcile queer theory and identity politics in the creation of queer space on campus. Specifically, race, gender, and class and those with certain identities within those categories in being under addressed, over addressed, and not addressed at all, respectively, are demonstrative of the complexities of queer spaces on campus in ways that illuminate the tricky negotiations of queer theory and identity politics. The under-addressing of race in these spaces has marginalized students of color and failed to create truly intersectional queer spaces, which I take as indicative of an over-estimation of the power of the term "queer" and spaces organized around it. Conversely, the over-addressing of gender in these spaces have created an inversion of what I jocularly call "the gay men problem," in which gay men are given all of the queer space outside of Oberlin, especially in urban spaces and gay bars, while in Oberlin, gay men lack community and space and feel unwelcome in queer spaces. The lack of discussion of class whatsoever in and around queer spaces on campus is indicative of the ways in which class falls the wayside in both queer theory and identity politics. Simultaneously, the lower-class style is appropriated by students, which Shak'ar Mujukian has termed "the queer poor aesthetic."

Catherine O. Fox and Tracy E. Ore write that

we must recognize that one of [LGBT safe space's] effects is the reinstitution of regulatory

forces that support a white, heteronormative order. Insofar as the central organizing feature for queer people is the eradication of homophobia and heterosexism, safe space discourse continues to operate within a normalizing gaze of a white, masculinist, middle-class subject, rendering queer subjectivity in a most simplistic and reductive manner and producing an illusionary 'safety.' (2010, 631)

The examples given about race, gender, and class in this chapter, show the ways in which queer theory and identity politics fail to blend seamlessly in the creation of queer space on campus, because of the intersectional complexities of identity and queerness. When a queer space occurs, and people are gathering on the basis of their shared (ill-defined) queerness, what happens to the other parts of their identities? Kiley and Emil explained this in terms of isolation and prioritization:

Emil: For people that I know that are queer from [my hometown], queerness isn't the only thing that's going on there. You know, here I think just a lot of the like playing fields seem pretty level. You know, which is also not totally a real thing, but we all go to class and all eat at [the dining hall], live in more or less similar conditions. And so queerness can kind of be more of its own thing. Whereas I think like, a lot of my friends that are queer went to like the public schools in New Haven, which are pretty rough and tumble places. And so they came out a lot sharper for that kind of balancing… a lot of them are people of color as well. And so like balancing those spaces, you know like Puerto-Ricanness and blackness and things like that. Which is already a super big division, I mean in New Haven it's like a huge deal…And just like having to actively put queerness in a space where like we talk about in terms of intersectionality is actually just like what you're living.
TS: Do you think it's a privilege for queerness to be the focus of a community?
Emil: In a sense, yeah, I think that sounds right to me. To be able to consider it as something kind of that you can isolate is definitely a privilege. And I mean, a privilege in an important way. I think it's something that I wouldn't have seen really otherwise.

Kiley: [Queer spaces at Oberlin fall short in that you have to] prioritiz(e) your identities to fit everyone else's experience of being queer. A lot of people experience some discrimination either based on sexuality or gender. That stuff is fine, and then you get into the more marginalized- asexuality or transitioning or all this stuff that not everyone can speak to and not everyone shares.

For Emil, the isolation of queer identity apart from other marginalized identities is a privilege, because it becomes a matter of walking through life with one marginalized identity, versus dealing with various marginalized identities. Thus, not only is oppression intersectional, but the creation of spaces for healing and community building must be as well. Kimberle Crenshaw's ideas about identity politics accurately sum up the ways in which identity politics cannot always lead to liberation: "The problem with identity politics is not that it fails to transcend difference,

as some critics charge, but rather the opposite—that it frequently conflates or ignores intragroup differences." (1991, 1242). Queer space that is organized upon the axis of queerness (as defined as "non cis-het") ignores the intra-group differences of race, gender, and class that do not disappear upon entrance into that space. As Anthony put it, "It's weird to assume that just because you're queer, you're all for it." These issues of intersectionality are not the result of specific failings of the organizers of queer spaces, nor the intentional –isms and –phobias of students. They are, rather, issues that are not foreign nor new to queer organizing, and issues that have been reflected upon by authors ranging from Crenshaw to Cohen.

Gender and Queer Space

In conducting these 27 interviews, a distinct pattern emerged, in that I was receiving quite different answers from the cis gay men who I interviewed than the non-cis people and women who I interviewed. This, I theorize, is an indication of the way that identity politics, in terms of gender identity and gender expression, are functioning in these spaces. I'll explain: for many of the interviewees, Oberlin's norm of queerness necessitated an experimentation with gender expression, a refutation of cis masculinity, and an overall disavowal of all that is cis and male. This is evidenced by the ubiquity of events on campus labeled as "non-dude" or "femme" only: spaces where all but cis men are welcome. Here, I see an inversion of identity politics on the axis of gender, wherein cis men are placed at the bottom of the social hierarchy in terms of queer community building. This, of course, does not mean that cis men do not hold privilege at Oberlin, nor does it mean that every space at Oberlin centers those who are not cis men. It does, however, mean that queer spaces, in enacting this inversion of gender identity politics, do not necessarily end up being spaces where cis gay men feel welcome, validated, or comfortable.

This is one of the ways in which queer-only spaces fail intersectionally, but it is ironic and subversive in the ways it excludes those with the most gender privilege. This is especially ironic because of the salience of gay male spaces outside of Oberlin, often as the only gay/queer spaces available.

Brendan, Jasper, Matthew, three of the white gay cis men I interviewed, explained their feelings on this issue with sentiments of guilt and discomfort.[8] These men understand their privilege and don't necessarily feel comfortable asking for space or speaking about exclusion because of it, but at the same time feel a real lack of community for gay men on campus. Part of this comes from the ways in which queerness is enacted and performed at Oberlin as something that is both fluid and fixed (as shown in chapter one). For example, Jasper talked about liking the word queer for himself, but not feeling like he is "queer enough" to really take it on:

Jasper: I like queer better, but I don't really know why. Gay sounds so severe, and maybe a little restrictive, but I don't think I qualify as queer totally. I'm just pretty gay in habits. But queer, I like the word better.
TS: What do you mean by you don't qualify as queer?
Jasper: I don't know. Because I'm like classic gay male. Six on the Kinsey scale and cis.
TS: Do you feel like you have too much privilege to be...?
Jasper: Yeah, also it's not a huge thing. I still use queer, but I feel like queer is more reserved for gender stuff mixing in with that, and an acknowledgment of everything is fluid, and I'm not that fluid.

This is an extremely interesting intricacy of the politics of queer identity: if queer is fluid, ever-changing, and all-encompassing, can those who feel their identities as non-heterosexual people are fixed and stable identify with it? f so, can they do so comfortably, and without pressure or rejection from queers who feel more fluid in their identities? Of course, it is also notable that none of the non-cis-men I interviewed identified strictly as lesbians, and thus this question does not extend across gender boundaries. For Jasper, queerness falls into two categories:

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[8] I interviewed several men of color, who spoke of the issues of race which I will describe in the next section, indicating that race plays a larger role in their issues with queer space than gender.

Jasper: The amount of alternative culture makes it queerer. Also, in my head, there's two types of queerness. There's the first generation of old school gay men who are like top or bottom, or masc or fem. Really categorizing. There's a new gender, all-encompassing queerness. The alternative spaces are that new queerness. I don't know where the old queerness exists….
TS: The '70s?
Jasper: Yeah. And Grindr.

Jasper also mentioned feeling that queer, in comparison to gay, prescribes a certain about of

experimentation with gender expression. Matthew also felt this:

Matthew: To be honest, this isn't very politically correct, but the first thing that comes to mind is there's a lot less guys and a lot more girls who identify as queer but I'm not sure if that's just Oberlin? But I would say like it's definitely like more feminine, more feminist, more intellectual space than gay, and I think it's more- I don't know, I think people, they pretend, being queer is supposed to be anti-normative, but I mean, within any set group of people you always have norms. Like in the gay world there's fashion norms, I think queer there's fashion norms--there's like definitely a hierarchy within the queer world, I think the gay world very much prizes like masculinity, and like good bodies, whereas like I think the queer world is more geared towards like really hip well-dressed educated, either female identifying or transfeminine people. But, I mean I'm obviously over-generalizing but this is more or less my gut impression.

In consideration of the dynamics I described in Chapter Two, this seems almost paradoxical, in

that the way these men conceptualize queerness (especially at Oberlin) is that it spans across

more than just non-straight identity. Especially in the ways in which queerness is visible at

Oberlin, it ends up connoting an identity that encompasses more than non-heterosexuality,

despite the insistence of many interviewees that they defined queerness as "non-straight," nor

"not cis-het." Matthew points out something that is key in an analysis of this, though: that within

any community, norms emerge, and queerness (despite its insistence on non-/anti- normativity) is

no exception. Because of the attention to gender and refutation of patriarchy that is so salient in

Oberlin's identity politics, the queer norm becomes one of the performance of gender non-

conformity over anything else[9] There are racial politics to this, of course, which will be explored

in the next section of this chapter, and it should be noted again that I interviewed several cis gay

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[9] Here, of course, I draw from Butler's *Gender Trouble* in the theorization of gender expression as performativity, wherein gender is "an identity tenuously constituted in time, instituted in an exterior space through *a stylized repetition of acts.*" (1999, 178, her emphasis).

men of color who spoke more about their feelings on race over gender, indicating that the issues

of race in queer spaces at Oberlin are more pressing than those of gender. This is, I believe, a

result of the way identity politics function on campus, that is, as a way of legitimizing one's

experiences and feelings in a space where students compete in what has been termed here as

"The Oppression Olympics," wherein one's opinions are taken more seriously in social justice

circles, the more marginalized identities they hold. I must, however, mention again that this does

not exempt the entire campus from the iteration and reiteration of harmful oppressive behavior

towards those with marginalized identities. In my discussion of "The Oppression Olympics," I

am speaking of the social capital one can gain within activist circles on campus, or discussions

about social justice on campus. The uneven distribution of this inversion of identity politics

furthers the complexity of these issues, leading students to preface their statements about these

issues with "as a ____" (in which they divulge their identities, privileged or otherwise), but

perhaps not to enact a commitment to identity politics apart from that. Brendan explained his

experiences with this:

Brendan: I guess before I came to Oberlin I didn't even think about it as an identity and like I feel like almost at Oberlin it's kind of sad that you almost have to… Oberlin kind of forces you to confront your identity because everyone is always using their identity for everything and everyone's always like "as a blank blank blank I..." So I feel like you kind of have to. And like also in a weird way, because it's almost, to a lot of people considered bad or like you don't really have a say if you're straight cis white male. I feel honestly like being queer or gay has been the only thing that I've been able to say as… I don't know.

Brendan's struggle to articulate this issue is indicative of the salience of it and the emotional

discomfort it inspires, especially for those with privilege. Brendan expressed his feelings of not

having "a say" because of privileged identity. I include this discussion of privilege not to

necessarily center the experiences of those with privilege, but to show the ways in which identity

politics play an important yet complex role in activism and social interactions on campus. Of

course, organizing around a particular –ism or –phobia wouldn't exist without identity politics,

but that does not mean that it always works smoothly. A consideration of the potent role of

identity politics on campus brings to light the difficulties of organizing that is based in queer

theory. When identities are taken as fixed along a binary of privileged/oppressed, and hold

implications of social capital along with them, there are bound to be issues of creating bounded

physical space that is organized around an ambiguously defined fluidity. This complexity is not

distributed equally among all axes of identity, which I show here in the ways in which gender

and race operate in queer space, differently accounting for the presence of those with gender

privilege (cis men) and those without race privilege (people of color).

As with the other issues of identity explored in this thesis, this plays out spatially,

especially in the politics of who feels welcome in queer spaces. These interviewees expressed a

distinct lack of feeling of gay male community at Oberlin:

Matthew: [Queer Beers] is an event for queer people, there's dancing, it's supposed to be like a club atmosphere, you've supposed to be able to meet queer people. But usually people are pretty awkward there. There's definitely not a lot of gay guys there. Definitely not. Although, the first one I went to this year there was a lot more, I don't think I've ever seen that many. But last year there were like none and I like knew them all and they were all super awkward, and like gay people at Oberlin are super weird at making friends with each other. There's like so many friend groups of like queer people.., I feel like they have a very solid group of friendships, but there's, I don't think, no two gay men I can think of, except that are in a relationship, and there are a few, that are actually friends, and there's certainly no group or like community. Which is definitely very particular to Oberlin.

Brendan: Queer Beers is always way more female or femme-identified. Like there's not many like cis guys there, which I never know why. I feel like there's a nice larger queer community but there's not really gay community at all.

Jasper: I don't really know, and I don't really have a good explanation of it, but I do feel like the gay male scene or masculine queer scene at Oberlin is really lacking. I don't know why, or maybe it's just me or something.

This lack of community is a result of the centering of non-cis queer people (including non-cis

men) and cis women in queer organizing on campus. I theorize that this is because of the

principal role of gender in Oberlin's identity politics. These men do not lack self-reflection in

their explanations of feelings of lack of community, which colors their rhetoric with guilt and

discomfort:

Matthew: Yeah, and I mean that's great [that the focus of queer space at Oberlin is gender nonconformity.] I mean it's awesome that there's a space for that and its awesome that that's… Because historically sexuality has been so prized, over, like deviant sexualities have been so prized in deviant communities over gender nonconformity, it's really awesome that there's a space for that, and I don't want to be seen as complaining too much, because I can always go out into like any city or any mainstream city and like have a gay community, so in that way, I mean I'm saying like all my problems with it, but in that way I don't feel too salty or too… you know what I mean? Because I mean it's awesome that there's a space for that.

Brendan: Yeah, so sometimes I feel like… sometimes I feel weird as a queer cis man because a lot of queer people sometimes feel very uncomfortable around cis men, and feel like oppressed and stuff and so I sort of feel like I'm in the middle, like I'm like queer but I still have the privilege of being a cis man. So I'm like, you know, knowing how much space to take up, and knowing like is it okay, are all queer spaces okay for me to go, there's sometimes like transgender, or like you know, when I wouldn't feel comfortable going or like that kind of space. But I do know and realize a lot of queer spaces are totally dominated by gay men, like a lot of queer bars are totally for, and there's a ton of gay bars and usually one maybe lesbian bar, so I do know that in that way a lot of queer spaces are dominated by people like that, but sometimes it's… yeah, I don't know, sometimes it's just an awkward situation.

The distinct inversion of the gendered aspects of queer spaces, especially queer party spaces, is a unique and interesting situation—or rather, an "awkward situation," as Brendan put it, and it has even spilled over into the feelings of non-binary individuals:

Kai: There's times that people are calling out able-bodied, white, skinny, trans-masc people and even though I don't identify as trans-masc, I've considered with my transition what I want to do and then I'll feel a lot of guilt and feeling like I'm somehow being misogynistic if I transition or anything.
In de-centering gay cis men from queer spaces because they tend to dominate them, queer cis men, and even those considering transitioning, at Oberlin have found themselves at an emotional conundrum, both in wanting more of a community that is specific to their needs (social and otherwise), while also recognizing the privilege (and specter of party-rape, patriarchy, and misogyny) they carry with them and the access they consistently have to queer space outside of campus. How can organizing that strives to be inclusive of sexual *and* gender liberation still include those who hold only one marginalized identity? Does it need to? How can queer space account for the dominance and prevalence of cis gay men in queer organizing, space, and history? After all, as many of the interviewees recognized, queer space outside of Oberlin is largely for and by cis gay men. These are not questions I seek to answer, as the answers to these

questions do not seem to exist in any concrete form. Rather, I mention these issues with the intention of drawing attention to the theoretical complexities at the intersection of queer theory and identity politics and how they play out spatially. I use the gender example, specifically, to show that a simple inversion of identity politics is not the solution, as it fails to account for those who end up at the bottom of the hierarchy. As Matthew put it, "in setting up a new hierarchy, it definitely excludes different people." While the "new hierarchy" that has been created at Oberlin is not all-encompassing, and does not extend beyond the campus, or even beyond the walls of the Sco on a Tuesday night, I use this as a caution against the creation of new hierarchies in the journey towards liberation--spatial and otherwise.

Race and Queer Space

Above, I have shown how queer space on campus is the spatial manifestation of the contradictions and complications that arise when cis men identify as queer. While the new hierarchy of gender within queer community at Oberlin is a radical inversion of existing hierarchies of oppression, the issue of race in queer spaces at Oberlin is not addressed with the same tenacity, and race becomes a casualty in the fight for queer space. This is to say that race becomes deprioritized and erased as a salient category in the creation of queer spaces. This analysis can only be understood within the context of the campus. Oberlin College was the first college in America to admit African American students in 1835, and Oberlin boasts a history of a continual commitment to racial justice:

Oberlin had a reputation as a center for abolitionist activities and many of the college's presidents embraced these efforts. Oberlin was a key stop along the Underground Railroad, an informal network of back-road routes and safe houses used to harbor escaped slaves seeking freedom in the Northern states and Canada. In 1858, a group of Oberlin and Wellington residents rescued a fugitive slave, John Price, from U.S. marshals, and took him to Canada. The liberators were jailed in Cleveland for violating the Fugitive Slave Act and for their part in the rescue but eventually gained release. The case drew national

coverage. Years later, the Oberlin-Wellington Rescue became known as the incident that set the American Civil War in motion. (Oberlin 2017a)

This history factors prominently in the admissions materials about Oberlin, as well as its place in history textbooks. Oberlin takes its history seriously, at least in its official rhetoric, which asks "If the early leaders recognized that a liberal arts educational community needed to be diverse, what about now?" and answers, "Today, Oberlin's faculty, staff, and student body reflect the college's early dedication to diversity and social justice." (Oberlin 2017c). Despite this rhetoric, Oberlin's current student body is made up of only 20% students of color (Oberlin 2017b). Many students are consistently organizing on the basis of racial justice at Oberlin, and each school year usually features some petition or protest demanding better treatment of Black students. However, it cannot be denied that Oberlin is 80% white students, leading students of color to consistently be a minority in spaces, queer and otherwise. Unlike the identity politics around gender, there is an "under-addressing" of race in queer spaces at Oberlin.

I interviewed seven people of color for this project, four of whom identified as Black (two cis women, one cis man, and one genderqueer individual), three of whom identified as Latinx (two non-binary individuals and one cis man). No information on the percentage of specific non-white racial groups represented in the student body is accessible and thus the breakdown of non-white racial groups cannot be proven to be representative. Nonetheless, it is important to recognize that while White vs Black is an important axis of oppression, there are racial hierarchies within people who identify as non-white, as black, and as white. Whiteness is the racial formation that organizes these hierarchies. My sample was 25% non-white, which is only slightly more than the campus' 20% non-white demographics. As previously mentioned, the interviewees of color whom I interviewed who also identified as cis men prioritized the issues of race in queer spaces over those of gender, indicating that the lack of community among gay men

was a less serious issue than the issue of race in queer spaces on campus.

In many ways, the issues of race in queer spaces came down to the issues of prioritization

and isolation of one identity that Emil and Kiley explained: upon entering a queer space, students

of color described having to prioritize their queer identity over their non-white identity. Mysha's

description of this prioritization occurred in the context of the part of the interview where we

discussed safe spaces:

TS: Do you think that queer spaces at Oberlin are safe spaces? What is a safe space?
Mysha: I definitely think that they are safer spaces, but then a lot of people's intersectional identities...As a queer person you may feel safe there, but if you're trans and it's all cis-gendered queer people you wouldn't feel as safe, or it's all queer white people and you're black and queer. It really depends on your intersectional identities. My queer identity feels safe there.
TS: Do your other identities feel safe there?
Mysha: I definitely think that being black is definitely a very different experience here. Most of the black kids here are athletes. I don't necessarily feel very safe. I don't know how to explain it.
There's not a lot of queer black people on this campus, I don't think. It's difficult to feel safe when you're surrounded by queer white people. I feel very accepted as a queer person, but sometimes not really as a black person… [there's] definitely lack of POC representation, but that's all throughout the campus.
That's hurtful, almost, because you're like, "Well, I fit in this space because I'm queer," and I love that, but then I feel so alienated at the same time…We're sitting here talking about how we've been marginalized for our queer identity, but you guys don't get that I've been marginalized for far more than just my queer identity. I'm black on top of that. I'm a woman on top of that. Sometimes, we feel like people are trying to play oppression Olympics with me, and I'm never one to be like, "I'm more oppressed than you," but the reality of it is that. It's almost like a part of you is silenced. You don't feel comfortable talking about it because you're like, "Well, we're both queer, and I shouldn't be saying anything," but being black is a whole 'nother level to this issue. Then, on top of that, being East African, in this new era of Drake and whatnot, there's so much fetishization. "Young East African girl" this and that. It's very multilayered. Queer, white, cis-gendered people don't get that intersectionality.
TS: Queer spaces are not enough to get at all the intersectionality of someone's identity?
Mysha: Mm-hmm.

Here, Mysha invoked Crenshaw's concept of intersectionality to describe the ways in which

racial politics fall to the wayside in queer spaces at Oberlin. In many ways, for Mysha, finding

queer community on campus means de-prioritizing finding community of color. This is

especially difficult given the simple issue of demographics mentioned earlier: how can queer

students of color find community when they are a minority within a minority? A choice emerges,

then within organizing: should queer spaces find a way to better include and accommodate

students of color and their experiences, or should queer students of color create their own spaces

where they can be in a space where the intersection of queer identity and racial identity can fully

be addressed? This division between liberation and assimilation is nothing new within queer

organizing: the examples of this quandry are too numerous to even list here. Therefore, on

campus, this is simply a manifestation of larger questions of queer organizing. With the gender

analysis, it is clear that a "new hierarchy" has emerged that attempts to use identity politics to

negotiate a "solution" to the issue of male supremacy. However, it is clear that students at

Oberlin are not addressing issues of race and white supremacy with the same veracity, and this

has not gone unnoticed:

Mason: I'm white, so I haven't been to any of the POC queer spaces. All of the non-POC queer spaces are very white

Le'Priya: Well, the queer spaces here are very white. Chicago, I don't even know. I'm pretty sure there's white queer spaces, but I've never seen any. That's pretty different coming from a place where you see people who are like you, look like you. Then you're here, and not a lot of people, and you're just like, "Damn. OK."

Anthony: Queer Beers is a very white space. I see a lot of white queer identifying people just flailing. I see my black friends in the corner, the few who show up. It's racial dynamics are still at play. All these things are still at play. I don't know. It's what you make of it.

Leah: It's hard for different groups to account for intersections of identity and experience. Certain spaces with alcohol or a lot of interaction or spaces that are super white. I think there are a lot of different situations in which maybe that feels comfortable to some queer people but not others. That's a barrier to community, I guess.

Kiley: Wow. Oberlin is so fucking white. I say as a white person.

When I wrote that race was "under-addressed" in queer spaces, this is what I meant: it is not that

it is not noticeable or not talked about, it's that it isn't addressed. These issues of race and

inclusion do not go unnoticed, but, unlike the issues of gender described above, there has been

no effort to address it: ideologically, theoretically, physically, or otherwise. People tend to

organize around the issues that directly affect them: within this framing (which I will call the

"numbers" approach here), it makes sense that at an institution that is at least evenly split, if not

majority, non-male, addressing the intersectionality of gender and queerness would occur more

than addressing the intersectionality of race and queerness. B.K., a white second year, both

utilized and problematized this approach:

B.K.: For instance, I've gone to several pre-gaming events for Queer Beers where I've noticed it is predominantly white. Not to say that that is the fault of the people hosting it, but it's very apparent that there are difficulties in intersectionalities here at Oberlin.
TS: Why do you think that is?
B.K.: It can be very difficult to move beyond yourself. I feel like here in Oberlin, a lot of us are so busy with our work and homework that sometimes we get so caught up in our own struggles. We forget to recognize others. Unless you're already busy being an activist and working with advocacy and recognizing where the issues are, sometimes you can forget about them. I think that can lead to problems in intersectionality. I don't think anyone is purposely saying, "Let's exclude these people." They just forget, which doesn't excuse it, but honestly people sometimes can just forget others' struggles.

B.K. makes it clear that the lack of ability to "move beyond oneself" is not an excuse for the lack

of racial diversity and inclusion, but that it may be a reason for it. Emil described a similar

sentiment, in which he recognized the complexity of a solution to this:

TS: Are there any issues that you personally see with queer spaces at Oberlin?
Emil: Yeah. I think it's just the big one, it's race, you know. It's like the whiteness of a space. And like, just the sense that like, I mean it's part of the safe space thing in terms of like, okay, now that we're a safe space for queer people, we're good! You know, we don't have to do anything else. But I definitely have felt dynamics that I feel outside of queer spaces- being like the only nonwhite person- within them. And it's shitty inside and out, you know. Yeah. At least for me a lot of that experience is within academic spaces, where like you say something and nobody even has to shut you down, it's just like someone else just kind of buries your point or the things you want to say. I don't really know kind of what solutions to that are but I think people would do well to understand… One thing I like is kind of the move towards like understanding more varied notions of queerness… I think it's just kind of an extension of like people dismantling the whole kind of like, solely marriage equality, solely kind of like pride parade idea of queerness. The idea that there are things that people would be like "you're a bad queer if you do this" but it's because of where people are coming from and how different those places can be.

Emil's description of the dynamics of being the only non-white person in the room invoke this

identity-focused "numbers" approach: the chances for the dynamics of white supremacy to play

out in a space increase exponentially the more white-dominated a space is.

However, I am not convinced by this numbers approach, which relies entirely on identity.

As was shown in the ways in which students are organizing at the intersection gender and

queerness with a solely identitarian approach, there are new gaps and voids that emerge when

organizing takes the form of simply flipping a hierarchy. It should be noted here, again, that

Queer Beers is not the only queer space on campus, and that there is a student organization that exists very specifically for trans and queer people of color. The organizers of that organization, Zami, described it as a safe space for them and the members of the group. However, I am examining Queer Beers most closely because of its salience as a social event, and its classification as a queer space that holds no other qualifiers. While the need and appreciation for Zami is evident, the fact that there is a separate queer space with the qualifier of being for people of color does not ameliorate the failings of other queer space to adequately address race.

Class and Queer Space

While differently dealt with, race and gender in queer space, as shown above, are frequently talked about on campus. There is, however a distinct absence in this rhetoric: class. Very few of the interviewees even mentioned class, and if they did, it was in listing their identities at the beginning of the interview. As with the other categories discussed in this chapter, I believe this is indicative of something larger, at least in environments that resemble Oberlin, if not in the greater queer community (if such a thing exists). The invisible role of economic capital in these spaces should not go unnoted: Urvashi Vaid writes that "Queer identity is learned principally through the mediation of commercial enterprises" (1995, 245). In many ways, she is entirely right. And by commercial enterprises, she means spaces that are commercially mediated. Thus, it is important to remember that while space plays a very important role in queer identity formation, as I elaborate upon here, the spaces are usually bars (and if not bars, then "settings like women's and gay bookstores, women's music festivals, lesbian-feminist concert screenings and film screenings—all commercial settings" [Vaid 1995, 245]). There are, of course, issues that are inherent in this formation: namely, issues of economic accessibility and substance use.

However, only the latter was mentioned by participants. This is partially because Queer Beers is a free event, and most people drink before they come for social or age reasons, but even if they do drink there, the beer is cheap and money does not filter into the larger capitalist system: it simply remains at the Student Union, and gets cycled through the systems of the College's finances. However, this does not mean that people's positionalities within systems of class are entirely erased when they enter queer space, however much students pretend they are. Many students here are middle to upper class, but, as Kiley aptly put it: "people at Oberlin love to pretend to be poor when they're not." While Vaid points to the important ways in which economics and wealth play a central role in gay organizing and politics, this is highly obscured due to "The Queer Poor Aesthetic," as it was termed by Shak'ar Mujukian in The Hye-Phen Magazine in 2016. This is a phenomenon whereby class gets erased in queer spaces: the author described this as "the identity that significantly affects my daily life was erased in a culture that consumes identity politics" (Mujukian 2016). This aesthetic encompasses performativity of poorness in appearance and discourse, while implicitly (and sometimes explicitly) indicating that queerness is supposed to supersede all other forms of oppression. Queer performativity at Oberlin, as it was described by many interviewees, often involves the visible erasure of class differences: students make a conscious effort to erase class differences, which can be seen in the lack of purposeful display of wealth in visible ways. Throughout my time at Oberlin, the prevalence of thrift-store clothing and grunge aesthetic among queer students, as well as the student body's collective claims of how "broke" they are, serves to render class a non-factor in queer space especially. While there are in fact students who are low income at Oberlin, the fact of the matter is that many students possess a fair amount of class privilege. *The New York Times* ranked Oberlin the least financially accessible among its 16 peer institutions and 132nd overall,

using the share of students on Pell Grants and the net tuition charged to both middle and low-income students. *The New York Times* also reported that "The median family income of a student from Oberlin is $178,000 and 70% come from the top 20 percent. About 1.2% of students at Oberlin came from a poor family but became a rich adult." 2% of Oberlin students come from the bottom fifth (families who made about $20,000 or less per year) and 9.3% of Oberlin students come from the top 1% (families who made $630,000 or more per year). It is clear that a large percentage of students at Oberlin are not, by most metrics, "poor." However, the ubiquity of the "queer poor aesthetic," wherein wealth is purposefully obscured and class is erased from discussions of oppression and activism, is another indication of the ways in which queer, as a label and a qualifier of space, cannot and does not supersede all identity difference.

Conclusion:
Collective Reflections and Reflective Collections

The issues of the interactions of race, class, and gender with queer space enumerated in Chapter Four lead to questions about the standards "queer" can be held to: must queer necessarily address and oppose all –isms and –phobias, or does queer (and the queer spaces formed around it) only hold a responsibility to address and oppose homophobia? This, of course, depends on one's definition of queer, and the multiple and varied usages of queer by students at Oberlin shown in Chapter Two make it clear that a shared, stable definition of queer does not seem to exist on campus. Therefore, it seems largely impossible that a shared sentiment about the responsibilities of queer to address oppressions of all kinds could exist and thus manifest itself in the politics of queer spaces. The lack of a shared queer politics, then, can be at least partially to blame for the issues of race and gender in queer space. To further complicate things, though, if queer is supposed to be a fluid, ever-changing political and identitarian category, is this shared meaning possible? E. Patrick Johnson's answer to this is "quare," a formulation of queer that is inclusive yet ever-changing: "Blind allegiance to 'isms' of any kind is one of the fears of queer theorists who critique identity politics. Cognizant of that risk, quare studies must not reply a totalizing and/or homogeneous formulation of identity, but rather a contingent, fragile coalition in the struggle against common oppressive forms" (2015, 104). This idea is extremely appealing, at least to me. Within the frame and scope of this thesis, we must wonder, then, what would quare space look like? Furthermore, what would quare safe space look like?

Several things have changed drastically since the interviews for this thesis were conducted, and I wish to spend a moment to acknowledge them here. First and foremost, Donald Trump was elected President of the United States of America in November of 2016. My last interview for this project occurred on November 3, 2016. Therefore, I think it is important to

acknowledge that the lives of queers in America are heavily impacted by this, and I do believe that in the wake of the election, the interviews for this project may have taken on a different tone. It now feels as if queer community is even less attainable and its imperfect versions on the Oberlin campus even more important. The concerns moving forward, in the wake of the election, reflect those that are enumerated in this thesis. In the aftermath of the shooting at Pulse Nightclub and increasing violence against queers, immigrants, people of color, people with disabilities, and trans people, queer space takes on new meaning. This new meaning is twofold, and involves the final piece of this puzzle, which returns to the queer figures and relationalites. I'll explain: with increasing threat and decreasing feelings of safety, queer space is both more necessary as a unifying space of resistance, and less unified as the identitarian differences between queer people become more salient. This, of course, reflects what has been written here; that queer space is important for the validation and navigation of queer identities, but that "queer' in its spatial manifestations do not supersede other identitarian differences, despite the efforts of the interlocutors to under-address, over-address, and erase them. Under decreasing safety, safe space (and Safe Space) takes on new meaning and importance. In some ways, it allows for a new queer figure to emerge: that of the person oppressed, targeted, and marginalized by the Trump administration. Post-election, America has seen non-Christian people, people with disabilities, LGB people, people of color, people on welfare, people who need abortions and birth control, immigrants, and women, trans, and gender non-conforming people, band together in a (fragmented) coalition against a common oppressor. For example, post-election, my Facebook timeline was filled with thoughts, prayers, and offers of support for "those targeted by the new administration," as a heterogeneous group. In some ways, I believe, the Trump Resistant has become a new queer figure, and one that fits nicely into the genealogy posited in the

Literature Review. This queer subject exists in relation to the "normal" subject- relationality #1-

which in this case is he who is best represented and protected by the Trump administration: the

white, cis, heterosexual, Christian man. Relationality #2, "the author's production of that subject

as a queer subject emerges from the author's relation to a political moment," is fulfilled by the

recognition of my position as author and interlocutor, who is responding to the current American

political moment. Finally, relationality #3- the genealogical relation- exists in the ways in which

I have drawn upon the works of Foucault, Sedgwick, Cohen, Puar, and many more, in my

navigation of the expansiveness and inclusivity of "queer." Thus, while the twenty-seven

students whom I interviewed for this project are and were my queer figures, a new queer figure

emerges in this post-election climate.

While this queer figure unites an extremely heterogeneous amalgamation of identities and

situations, the political moment in which it is emerging is one of stratification as much as it is

one of unity. That is, under new pressures, policies, marginalizations, incarcerations, violences,

and threats, identity politics become a more pronounced part of politics. When certain groups are

targeted specifically for either their beliefs, appearance, immigration status, gender

identification, sexuality, race, ethnicity, disability status, trans status, and gender expression,

those differences become more pronounced. They also become sites of resistance in the form of

identity politics. As I have shown here, this messy combination leads to a continuous navigation

between queer theory and identity politics that plays out spatially.

Throughout this piece, I have been operating under the idea that queer space is the

manifestation of the complexities of queer identity, politics, and organizing. In the name of

queering, I end this piece with the suggestion that, instead, there is an extremely liberatory

potential in starting with queer space, and moving to queer. This piece begins with defining

queer and moves to space as a physical expression of that definition and its attendant politics, my

final discursive move is to recognize that there is quite possibly, potential in flipping this on its

head (perhaps, queering it?) Perhaps my favorite interview excerpt from this project will shed

some light on how this could be possible. Anthony described queer spaces as "reflective

collections":

Anthony: Part of the thing is, coming from my background, I was raised to believe I'm going to hell. To be at a place that's so progressive or whatever, even if not everyone has had the same tragic experiences with coming out, if they have at all, or if they're aware of their sexuality, things like that, there is this idea of being aware of the different political aspects of not being straight. I'm always a very reflection-oriented person. I feel like queer spaces are, in essence, reflection spaces, because in so many other places… [people are] dying to show their pride. There are other places, even in this country, where I will probably get killed by being myself. Being here, what does it mean that we're in this time period in which we can do this, and we have these rights. We can exert political power, but in other spaces, if we aren't together, it's over. It is a collective, in that sense. **Queer spaces, to me, are reflective collections**. You might not ever have this type of political power again, because they made Queer Beers. People got together and made Queer Beers. It never existed. No one thought to make a Queer Beer space, so they did it and we have these queer things.
Anthony recognizes that queer spaces are special primarily because of their political potential.

While reflection may not be a political panacea, I believe there is a liberatory potential in making

queer spaces reflective collections: if these spaces become spaces where there can be collective

reflection upon the intricacies of queerness, then we can *start* with space, and queer identity and

politics can become ideological manifestations of the space, instead of the other way around. In

the end, this piece is a collective reflection in and of itself. I have attempted to collect the

reflections of queer students at Oberlin in order to analyze the complexities inherent in

navigating queerness, space, queer space, identity, and safe space, trademarked and otherwise.

Again, while simple collective reflection is not the end-all-be-all of eradicating the –isms and –

phobias that manifest themselves in queer community and queer organizing, I believe it is the

best place to start.

Appendix I: Relevant Terminology

Aromantic (Aro): the identity used by many people who experience the distinct and specific lack of romantic feeling and attraction

Asexual (Ace): the identity used by many people who experience the distinct and specific lack of sexual feeling and attraction. There is an emerging field of Asexuality studies within the discipline of gender/sexuality studies: See Cerankowski and Milks 2014.

Cis (-gender): the alignment of gender assignment at birth and gender identity.

Cis-het: an abbreviation of cisgender and heterosexual. In this piece, it is used as the non-/anit-queer *par excellence.*

Heteronormativity: the systems of widespread, dominant, and societal ideology that require and normalize heterosexuality and prescriptive gender roles. Heteronormativity assumes the alignment of (cis-)sex, (normatively performed cis-)gender, and (heterosexual)sexuality and enforces it.

Non-binary: referring to gender identities that do not adhere to a male/female binary, and instead fall outside of that binary in some way.

POC: People of color- people who are not classified and/or do not classify themselves as white.

Trans: a term used for identities which are not classified as cis.

Oberlin Terminology

MRC: The Multicultural Resource Center, Oberlin's office for resources and programming. The MRC helps sponsor Queer Beers, and is made up of a director, four Community Coordinators (Asian and Pacific Islander Diaspora, Africana, LGBTQ, and Latinx), and student workers, activists, and organizations.

Queer Beers: See section entitled "Queer Beers" in Chapter Three.

(The) 'Sco: See page 53.

Splitchers: The Wednesday night student-DJ'ed event at The 'Sco where students drink and dance. Named as such because of the amalgamation of "split" and "pitchers" (of beer). Invoked here by interviewees and the author as Queer Beers' non-queer, open, equivalent.

Appendix II: List of Interviewees

Name	Pronouns	Year/Age at time of interview	Date/Location	Length	Self-Description[10]
Annie	She/her/hers	1st year, 18	10-25-16 scholar study[11]	24min 27sec	White, middle class, cis woman, bisexual
Mysha	Any pronouns	1st year, 18	11-3-16 scholar study	24min 41sec	Black, woman, bisexual, Ethiopian
Kai	He/him/his or they/them/theirs[12]	1st year, 18	10-26-16 dorm lounge	37min 39sec	Non-binary, queer, white/part Native American, middle-class, Hawaiian
Seraphina	She/her/hers	1st year, 18	10-27-16 coffee shop	34min 3sec	White, middle class, asexual, transfeminine
Kaitlyn	She/her/hers	1st year, 19	10-12-16 outside of dorm	22min 41sec	Genderfluid, queer sexuality in general, white, from rural Ohio
Mason	He/him/his	2nd yr, 20	10-7-16 scholar study	36min 49sec	Transgender, transmale human, from southern Ohio, white, culturally Jewish (but really loosely so)
Alexa	She/her/hers or they/them/theirs	2nd yr, 20	10-24-16 scholar study	30min 7sec	White, upper middle class, not cis/genderqueer, queer
Le'Priya	She/her/hers or they/them/theirs	2nd yr, 19	10-1-16 Multicultural Resource Center	38min 59sec	Queer, genderqueer, Afro-Latina/x
B.K.	She/her/hers	2nd yr, 19	10-11-16 scholar study	33min 9sec	Bisexual trans woman on the femme side of the spectrum, southern (from South Carolina), white, geek
Tori	She/her/hers	2nd yr, 19	10-23-16 library courtyard	45min 20sec	Trans girl and a lesbian, white, upper middle class, from central Indiana (suburban)
Matthew	He/him/his	3rd yr, (transfer) 21	9-29-16 restaurant	39min 28sec	Gay, white, upper middle class, male, identify as a man
Rita	Any pronouns	3rd yr, 19	10-10-16 scholar study	37min 10sec	Don't really have a word gender-wise but like not cis, bi and also sort of aromantic/asexual spectrum, some combination of those three depending on the day, Puerto-Rican POC, I have PCOS so I have like hormonal imbalances so i'm technically intersex, have depression.

[10] The descriptions here are exact quotes from the interviewees

[11] My scholar study is a small private study room/office in the library for my use during my research

[12] For participants who use more than one set of pronouns, I used both in my writing.

Peyton	They/them/theirs	3rd yr, 20	10-3-16 library	23min 54sec	Non-binary and genderfluid, queer, demi-sexual, from low-income family From rural small town in Michigan
Carlos	They/them/theirs	3rd yr, 20	10-11-16 scholar study	35min 31sec	Gay, non-binary, Hispanic
Abraham	He/him/his	3rd yr, 20	10-13-16 my apartment	41min 30sec	Trans man, tend to prefer dating men, non-observant Jewish, white
Renee	She/her/hers	3rd yr, 20	9-18-16 my apartment	35min 23sec	White, female, queer, cisgender, American, reluctantly
Emil	He/him/his	3rd yr, 20	10-116 library courtyard	44min 46sec	Latinx, Puerto Rican, queer, cis male, disabled (type 1 diabetic)
Kiley	She/her/hers or they/them/theirs	4th yr, 21	9-27-16 coffee shop	40min 21sec	Queer, ("but if you need to break it down more, pansexual/asexual, but also pansexual") gender nonconforming, androgynous
Anthony	He/him/his	4th yr, 21	10-3-16 scholar study	35min 2sec	Non-religious, alternate between gay and queer, Black, cis male
Brendan	He/him/his	4th yr, 21 (transfer student)	10-10-16 coffee shop	25min 29sec	Cis white pretty much gay, Jewish male
Alton	They/them/theirs	4th yr, 21	9-28-16 their house	27min 44sec	Trans masculine and bisexual
Leah	She/her/hers or they/them/theirs	4th yr, 21	9-28-16 student union	37min 39sec	White, upper middle class, parents hold upper level degrees, 4th yr, attracted to people regardless of gender- I guess that's a way to put it, of many genders, I don't really know about my gender identity, I choose not to think about it a lot just 'cause like I feel like it's not always a good axis of like understanding myself all the time
Emma	She/her/hers	4th yr, 21	10-4-16 student union	31min 28sec	Woman, queer, bisexual, Jewish
Megan	She/her/hers	4th yr, 21	10-5-16 her house	32min 32sec	Queer, person w a disability, panromantic asexual, queer environmental justice activist, white, cisgender female
Jasper	He/him/his	4th yr, 21	10-26-16 coffee shop	39min 10sec	White, middle class, cis man, gay
Raven	She/her/hers	2016 graduate, 22	10-1-16 phone/skype	53min 3sec	Black, poor, queer, cis, as a survivor

Appendix III: Interview Schedule

- Can you tell me your name, pronouns, the name you would like used in the research, and

  anything you feel comfortable sharing about your identity?

- How would you define queer?

- Do you identify as queer? What does that mean for you?

- Queer with Grandma

- Have you ever been to queer beers or other events for queer students at Oberlin?

- How would you describe queer beers to a prospective student?

- What feels different about queer beers than any other night at the sco?

- What appeals to you about queer-only spaces, if anything?

- Do you feel queer spaces at Oberlin are safe spaces?

- What kinds of queer spaces do you prefer and what do you think makes a queer space, a queer

  space?

- What are some issues you see with advertised queer spaces at Oberlin?

- How do you feel your identity as a queer person has been shaped by utilizing certain spaces?

- How do you feel queer space at Oberlin differs from queer space outside of Oberlin?

- Who else should I interview?

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