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Social Spaces, Places, and Substance Use in Shaping Queer Identities

by

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Louis

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Doctor of Philosophy in Criminology and Criminal Justice

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ABSTRACT

Research has suggested that queer people may be more likely than their cisgender heterosexual counterparts to use substances. Largely, these higher rates are commonly explained through frameworks of victimization or (ab)use that render substance use as a form of coping or inherently problematic. While some queer people do use substances to cope, the social spaces, places, and contexts in which use often occurs are often obscured or ignored. More recently, contemporary queer criminologists have explored queer substance use and have considered how it is intimately linked to social space, place, identity formation, and community building. This dissertation draws from queer criminological approaches to theorize and develop the idea of social spaces and places. In particular, it explores how queer people define and create social spaces and places, how social spaces and places shape identity formation, and how social spaces and places are imbued with substances. To investigate, 49 in-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted with self-identified queer people who have used substances or frequented queer social spaces to examine the intersection of social place, contexts, substance use, and queer identity formation. As such, it is argued that social spaces and places can be distinguished, imbued with identities, messy, and crucial sites for substance use and identity formations through use.

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION AND LITERATURE REVIEW

INTRODUCTION

The Pulse Nightclub, a gay club in Orlando, Florida, was the site of one of the deadliest shootings in U.S. history. On June 12th, 2016, Omar Mateen, a 29-year-old ex-private security guard, entered Pulse on its weekly “Latin Flavor” night. After surveying the environment, Mateen left, returned with his AR-15 rifle, and began opening fire into the crowded club of more than 300 people who were primarily Latinx and queer, ultimately taking the lives of 49 people and wounding 53 others (Natour, 2021). In the aftermath, many queer¹ people were traumatized, not only because of the massacre that occurred, but because it shattered the idea of safe spaces or places for queer communities (Stults et al., 2017). Underlining the crucial ways that queer social and places shape behavior and intersect with identity, the horrific attack on Pulse was a clear violation of the security that these environments provide, encouraging some queer people to use substances to both grapple with trauma concerns about violence towards queer identities (Boyle et al., 2018). Largely, the mass murder that occurred at the Pulse Nightclub viscerally underscored one vital, yet understudied, theme for criminological theoretical research: The importance of queer social spaces and places in shaping queer substance use and identities.

¹ Although the terms “queer” and “LGBTQIA” are often used interchangeably, this proposal will primarily use “queer” to describe LGBTQIA+ people. This decision was made to both highlight “those with shared experiences by virtue of their existing outside of heteronormativity to be represented in research” and “it also allows researchers and others to bring criminological attention to bear on issues of injustice, or to important silences in these discourses, and open up a space for these injustices to be remedied, or these silences to be broken” (Ball, 2014:5).

Distinctions and overlaps between a queer social space and a queer social place could be compared to that of a house vs. a home. While a house refers to the physical structures or material aspects of a place of dwelling, the term “home” implies a state of immateriality rooted in “human experience” or interaction (Rykwert, 1991:51). In this regard, a queer social space is a site or geographic locale whereas a queer social place is an assemblage of connections and interactions. Generally, queer social spaces such as bars and clubs have “historically acted as safe places and sites of resistance” (Dwyer and Panfil, 2017:3) or cradles for civil rights movements (Carter, 2004). As such, many queer people seek out these environments because they are welcoming (Giesecking, 2016), places for socialization (Israelstam and Lambert, 1984), and offer opportunities for community-building (Croff et al., 2017). As built from a shared identity, queer people can safely develop and explore their queer identities in these spaces, cultivate queer places, and therefore are “important to the creation of community and interpersonal social bonds” (Anderson and Knee, 2021:120).

As a refuge from systems of heteronormativity, such as familial ostracization and legal surveillance (Dwyer and Panfil, 2017), some queer people use queer social spaces to participate in various experiences, such as substance use (Demant et al., 2018). Classic symbolic interactionist scholars who do work on identity have suggested that identities are inseparable from social environments (Erikson, 1959), created from social interactions (Mead, 1934), integral to the formation of communities (Mead, 1934), and foster subsequent behavior(s) (Erikson, 1959; Mead, 1934). Substance use behavior, for example, can be taught through environmental (e.g., being in a bar) and interpersonal (e.g., conversing with a friend) cues (Townsend and Belgrave, 2000).

Spaces and places, similar to identities, are fluid and shaped by their inhabitants

(Love, 2017; Goffman, 1969). Put more simply, they are “messy” and precariously nestled within balancing acts of negotiations and concessions (Manalansan, 2014: 569). While queer social spaces were created for queer people to feel safe and build community (Croff et al., 2017), the presence of heterosexual² people within queer social spaces can rebrand them as “questionably queer places” (Hartless, 2019: 1044). In comparison, because heterosexual social space is recognized as all social space (Bell et al., 1994), the presence of queer people or the construction of queer social places within heterosexual social space could be considered an act of subversion (Rushbrook, 2005). As such, while queer social spaces may distinguished by heterosexual social spaces, the routine positioning of queer social spaces “in opposition to heterosexual [social] spaces” Oswin (2008: 97) can obscure the ways in which all space can be “sexualized or desexualized by different people at different times” (Hubbard, 2000:192).

Substance use is intimately linked to identity- and community-building in queer populations (Race, 2009). In fact, some queer people have even described the importance of substance use, specifically within queer social places, in accessing queer communities (Demant et al., 2018; Race, 2009) and their own queer identities (Pienaar et al., 2020; Race, 2009). Not only do researchers find that substance use is more acceptable within queer populations relative to heteronormative populations (Demant et al., 2018; Race et al., 2016), but queer civil rights movements explicitly encouraged a rejection of normative conceptualizations of identities, including through substance use (Hill, 2011). Although substance use is certainly an important and shared practice for facilitating queer identity, it works in tandem with other aspects and practices such as music, clothing, and

² Although the term “straight” is queer slang for “heterosexual” (Doyle, 1982), this dissertation uses the latter for one important reason. While I personally take no issue with the term “straight,” its original usage in contexts reaffirms the naturalness of heterosexuality and renders other identities as “crooked,” “misshapen,” or “bent” (Henry, 1959).

interactions (Race, 2009; Southgate and Hopwood, 1999). However, substance use is often used to enhance these other aspects which makes it an interesting point of examination (Taylor, 2010). As such, work on queer substance use has highlighted how consuming substances has “brought into being” queer communities, spaces, and places (Race et al., 2017:43).

Although social space and place is often invisibilized, one important consideration in drug research is the importance of social contexts (Becker, 1963;1982; Goode 1970; 1972) and environmental factors (Agnew, 1992; Dai, 1937; Lindesmith, 1947; Newcomb and Harlow, 1986) in shaping substance use and identities. For example, Goode (1970:23) illustrated how smoking marijuana is often done in gatherings of close or personal groups that frequently results in “a kind of subcommunity.” While using substances within these subcommunities, people identify with each other, bond over the process of using substances (Goode, 1970), and can further explore their identities among like minded people (Hunt et al., 2019). Building from this work, social³ and physical places, as sites for community building and resistance, are likely important for queer communities and the construction of queer identities. For many queer communities, bars, clubs, and parades are the predominant cultural, historical, and social spaces (Demant et al., 2018; Felner et al., 2020). These social spaces are often dependent on the consumption of substances. For example, a bar cannot exist without the distribution of alcohol (Hunt et al., 2019). Heterosexual social spaces, on the contrary, are not often considered specific spaces. Rather, they are recognized as the wider “hetero-normative world” by some queer people (Valentine and Skelton, 2003:885). While some queer

³ I draw from the idea of Oldenberg’s (1989) social places, which I define as any physical or virtual environment that is embedded with meaning-making processes that regulate normative expectations for identities and behavior(s).

people actively avoid entering these environments, those that do sometimes abstain from substance use out of fear of anticipated or past experiences of lived violence (Hunt et al., 2019). Preferring to indulge in queer social spaces, some queer people create places to circumvent heteronormative expectations of docility and provide temporary, but liberating, moments of respite (Valentine and Skelton, 2003) and identity formation.

Research finds that people classified as sexual minorities, such as members of LGBTQIA+ or queer communities, are significantly more likely than their heterosexual counterparts to engage in substance use (Koeppel, 2015; Marshal et al., 2008; Talley et al., 2010; Bowers, Walls, and Wisneski, 2015). These higher rates of use are often explained through frameworks of victimization, trauma, deviance, and abuse (Felner et al., 2020). Just as other people with identities that have been marginalized, queer people often experience stress and victimization related to their gender and sexual identities (Dwyer, 2015)⁴, which can encourage some to cope through substance use (Mereish et al., 2017). Yet, work within this area often renders social space, place, and context as “passive backdrop[s]” (Jayne et al., 2016:117). As such, while this research has highlighted the ways in which *some* queer people use substances, the reliance upon frameworks of substance abuse as inherently risky has eclipsed other equally valid experiences. Furthermore, because the behavior(s) of queer people, particularly queer people of color, are considered embodiments (Nygren et al., 2016; Dwyer, 2015), these approaches may not be suitable for understanding queer substance use.

⁴ However, what is unique to queer people is the overlapping experience of “identity concealment” (McConnell et al., 2018:2), where the conscious or subconscious suppression of a queer identit(ies), coupled with homophobic or transphobic disenfranchisement(s), can force some queer people to grapple with internalized homophobia, “a common manifestation of minority stress” (Hatchel et al., 2019:2); For example, some queer people of color must simultaneously navigate racial/ethnic discrimination in queer spaces and homophobic stigmatization(s) within their racially/ethnically similar communities (McConnell et al., 2018).

Queer criminological frameworks can help make sense of substance use beyond victimization-only and risk-based frameworks. Queer criminology has its roots in queer and feminist theory which consider how identities and behaviors are socially constructed and reproduced (Panfil, 2018; Buist and Lenning, 2016). In this regard, queer criminological theories suggest that many approaches to criminological research are reflective of heteronormative assumptions of gender and sexuality (Buist and Lenning, 2016). To mitigate these biases, scholars have considered the development of queer-specific approaches in addition to a “queering” of the field more generally, imperative to any criminological research (Panfil and Miller, 2014; Rogers and Rogers, 2022). These considerations are both theoretical and methodological interventions that question how criminological questions are conceptualized, asked, and analyzed. The concept of “queering” refers to the destabilization of ingrained and preconceived notions of gender and sexuality, and a potential solution to the historical and contemporary paucity of work that includes gender and sexually diverse peoples (Ball, 2014; Buist and Stone, 2014).

THE CURRENT PROJECT AND CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE LITERATURE

Building on queer criminology, identity and substance use, and the social context of substance use literature, this dissertation examines how social spaces and places are distinguished and navigated as they inform queer substance use and create opportunities for queer identity formation through substance use. In this project, I ask the following research question: How do different types of social spaces, places, and contexts shape how some queer people use substances in relation to identity formation? This question also consists of the following three sub-questions reflected in my three substantive

chapters: 1) How are queer and heterosexual social places defined or distinguished by some queer people?; 2) How do social places shape how substances are used by some queer people?; and 3) How do different types of social places shape how some queer people use substances in identity building?. In doing so, I draw from 49 in-depth, semi-structured interviews with self-identified queer people who have spent time in queer social spaces and places to investigate the intersection of place, behavior, and identity. Utilizing a queer theoretical framework, which suggests that substance use can be advantageous to identity and community development, the study emphasizes pathways into drug use and into queer social spaces and places, motivations for participating in recreational drug use within these environments, and, generally, the role of social spaces, places, and substance use within them in defining and (re)defining identities.

This work makes four contributions to the literature. First, although prior research considers how queer people move through queer social spaces and places, little has explored how queer people move through heterosexual social spaces and places. Second, in exploring the messiness of space and place-based boundaries, this work investigates the shifting materializations of space that can be impacted by the movements of people. Third, in moving past traditional victimization frameworks of queer substance use as inherently abusive, this dissertation highlights how substances can be constitutive of social space and place. Fourth, because substances can be used as a “technology” or strategic mechanism through which people transform themselves (Foucault, 1988:18; Pienaar et al., 2022) or their environments, this work underscores the importance of developing queer-specific theories to understand queer substance use.

Since most of the criminological literature to date has focused on explaining

in-group versus out-group dynamics between queer and heterosexual communities, little research is explicitly centered on queer communities, particularly, those who thrive outside of the gender binary, such as nonbinary⁵ or genderfluid⁶ people (but see Newcomb et al., 2020). Similarly, although a small yet growing body of research has explored how queer social spaces are built or navigated, little is known about how queer people navigate heterosexual social space and place. As such, this project expands and queers criminological work and theory (Panfil, 2018; Buist and Lenning, 2015; Ball, 2016).

Third, I aim to create a conceptual model for understanding how queer social spaces and places are constructed from substance use and can shape queer identity formation. In theorizing space and place through queerness, I consider the ways in which it can be constructed, defined, and imbued with identities. Additionally, this approach thinks through the messiness of space and place through an examination of queer and heterosexual social space and place which may parallel the messiness of identity formation. In doing so, social spaces and places become an analytical tool to investigate how queer people understand their environments and identities. Furthermore, this work locates queer substance use within social space and places and contexts which have implications for identity formation. In other words, since behaviors are gendered (Kruttschnitt, 2013), sexualized (Ball, 2016), shaped by, and taught through spaces and places (Unnever and Owusu-Bempah, 2018), any analysis of queer substance use must recognize the role of queer social space and place. As such, this research challenges

⁵ The term, nonbinary or “non-binary” refers to people who thrive outside the gender binary. While some nonbinary people may identify as transgender, not all do, and nonbinary identities can “include identifying as neither male nor female, both male and female or as different genders at different times (Rimes et al., 2019:1).

⁶ See definition of nonbinary in footnote #5.

heteronormative frameworks of space, place, behavior, and identity.

The remainder of this dissertation consists of 5 chapters. The following section reviews the literature on place vs. space, queer vs. heterosexual social space and place, the messiness of space and place, and the relationship between space, place, queer identity formation, and substance use. Next, in describing the dissertation's methods, Chapter 2 discusses the importance and mechanisms of queer criminological work. Chapter 3 considers how queer and heterosexual social spaces and places are distinguished, defined, navigated, and "messed" through the navigation of people. Subsequently, Chapter 4 explores how social spaces and places can facilitate or inhibit queer substance use, substances constitute queer social space, and how substances can be used strategically to navigate social spaces and place. After, Chapter 5 explores how the interplay between social space, place, and substance use can impact queer identity formation. Lastly, Chapter 6 offers a conclusion, implications of the current research, and suggestions for future research.

LITERATURE REVIEW

PLACES AND SPACES: THEORY AND THE MESSINESS OF HETEROSEXUAL AND QUEER SOCIAL SPACES AND PLACES

THEORIZING SPACE AND PLACE

Considerations of space and place have long been linked to the study of human geography (Withers, 2009; Agnew, 2011) to describe how spaces and places structure the behaviors, feelings, and meanings people ascribe to environments and settings (Relph 1976; Tuan (1997). Although used interchangeably⁷, Tuan (1997:6) viewed space and place as separate, where space “allow[s] movement” or recognized as a “sense of [a place]” (Withers, 2009:638), and place is denoted by a “pause in movement” or the character of a space (Tuan, 1997:6). In this regard, while meanings are necessary for places, spaces are composed of places and are imbued with meaning through a sense of places (Withers, 2009; Agnew, 2011; Tuan, 1997). For example, to describe St. Louis, MO in terms of a space, one could say that: it is a Midwestern city located within the state of Missouri, nicknamed “the Gateway to the West,” and is 66.17 square miles in size. As a place, a description of St. Louis might include that: it originated from the cultures of Indigenous, Black, French, Dutch, German, and Irish people; it is the birthplace of African American ragtime jazz, and was home to the country’s first gasoline station. Conversely, Relph (1976) viewed space and place as “dialectically” interrelated because people move through spaces based upon the meanings given to places, and also navigate places based upon “their spatial context” (Seamon and Sowers, 2008:4). Some,

⁷ It should be noted that while this project considers how social places are distinguished and navigated, much of the academic literature that describes features of a social place commonly uses the term “social space” instead. As such, this section, in addition to the remaining others, will use the term “space” and “place” interchangeably in reviewing the literature.

like Coleman and Collins (2006:2) and Agnew (2011:5) have noted the “simultaneous prominence and disappearance of place” and the impact of technological advances, such as social media, as reflective of “space...conquering place”.

I draw from the idea of social spaces, which I define as any physical or virtual environment that holds opportunities for encounters and interactions. This definition also informs my idea of social places which are located within social spaces and are embedded with meaning-making processes that regulate normative expectations for identities and behavior(s). Yet, because the meanings of social spaces are attributable to its composition of social places and social spaces give social places an environment to inhabit, they are constitutive of one another. However, much of the theorization on social places has been eclipsed by a notion of space. The development of social spaces as a lens of analysis was originated by Durkheim (1838:444), which understood spaces as occupied by specific “social groups” or kinds of people who replicated and defined the cultures of the wider society, or “social life” (Buttimer, 1969; Reed-Danahay, 2019). In analyzing how religion structures society, Durkheim proposed that all people have their “assigned place in social space” which dictates how they interpret themselves and others (pg. 444). Later theorizations, such as Sorre (1957), critiqued Durkheim for excluding how “physical conditions influenced social differentiation” (Buttimer, 1969:419). For example, while groups of people have specific social spaces constructed from their values, these spaces remain stratified by “points of privilege” that regulate inhabitants (Sorre, 1957:np; Buttimer, 1969). In this regard, social spaces were a “mosaic of areas” embedded with power relations (Buttimer, 1969:419). Subsequent revitalizations of Durkheim (1893) such as Bourdieu (1984; 1986) analogized social spaces as reflective of class and social capital that can further indicate a person’s “position in the social space”

(Skeggs, 1999; Lindell, 2022:383). Here, access to resources, such as education or money, become forms of (social) capital are brought into social spaces and structure interactions within them (Skeggs, 1999).

Social places, conversely, became popularized by Oldenburg (1989) who examined how and why people seek places for interaction. As “third places,” social places are public places outside of employment or domestic spheres that people actively seek out or create (Oldenburg, 1989:18). Within these places, people develop opportunities for pleasurable encounters, “community building,” and identity formation (Oldenburg, 1989:18). In this regard, the term “social places” might be more appropriate for examining settings created from or centered on specific identities and behaviors. Yet, while social sciences have explored the ways in which social spaces are gendered (McDowell, 1983; Bondi, 1992), racialized (Hunter et al., 2016), and demarcated by sexuality (Knopp, 1992; Bell and Valentine, 1995)⁸, the term “social place” is often reserved for class- or social-based interpretations. For example, people whose identities that have been marginalized are often excluded or further marginalized within certain types of social place (Kobayashi and Peake, 2000). In other words, the interchanging of space and place has obscured the ways in which meaning-making processes within a place structure how people navigate themselves and their environments.

Social spaces become sexualized through expectations for identities and behavior (Bell et al., 1994). If social spaces are sexualized and racialized, as Knopp (1995)

⁸ For example, people who thrive outside the gender binary and expectations for gender presentation, or “gender outlaws,” face elevated levels of assault (Namaste, 1996:226) in public places. As an example, the “weaponiz[ation of] white femininity” (Negra and Leyda, 2021:352) by the “Central Park Karen” to vilify a Black male birder illustrates how racialized and gendered fear (Day, 2006) can reinforce claims to place (Shiffman et al., 2012). Largely, this work demonstrates how violence can be interwoven into the fabric of place (Bourdieu, 1989).

suggests, places, as existing within spaces, are too subjected to sexualization. For example, the unique challenges that queer people, particularly Black queer people, encounter while navigating heterosexual and queer places (Newcomb, 2014; Slater et al., 2017) can further highlight the role of place in dictating expectations of identity and behavior. Additionally, the racialization of space ascribes certain people with assumptions that structure how they are interpreted. In this regard, trans women of color existing in heterosexual public spaces are presumed to be sex workers (Robinson, 2020) and are marked as “out of place” (Bell and Binnie, 2004:1810; Branton, 2020). To simplify how identities can structure how people move through spaces, a queer Black male in a study by Bowleg (2013:764) explained, “When you are [Black and gay] everyone hates [White people hate you because you are Black; Black people hate you because you are gay].” In this regard, homonormative definitions that synonymize queerness with whiteness (Vo, 2021) and compulsory heterosexuality within racialized communities (Battle and Ashley, 2008) can render queer people of color unmoored to place.

Yet, while notions of access and violence can structure opportunities and limit access to existing within particular spaces, these “expulsions” (Sasken, 2014:1) are also transformed and reshaped into other place-making possibilities (Hunter et al., 2016; Holland-Muter, 2018). Hunter and colleagues (Hunter, 2010; Hunter et al., 2016:2; Hunter and Robinson, 2018) term “Black place-making” as the ways in which some Black communities transgress stereotypes of Black existence and transform “hostile spaces,” such as the intensified and violent policing within Black neighborhoods (Ritchie, 2017), to places of resilience and growth as they resist destruction. “Queer world-making,” similarly, describes the ways in which some queer communities to “disidentify” (Muñoz, 1999:1) with hegemonic constructions of identity that privilege

dominant ideologies to “construct a world,” or a place, that is affirming of queerness⁹ (Holland-Muter, 2018:213). In this regard, places, particularly queer places, are environments that attempt to “break down barriers that exist in everyday life” and provide opportunities for community building (Delamere, 2013:238).

QUEER SOCIAL SPACES AND PLACES

Queer social spaces are considered safe (Stults et al., 2018) environments for queer communities and are places of resistance (Myslik, 1996) that provide access to pleasure (Hunt et al., 2019) and temporary respite from the wider heteronormative world (Adams, 2020). Generally, research has suggested that the predominant queer social spaces tend to be bars, nightclubs (Hunt et al., 2019), and parades (Demant et al., 2018; Felner et al., 2020). These environments were created in response to the historical linkage of queerness and biological determinism which marked queer people as genetically inferior and dangerous (Woods, 2014). As such, the violent regulation of queer (or queer-coded¹⁰) behaviors (Hill, 2011) subjected queer social spaces to various forms of state-perpetrated violence such as police raids (Agee, 2006). Largely, queer bars became one of the few social spaces where queer people could get together, socialize, and cultivate a sense of community (Race et al., 2017) in an accepting and more welcoming environment (Giesecking, 2016).

Queer social spaces are, as Halferty (2008:19) notes, built from and situated within a “complex negotiation” between the behavior of customers and “the disciplining force of” the owners; this discourse sustains “(sub)cultural production and meaning[s]”

⁹ As such, spaces must be understood as constructed from and situated within a continuous negotiation of social interactions and systems of power—“it both constitutes and is constituted by social relations.”(Visser, 2008:1345).

¹⁰ Often used to refer to characters from television shows or movies, “queer-coded” describes an insinuation that a person is or certain behaviors are (assumed to be) queer (Brown, 2021).

(Halferty, 2008:19). Within these environments, some queer communities have developed “queer cultural capital” that defines spaces as queer through the use of language, (Pennell, 2016:325), nonverbal communication (Pennell, 2016; Nicholas, 2004), or music genres or aesthetics (Brett et al., 2002; Hubbs, 2007). For example, Nicholas’s (2004:72) ethnography of “gaydar,” a play off the word “radar,” highlights the ways in which queer language and behavior, such as “the prolonged eye-gaze,” could trigger a queer person’s gaydar and signal to them that they were in similar company. Music, similarly, is central to queer social places through genres such as disco that symbolized “Blacks, Latino/as and queers coming together in ecstasy” (Hubbs, 2007:242).

Additionally, queer social spaces often use symbols to identify themselves to queer communities (Wolowic et al., 2017), and even specific sub-communities within them (Halferty, 2008), to distinguish themselves from heterosexual social spaces. Examining the decor of Bar Le Stud, a gay bar in Montreal, CA, Halferty (2008) noted how the rainbow flag, leather Pride flag, and the *Association des Motorcyclistes Gais du Québec* specified that the bar catered to gay men who were interested in leather and bear subcultures. Wolowic et al., (2017:11) investigated how queer young people balanced recognizing rainbow flags or decor as a symbol of queer friendliness and “vet[ting]” spaces before deciding if they were truly queer.

Although much of this work has created frameworks for how queer social spaces may be distinguished, a recognition of how social contexts within social spaces can impact distinction is still missing. The erasure of lesbian social spaces and the predominance of places catering to cisgender gay men, for example, has created a social context in which certain queer identities are excluded or rendered invisible (Morris,

2016). As such, this project investigates these overlaps between social space, place, and context that create opportunities for queer people to “step out of the hetero-normative world where they often feel marginalized ... where [they] can lose themselves and their troubles in music, dance and sex ... and enjoy themselves together in ways that can be empowering” (Valentine and Skelton, 2003:855).

HETERO(SEXUALIZATION) OF SPACES AND PLACES

While a small body of research has explored heteronormativity within culture or cultural expectations (Valentine, 1993), as constitutive of public spaces (Foucault, 1978; Rushbrook, 2002), and the “(hetero)sexing of space[s]” more broadly (Visser, 2008:1345), attention to heterosexual spaces remains underdeveloped (Bell and Valentine, 1995). Largely, this paucity might reflect the embeddedness of heterosexuality or “assumption of ‘naturalness,’” particularly within Western societies (Kirby and Hay, 1997), that obscures the ways in which heterosexuality structures “power relations in all spaces” (Valentine, 1993:396).

If every space is a heterosexual space (Bell et al., 1994) and “waiting to be queered” (Puar, 2002:935), it might be difficult to tease apart (or examine wholly) how spaces are or become heterosexualized. One solution, as Hubbard (2000:198) notes, could be examining how morality and the performance of heterosexuality informs how “heterosexuality is naturalized in (and through) space.” Another could be examining how the normalization of heterosexual desire obscures the (hetero)sexing of social spaces to heterosexual people while reinforcing that delineation to queer people who curb their own desires in public (Rushbrook, 2002). In other words, while heterosexual couples “can walk together safely in the streets,” queer people are forced to navigate “the threat

of violence each time they enter the public realm—particularly if they walk with a same-sex partner” (Valentine, 2003:226; see also Kirby and Hay, 1997). As an example, Snapp et al., (2015) describe how schools surveil and punish queer young people for engaging in public displays of affection in comparison to their heterosexual peers.

In contrast, regulations of gender and behavior suggest that spaces are not “‘naturally’ ‘straight’ [and are...] actively produced and heterosexualized” (Binnie, 1997:223; as cited in Oswin, 2008:90). Particular social places, such as workplaces (Valentine, 1993) and spaces such as college bars (Strouse, 1987), perpetuate heterosexuality through expectations for heterosexual behavior and identities. Describing hotels as “surrogate home[s]...associated with heterosexual family units” and stereotypes of heterosexual adultery of “dirty weekends,” queer (or queer-coded) people reserving a single bed suggests that they have a “sexual relationship” (Valentine, 1993:404). Similarly, Schilt and Westbrook’s (2009:441) analysis of the workplace as a site of “the social maintenance of heterosexuality,” underscores the complexity of heterosexual social spaces. On one hand, “gender normals,” or cisgender¹¹ men and women, affirmed transgender identities in asexual interactions such as asking a trans man to lift a heavy box. On the other, interactions that were perceived as sexual, such as flirtations or questions about particular sexual encounters, reverted back to invalidations of trans people’s genders that fixated on genitals (Schilt and Westbrook, 2009).

Largely, these spatialized boundaries are protected and sustained through implicit or explicit forms of homophobia (Valentine, 1993) and violence (Valentine, 1989; Adler

¹¹ The term “cisgender” is used to describe people whose *current* gender is the same as their sex assigned at birth (Guadalupe-Diaz). Similarly, “transgender” is often used as an umbrella term to refer to people whose *current* gender or gender presentation, as explained by Bornstein et al., (2006) but noted in Guadalupe-Diaz (2019:1), “varies from the cultural norm for their birth sex.” The word “current” was both used and italicized in this definition to underscore and reflect the fluidity of identity across time, space, and place.

and Brenner, 1992; Namaste, 1996). For example, “gender and sexuality [become] intertwined” in space when women (or women-coded people) labeled as “failures of femininity” (Guest, 2008:251) and men (or male-coded people) considered to have “misstepped masculinity” are “marked” as queer and assaulted for lack of adherence to heterosexual expectations for gender and behavior (Namaste, 1996:225). As such, heterosexual social spaces for queer women or women-coded people (Valentine, 1989), and those who thrive outside of the gender binary (Namaste, 1996), can become sites of risk and vulnerability (Adler and Brenner, 1992).

THE MESSINESS OF QUEER AND HETEROSEXUAL SOCIAL SPACES AND PLACES

Queer theorists have deployed messiness as a tool to critique hegemonic methodologies that essentialize identity and behavior (Law, 2004), knowledge (Dadas, 2016), complicate decolonial scholarship (Meer and Müller, 2021), and, particularly, examine queer lived experiences (Manalansan, 2014; Winton, 2022). Messiness is a rethinking and recognition of the research process (Campbell and Farrier, 2015), and those researched (Manalansan, 2014), as organized disorder. For example, Manalansan (2014; 2018) describes how the messiness of queer existence and mismeasures, meaning, a messy persistence despite pressures to passively submit, that sustain “impossible lives made livable” (Manalansan, 2018:496). As such, considering how social spaces and behaviors within them are regulated, messiness, as an analytical tool, can inform how queer people understand themselves and their environments.

Ahmed’s (2006) development of queer phenomenology explores this messiness through analyzing how spaces can queer or “expel” bodies (Sassen, 2014:5). Considering how heterosexual spaces “can straighten queer bodies” (Vitry, 2021:939), queer bodies

within heterosexual spaces appear as if “they are slanting or oblique” (Ahmed, 2006:560). For example, the presence of heterosexual people within queer social spaces can temper the ability to safely explore queerness (Gruskin et al., 2007). However, the presence of other queer people within heterosexual social spaces can create a sense of defiance and intensify queer identities (Kirby and Hay, 1997). In this regard, while social spaces themselves can encourage or discourage the formation of identities, their shifting embodiments, meaning, who is within the space, can further complicate these processes and the formation of place.

Like queer identities and experiences, spaces are fluid and precariously (Love, 2017; 2016) impacted by people who move within them (Goffman, 1969). Put more simply, social spaces are messy. For example, the embeddedness and (re)production of sexual identities within social spaces through various symbols (e.g., a rainbow flag) or mechanisms (e.g., queer languages) can distinguish queer from heterosexual spaces. Yet, these distinctive boundaries can be simultaneously blurred or rematerialized (Bell et al., 1994; Skeggs, 1999). For example, the presence of heterosexual people in queer social space can transform that space into one more uncomfortable for queer people (Rushbrook, 2005). In contrast, the presence of queer people in heterosexual social space can act as a form of subversion or (re)occupation of space (Bell et al., 1994). As such, queer social spaces cannot be placed in “coherent opposition to heterosexual spaces” (Oswin, 2008:97). Furthermore heterosexual and queer social spaces are “sexualized or desexualized by different people at different times” (Hubbard, 2000:192).

The development of queer social spaces could be a form of queering heterosexual social spaces, that is, persisting and taking space in a heterosexual world traditionally

seen as hostile towards queerness (Giesecking 2017). Others question that spaces, such as heterosexual social spaces, “may not be restricted to heterosexuality” (Bell et al., 1994:33) if gender is constructed from situated performances (West and Zimmerman, 1987; Butler, 1990) and is not owned by specific genders. Butler (1990) and Bell et al. (1994:33) demonstrate how queer “deployment of heterosexual identities,” such as the “gay skinhead” and “lipstick lesbian” can disrupt and delegitimize heterosexuality as innate. For example, the hyper-feminization of the lipstick lesbian and the hyper-masculinization of the gay skinhead, through embracing heterosexual presentations such as mini-skirts or shaved heads, is a form of “heterosexual drag” that creates access to heterosexual culture (Bell et al., 1994:33). Generally, queer adaptation of heterosexual presentation could be read as a larger subversion of heterosexuality which can offer queer people opportunities to transgress, access, and “parod[y]” (Bell et al., 1994:33) “heteronormative ways of being” (Johnson, 2017:23).

The queer occupation of heterosexual social space can facilitate queer place-making. Exploring the queering of heterosexual social spaces, Burgess (2005:27) noted that prominently placed Canadian “positive space” campaign posters, which promote visibility and safe spaces for queer university students, challenged “structural forms of homophobia” and created queer places within academic spaces (Burgess, 2005:27). This queer re-working of spaces, such as the journal entries, poems, and short stories of young Black queer people writing about queer concerns of visibility (e.g., publicly holding their partner’s hand) are literal and literary (in this case) rejections of respectability politics that dictate what, who, or how to be (Johnson, 2017). Bounce music, for example, is a young Black queer New Orleanian style of hip-hop that “thrives on...and gleefully” transforms a hypermasculine and heteronormative genre into “spaces

of queer performativity” (Casey and Eberhardt, 2018; Johnson, 2017:544). Lyrics spat by Katey Red, a Black trans woman, like “You wanna fuck me when I suck your dick” (Casey and Eberhardt, 2018:331), for example, is a form of disidentification or the intentional reimagining of ways of existing (Muñoz, 1999). As such, Red’s occupation of heterosexual social space rejects hetero and homonormative positionalities that define hip-hop and queerness, especially Black queerness, as incompatible.

The (hetero)sexualizing of queer social space, conversely, is often positioned as an invasion or an erasure. Much of the literature exploring the increasing presence of heterosexual people, particularly heterosexual women (Casey, 2004; Skeggs, 1999), within queer social spaces is focused on gay- or lesbian-specific space. Largely, much of this work has explored concerns about safety (Skeggs, 1999) or gendered and sexualized violence (Eves, 2004). Similarly, questions centered on “claims to these spaces” or belonging have complicated the boundaries of these environments (Casey, 2004:453). Betsky (1997) points to this growing publicization of queer social spaces as a façade for the “commodification of queer space” and subsequent absorption into heterosexuality (Rushbrook, 2002:194). The inclusion or assimilation of queer nightlife into general (and heterosexual) culture is sometimes recognized as evidence that queer social spaces are being “taken over by heterosexuals” (Branton and Compton, 2021:7). For example, some lesbian women have referred to this phenomenon as the “de-dyking of queer spaces,” through the involvement of heterosexual women into gay or lesbian specific spaces (Casey, 2004:446), or a “penetration” of queer social spaces more generally (Rushbrook, 2002:197).

If queer social spaces are constructed subversions of heterosexuality (Gieseeking 2017), heterosexual women within queer social spaces may be read as embodiments of heterosexual violence and occupation (Skeggs 1999). Gaining access through friendships with gay men (Skeggs, 1999; Casey, 2004), some heterosexual women use queer social spaces as an escape from the “constant male gaze” within heterosexual social spaces (Skeggs, 1999:227). Their very presence, especially for lesbian women (Skeggs, 1999; Casey, 2004), can raise concerns for queer safety and visibility (Eves, 2004; Rushbrook, 2002). Butch lesbian women in Eves’ (2004:486) study, for example, expressed “frustration” and “resent[ment] in being harassed by heterosexual women while trying to use the bathroom in their own spaces. Similarly, gay men describe similar irritation by the blatant occupation or “disruptive presence” of heterosexuality within queer social spaces (Baldor 2019; Branton and Compton 2021:87). As such, heterosexual men lecherously attending burlesque shows (Branton and Compton, 2021), heterosexual couples kissing in gay bars, and heterosexual women hosting bachelorette parties are often viewed as “visible heterosexual rituals” that “straighten[ed] gay spaces” (Baldor, 2019:428), rendering them as mere “‘tourist’ destinations” (Nichols, 2017:1).

Much of the considerations of the (hetero)sexualizing of queer social spaces as invasive is largely dependent on the behavior, “attachments to[,] and motivations for” heterosexual use of these spaces (Baldor, 2019; Matejskova, 2017:2). Extending Valentine’s (2003:237) conception of “time-space,” Matejskova (2017) explains how these perceptions are rooted in shifting constellations and materialities that impact spatial definitions or negotiations. Notions of privacy and safety (Bell, 2011; Demant et al., 2018), two centralities to queer social spaces, can be threatened or upheld depending upon “the particular configuration of bodies in time-spaces” (Matejskova, 2017). For

example, Branton's (2020:19) exploration of a gay bar holding opportunities for all women to practice pole dancing revealed how an initially sex-positive atmosphere, free from the "judgment or touching," shifted drastically by the presence of heterosexual men watching and "sit[ting] back...in a weird, horny little funk."

Rushbrook (2002:191) suggests that when queer identities and cultures "became commodities" or sites for consumption, heterosexual people began to enter and interact with queer social spaces. Queer spaces became sites for "urban, middle-class white men and women 'slumming' (or touring) drag balls" (Heap, 2008: as cited in Baldor, 2019:421-422). As such, drag-themed events, like drag shows (Rushbrook, 2002) or brunches (Siddons, 2019; Patillo, 2022), are uniquely situated events that "messy" the overlapping of heterosexual and queer social space. For example, a gay bar in Branton and Compton's (2019:80) study promoted drag shows as part of queer culture and used language such as "you're welcome if you're not hateful" to entice heterosexual attendees. Yet, the cultivating of a primarily heterosexual audience transforms an initial place for queer inhabitation into that of heterosexual consumption. Furthermore, because drag brunches are primarily used to "expose" heterosexual audiences to queer culture¹² (Patillo, 2022), the idea of an heterosexual presence as invasive is bypassed by the invitation of the queer social space.

In contrast, while bachelorette parties in queer social spaces represent a blurring of heterosexual and queer place, they are also distinctive "site[s] of performative heterosexuality" (Nelson, 2019:47) that further render queerness as a "spectacle" (89). Considered to be safe havens from heterosexual male violence, bachelorette parties allow

¹² The novelty of drag is "more normal" for queer people (Branton and Compton, 2019:85).

heterosexual women to drink to excess (Jones II and Essig, 2022). In doing so, large groups of heterosexual women often use up a lot of space “in favor of their own purposes” by centering festivities around the bachelorette and her impending marriage (Nelson, 2019:89). Bachelorette parties may also be considered an appropriation of queer space (Jones II and Essig, 2022), ignorant of the historical roots of queer places (Nelson, 2019) and marriage as heterosexuality property (Baldor, 2019). As such, common bachelorette behaviors, such as capturing pictures of people without their consent (Baldor, 2019), “grab[bing] the butt of a cute gay man,” and taking selfies “in front of the leather daddies” position queer people “as if they were exhibits in some queer zoo” (Jones II and Essig, 2022:n.p.).

The tensions between queer social spaces as exclusively existing for queer communities and the increased “hetero(sexing)” of queer social spaces (Valentine, 1993:409) also could be read as a queer embracing (albeit forced, as some would caution) or capitalization of “heterosexual consumption” (Branton and Compton, 2021:88). For example, Siddons (2019) notes that drag branches make a lot of money. Although (straight) bachelorette parties are performances of heterosexuality, the ability for queer people to get married encourages some, like a participant in Baldor’s (2019:431) study, to take an inclusive yet apathetic and “powerless” stance on the prominence of bachelorette parties. Some drag queens have also expressed that bachelorette parties generate the most amount of money and queer attendance is low (Jones II and Essig, 2022). Jones II and Essig (2022:n.p.) term dependency “hetrification,” or the use of heterosexual money to “seduce” and “appropriat[e]” queerness, and caution that it will be the death of queer social spaces and culture. As such, some may question if “the physical places where

queer men and women had to go to define themselves, are [even] necessary,” or, as I might add, sustainable “anymore” Kolby and Betsky (2017:88).

In this regard, power is central to the overlapping of interpretations or inhabitations of social space. The assumption that all public space is heterosexual social space is a motivation for the creation of queer social spaces and places. Furthermore, the existence of this disparity or access to public spaces more generally positions the claiming or queering of heterosexual public space as subversive. Yet in comparison, the presence of heterosexual people within queer social space is often read as a form of colonization or tourism. Put simply, social spaces are messy in their contestations, formulations, and embodiments.

THEORIZING QUEER IDENTITIES

QUEER IDENTITY FORMATION(S) AND CRIMINOLOGY

While many have theorized the locus of queer identity formation, they are largely concentrated around three frameworks. Some, like D’Emilio (1983) linked emergence of visibly queer identities to various economic shifts that provided opportunities to subvert compulsory heterosexuality. Other developmental theories consider the term “sexual identity” to suggest that queer identities develop from positive divergences from heteronormativity and are materialized through desires, romanticism, and how one understands themselves (Denton, 2016:58). Perhaps more popular, poststructural and critical approaches deconstruct dichotomous definitions of gender, sexuality, and other identity categories to emphasize the social construction of identity through political, historical, power, and social dynamics (Denton, 2016). Regardless of these converging

and diverging perspectives, historical analyses of queer identity formation(s) have suggested that the binarization of gender and sexuality “were even less tethered” to an identity in the past than contemporarily (Kunzel, 2018).

One of the most prominent poststructuralists, Foucault (1976) examined the history of sexuality and demonstrated how 19th Century Victorian ideological departures, rooted in power relations, defined sexual behaviors in terms of sexual identities. As Foucault (1978) argues, while queerness has always existed, the linkage of morality with concerns for acceptable sexual behavior coupled with the search for the “true” man or woman birthed “homosexuality.” Queer people, and queerness more broadly, was considered a pathology or disease (Fricke, 2010), and a distinct “species” from heterosexual people (Foucault, 1976:43). Yet, challenging these categorizations, 1960s and 1970s modern queer civil rights movements’ reclamation of the word “queer” pushed back against the rendering of queer identity as inferior or abnormal (Denton, 2016). Rather, as an “anti-assimilationist” project, the word queer became a rallying cry for the importance of distinctions and recognitions of queer as an affirmation (Kunzel, 2018:1565).

More recently, however, queer (Ball, 2016), post-structuralists (Namaste, 1994), and other critical scholars (Woods, 2014) re-problematized normalcy of shared “queer” experiences and definitions. For example, while “the closet” may be considered a “normative” step in queer identity development (Cass, 1979; Sedwick, 1993), some have suggested that this form of queer performativity may be reflective of white homonormativity. Ross (2005), for example, describes that because some Black communities have unspoken acknowledgements that someone is queer, there is less of an

emphasis or need for someone to announce that they are queer or “come out.” In this regard, positioning the closet as a normatively queer pathway may fail to consider the various racialized differences surrounding queer identity development (Ross, 2005).

Different theoretical branches, such as queer theory, were created to explore the development of sexuality or sexual identities. Like the critiques put forth by Black feminists who suggest that mainstream feminism has erased the experiences of Black women (Heyes, 2008), queer theorists emerged to challenge the omission of queerness within civil rights and feminist discourses (Rivera and Natal, 2019). Generally, queer theory destabilizes the naturalness of heterosexuality (Foucault, 1978; Rubin, 1984), considers how heteronormativity is actively produced (Butler, 1990), and challenges the behaviors that binarize heterosexuality and “homosexuality” (Sedwick, 1990). Although queer theory, at its core, is a vow to “obliterate the very idea of normal,” the predominance of white queer experiences has resulted in the important work of queer Black people being ignored (Robinson and Hunter, 2019:164). For example, while modern queer civil rights movements were created from the actions of Black trans women (Comfort, 2021), the ways in which racism and misogynoir impact queer people of color often remain unacknowledged (Bailey and Trudy, 2018; Robinson and Hunter, 2019). As such, Black queer theory emerged as a reclamation of queer identity and space that challenges the assumptions that are “rooted in the epistemologies” of oppression and asks how might they be “repurposed for the liberation arsenals of marginalized groups” (Robinson and Hunter, 2019:172; but see also Johnson, 2005).

While larger debates on the “intellectual heritage” of queer criminology often fluctuate between critical and feminist criminology (Panfil, 2018:2), queer and feminist theoretical traditions are central to queer criminology’s consideration of how gendered

and sexual identities are regulated within or in proximity to the criminal justice system and processes of criminalization (Panfil et al., 2022; Buist and Lenning, 2016; Lamble et al., 2020; Ball, 2016). Generally, feminist theory considers the ways in which gender is constructed from roles (Friedan, 1963), rooted in violent regulations of women's subordination to men (MacKinnon, 1979), and perpetuated via systems of power and inequality (De Beauvoir, 1949). Although, contemporarily, feminist theory is associated with Butler's (1988) assertion that gender is a socially constructed performance, earlier forms of feminist theory were first articulated by Black women (Rice, Harrison, and Fridman, 2019). For example, questioning the role of feminism at a women's right's convention, Sojourner Truth asked, "Ain't I a woman?" to challenge racialized definitions of femininity that marked Black women as undeserving of the same treatment that white women accessed (Rice, Harrison, and Friedman, 2019). Subsequent Black and queer feminists, such as Lorde (1984), Davis (1993), Crenshaw (1989), and Collins (1990) have revitalized Truth's analysis to emphasize how Black women experience specific forms of gendered and racialized oppression (Race et al., 2019).

In response to the criminalization of queer communities, queer criminology emerged in the early 2000s (Panfil, 2018) to expose the embeddedness of heteronormativity within criminological research (Buist and Lenning, 2015; Panfil, 2018) and institutions (Snapp et al., 2015; Vitulli, 2013). Vitulli's (2013:113) "historicizing [of] the prison as a queer site" explores how the criminal justice system assumes and expects people to fall along the gender binary and criminalizes the identities of trans and queer people. Social institutions, such as schools, can also reify heteronormative regulations that justify violence against young queer people (Snapp et al., 2015). Additionally, research that has explored how queer communities engage with violence primarily

focuses on their experiences of victimization rather than the ways in which they fight back or advocate for themselves (Panfil, 2018).

SOCIAL SPACES, PLACES, QUEER IDENTITY FORMATION(S), AND SUBSTANCE USE

Spaces, places, and substance use impact how people understand themselves and form their identities (Dieseking, 2017). In turn, identities, such as queerness, can subvert the “normative arrangements of bodies, things, spaces and institutions” (Manansalan, 2015:567). For example, because queer social spaces, like bars and clubs (Anderson and Knee, 2020; Demant et al., 2018), were (and arguably remain) one of the few public spaces where queer communities could gather (Stults et al., 2018), much queer socialization is centered around substance use. Furthermore, as safer environments (Stults et al., 2018), queer social spaces are embedded with “spatial practices” that are crucial to the formation of queer identities (Dieseking, 2017:47). Conversely, although substance use is certainly an aspect of some heterosexual social spaces (Wenner, 1998), some queer people are deterred from engaging in these atmospheres. For example, the reinforcement of heterosexuality as “natural” via gendered bathrooms can complicate queer affirmative self-making (Martínez-Guzmán and Íñiguez-Rueda, 2017; Kirby and Hay, 1997) and substance use (Gruskin et al., 2007; Hunt et al., 2019).

Attributable to the “social” context of social spaces, substances are often present within both queer (Race et al., 2022) and heterosexual social spaces (Halim, Hasking, and Allen, 2012). However, there is a perception that substance use is more acceptable, prevalent, and encouraged within queer communities (Demant et al., 2018; Race et al., 2017). Similar to the role of substances in Beatnik development of a counterculture (Belser, 1991), using substances shaped some aspects of queer civil rights movements by

encouraging pleasure(s) and rejecting heteronormativity (Hill, 2011)¹³. Other work has highlighted how consuming substances has been integral in the (re)formation of many queer communities and identities by allowing room for pleasure and the discovery of queer identities (Race et al., 2017; Race, 2009). For example, Florêncio (2021:14) explains that queer chemsex contexts are undoubtedly part of a “life-affirming culture” that both safeguards “the reproduction and survival of queer bodies and ways of living” and “the very survival of the subcultural subjectivities of queer folk who participate in them.” In this regard, substances used within particular social spaces and contexts can be “technologies of the self” (Foucault, 1988:18) or of “the body” (Preciado, 2008:109).

Largely, the power of substances to lower a person’s inhibitions and create sites for vulnerability can structure how some queer people form their identities across social spaces, places, and social contexts. For example, because queer social spaces are perceived to be safer alternatives to heterosexual social spaces (Stults et al., 2018), some queer people feel more comfortable exploring their queerness through substances within queer social spaces. On the contrary, substance use within heterosexual social spaces may be less attractive and inhibit the exploration of queer identity through substance use (Gruskin et al., 2007; Hunt et al., 2019). As such, an investigation of the intersection of social space, place, substances, and queer identity formation must consider how space and place-based boundaries are distinguished, substances are used, and the overlapping of space, place, and substances merges to form queerness.

¹³As such, “the use of substances became intricately connected to a flourishing sexual liberation movement that promoted free and open expression of the queer body as a political act and queer sexuality as a human right” (Hill, 2011:2).

THEORIZING SUBSTANCE USE, QUEER SUBSTANCE USE, AND STRATEGIC USE OF SUBSTANCES ACROSS SOCIAL SPACES AND PLACES

THE CONTEXT, SPACE, AND PLACE OF SUBSTANCE USE

Examining the ways in which behaviors can flow across different social spaces, literature has suggested that a person's psyche, settings (Zinberg, 1984), and social contexts (Duff, 2005; Okamoto et al., 2014) can impact substance use. Zinberg's (1984:1) terms "set" and "setting" highlight how people approach substance use. "Set" refers to a person's mentality, meaning, attitude, when using substances (Zinberg, 1984:1). "Setting" describes the social and physical atmosphere(s) in which a person consumes substances (Zinberg, 1984:1). For example, because substances can lower inhibitions and increase feelings of vulnerability (Turchik, 2009), some queer people prefer or exclusively indulge within queer social spaces in comparison to heterosexual spaces to avoid uncomfortable assumptions about and violence directed towards their identities (Gruskin et al., 2007; Hunt et al., 2019).

Contexts, as an interplay or "an assemblage of" spaces, ways of being, and social(ized) rituals, can produce or dismantle opportunities for and definitions of (Agar, 2003) substance use (Duff, 2007:504). In this regard, problematizing Zinberg (1984) and other work that has focused solely on "historical and structural factors" (e.g., identity characteristics), a post-structuralist critique of drug use literature could investigate how particular "contexts shape and transform drug use behaviours." For example, social contexts, as constitutive of social spaces and places, are imbued with various "social and symbolic meanings" that arise from use (Duff, 2007:504). In contexts or spaces where substance use is encouraged or expected, such as a nightclub, some people may use as a

form of participation (Havere et al., 2011). In other contexts, such as a doctor's appointment, entering that environment while under the influence is neither encouraged by the space or its inhabitants. In this regard, recognizing how substance use is contextualized transforms social spaces into "active constituent[s]" (Jayne et al., 2016:117; as cited in Hunt et al., 2019:6; see also Duff, 2007).

Queer social spaces and places may be emblematic of how substance use actively transforms environments. Generally, there is a wider acceptance of substance use within queer communities (Southgate and Hopwood, 1999). For example, a young person in Demant et al., (2018:10) suggested that since queer social places are nestled within a "here we are, we're gonna celebrate" culture, substance use is very prominent. Encouraged by both the people within the spaces (Southgate and Hopwood, 1999) and the construction of the spaces themselves as primarily bars and nightclubs (Hunt et al., 2019), some queer social spaces have an almost symbiotic relationship with substances in which consumption is normalized (Lea et al., 2013). For example, some queer clubs or queer social spaces may hold an "after-hours¹⁴" to enliven patrons and because, as a participant in work by Hawkins et al., (2019:7) explained, "the reason why they sell water and Gatorade is for people who are high on MDMA or ecstasy, so we know that those spaces right away are already infiltrated with this drug," (Hawkins et al., 2019:7).

Considering this embeddedness of substances within queer social places, and communities more broadly, some have highlighted how queer communities were created from substance use (Race et al., 2016), and can build bonding within queer communities (Koeppel, 2015). Many queer people feel more connected to their communities through

¹⁴ After-hours are a setting where clubbers or party attendees can gather after the initial space has closed, recharge, and keep partying (Hawkins et al., 2019).

substance use (Power et al., 2018) and some, like a queer young person in Demant et al.,'s (2018:10) study, explained that using is “like a discourse, it’s like your access card to the community.” Substance use can also contribute to a sense of resilience (Race et al., 2016; Power et al., 2018). Using psychoactive drugs such as MDMA or ecstasy gave some queer people freedom to explore “stigmatised desires” (Race et al., 2016:n.p.) particularly within queer social spaces (Power et al., 2018). Substance use in queer social spaces can also build a sense of resiliency (McKirnan and Peterson, 1989).

Although some queer people use substances strategically within social spaces, little research has examined these processes. Within queer social spaces and substance use, much of the work is largely concentrated on the social context of combining substances with sex. Examining the social norms within queer chemsex sessions¹⁵, Ahmed et al., (2016) found that their participants used substances to reimagine the sexual possibilities of their bodies (e.g., contorting themselves into otherwise unattainable positions) and design frameworks of consent and boundaries around how much they would consume. As another example, some queer people of color have explained how using substances can help transgress racialized and previously inaccessible spaces as substances can create access “into every community” (Jerome and Halkitis, 2009:359). As such, integrating a socio-spatial analysis of queer substance use can highlight the agentic and meaning-making processes that can materialize through using substances, particularly within queer social spaces (Power et al., 2018; Pienaar et al., 2020).

While the literature has made many advancements of queer social spaces, places, and substance use, missing is a consideration of how substances can be constitutive of

¹⁵ Chemsex sessions are gatherings where substances are used to enhance sexual activities (e.g., having prolonged sex with multiple partners).

social space. Because the predominant queer social spaces are ones dependent on substance consumption, substances can help define spaces. Furthermore, although much is known about the rates of substance use among queer population, little has considered how some queer people use substances strategically. If heterosexual social space is constitutive of all public spaces, the ways in which queer people navigate and interpret these environments may be impacted by substance use. More explicitly, some queer people may intentionally use substances as a specific strategy for navigating heterosexual social spaces.

CRIMINOLOGICAL THEORY AND SUBSTANCE USE

Much of the criminological theory examining recreational substance use¹⁶ has extended social spaces to consider how the social contexts in which use occurs, the ramifications of use, and the larger role of substance use within a person's life (Dull, 1983, Miller and Miller, 2014). Two of the most popular theoretical explanations include control and strain theories¹⁷, which suggest that substance use is shaped by social norms, access to favorable definitions of authority and conformity (Hirschi, 1969), impulsivity (Gottfredson and Hirschi, 1990), and stressful aspects of a person's environment (Agnew, 1992)¹⁸. Social control theories underscore the ways in which externalized and internalized mechanisms of control shape how people interact with substance use

¹⁶I define substance consumption as the use of drugs (pharmaceuticals, narcotics, psychotropics, etc.) to alter a person's corporal or psychic state of being.

¹⁷ Other approaches include structural functionalism, as the foundation for control or strain theories, which suggests that substance use is shaped by social norms (Comte, 1896). These theories suggest that substance use is both normal and are anomic producing responses to abrupt social and cultural changes (Durkheim, 1897), and are crucial warning signs for the instability of society (Parsons, 1951). While functionalists consider substance use to be both functional and necessary, they are often viewed as symptoms of larger social problems and the destabilization of social equilibrium (Parsons, 1951 as cited in Shaw, 2002).

¹⁸ For example, Agnew (1992) extended Merton's (1968), which explained substance use as an anomic reaction to inability to reach hegemonic markers of success (e.g., wealth) to create general strain theory and suggest that people use substances to cope.

(Hirschi, 1969; Gottfredson and Hirschi, 1969)¹⁹. In comparison, conflict theories suggest that while behaviors such as substance use are produced through social problems arising from capitalist social inequalities, they are ultimately criminalized as a tool to control the working class (Marx, 1978)²⁰.

Research has suggested that queer people may be more likely to use substances than heterosexual people (Marshal et al., 2008; Bowers et al., 2015)²¹. Some have considered factors, such as homophobic/transphobic peer-to-peer bullying (Marshal et al., 2008) and ostracization (Silvestre et al., 2013) that could “push” (Young et al., 2017:5) or encourage some queer people to use. Another explanation, minority stress theory, suggests that the experience and internalization of “social stigma based upon one’s minority group status,” is used to highlight how substances serve as coping mechanisms (Flentje et al., 2015:100). For example, the embeddedness of heteronormativity and genderism²² within social institutions, cultures, and communities may lead some queer people to use substances to cope with those traumas (Weber, 2008²³). However, while

¹⁹ For example, research has suggested that the lack (or weakness) of ties (or bonds) to elements of society (e.g., school or family) can free people to offend and use substances (Hirschi, 1967); In addition, low levels of self-control can remove internal constraints (e.g., an internal dialogue) that would prevent people from using drugs (Gottfredson and Hirschi’s, 1969).

²⁰ Additionally, symbolic interactionism, embedded within contemporary learning and cultural transmission, as well as control and strain theories, emphasizes how behaviors are shaped through socialization(s) (Mead, 1967) in addition to the various meaning-making processes (e.g., substance use) that structure how people navigate their environments (Blumer, 1986; Miller and Miller, 2014).

²¹ For example, in conducting a meta-analysis, Marshal et al., (2008) found that compared to their heterosexual peers, gay, bisexual, and lesbian young people were 190% more likely to engage with recreational substances.

²² Genderism refers to a system that both awards primacy to heterosexuality and emphasizes the “often unnamed instances of discrimination based on the discontinuities between the sex/gender with which an individual identifies, and how others, in a variety of places, read their sex/gender” (Browne, 2004:332). Put more simply, genderism is the belief that there are only two genders (i.e., male and female) and the expectation that one’s gender should reflect one’s sex assigned at birth or suffer ramifications (e.g., victimization) for failing to do so.

²³ Weber (2008) found that queer people who were considered to have a substance use disorder had often experienced heterosexism and internalized homophobia; Hostile school environments (Pollitt et al., 2018), familial rejection (Felner et al., 2020), and communal rejection (Slater et al., 2017) have also been shown to impact suicidal ideations and substance use (Hatchel et al., 2019).

some have considered the experiences of those who thrive outside of the gender binary, such as nonbinary or genderqueer people, there is still an overall paucity of research that considers the experiences of nonbinary people in particular (Connolly and Gilchrist, 2020; Rimes et al., 2019). Although work by Langenderfer-Magruder et al., 2016 and Newcomb et al., (2020:11) found that rates of substance use were higher for nonbinary participants assigned male at birth (AMAB) than nonbinary people assigned female at birth (AFAB) and transgender men, Rimes et al., (2019) found that there were no differences between these groups. As such, more research that includes nonbinary people is needed as the unique experience of having an identity that thrives outside of the gender binary may impact how some navigate social space, substance use, and identity formation.

Although it is important to consider how experiences of victimization *can* shape introductions to and justifications for some queer substance use, the reliance on a framework in which victimization leads to negative coping through substance use has produced a controlling (Collins, 1990) narrative of queer substance use as inherently rooted in victimization, stemming from experiences of (ab)use or otherwise harmful and negative incidents (Race, 2009). Furthermore, the consolidation of queer identities as embodiments of risk may complicate how some queer people approach or navigate substance use (Nygren et al., 2015; Dwyer, 2015).

CHAPTER 2: METHODOLOGY

QUEER CRIMINOLOGY AND QUEER CRIMINOLOGICAL APPROACHES

Feminist, queer, and queer criminologists tend to gravitate towards qualitative methodologies for several reasons (Panfil et al., 2022). Queer qualitative approaches²⁴ emphasize positionality to drop the charade of objectivity (Greenbank, 2003) and can help assuage the inherently unequal power relations in conducting research (Collin, 1990). For example, rather than considering the researcher or the academic as the only source of knowledge, the participant is transformed from the identity of “the researched,” into a (co)collaborator (Collins, 1990). In doing so, the queer qualitative researcher does not “give voice” to the (co)collaborator, asserting their own meanings to the experiences of the collaborator; Rather, they amplify their voice(s), highlighting their unique processes and knowledge(s). Similarly, queer qualitative approaches’ ability to “move beyond the limits of categorization and statistical correlation” (Panfil et al., 2022:197) can deepen explorations of meaning-making processes or contextual factors that are particularly important to criminological contexts (Rogers and Rogers, 2023:469).

Moving past the normative “add queer and stir” incorporation into existing methodological paradigms (Ball, 2014; but see also Buist and Lenning, 2016:7), scholars have suggested the development of queer informed approaches in addition to a “queering” of the field, more generally, as imperative to any criminological research (Panfil and Miller, 2014; Rogers and Rogers, 2022). To “queer” something refers to the

²⁴ With roots in symbolic interactionism, queer approaches emphasize how people develop from social interactions and contexts (Woods, 2014). Specifically, symbolic interactionism aligns itself to a queer-informed approach in its recognition of the dynamic social processes of identity formation, behavior(s), and positioning of gender and sexuality as socially constructed (Stein and Plummer, 1994; Plummer, 2003).

destabilization of ingrained and preconceived notions of gender and sexuality, and a potential solution to the historical and contemporary paucity of work that includes gender and sexually diverse peoples (Ball, 2014; Buist and Stone, 2014). As an approach, queer criminology moves past hegemonic binarizations of sexuality (Dwyer, Ball, and Crofts, 2016) and gender (Valcore and Pfeffer, 2018) that often code queer communities out of analysis (Browne, 2008). Put more simply, a queer approach “invites the messiness of research – its fluidity, resistance, unspecificity and lack of disclosure” (Grzelinska, 2012:113). Because “mainstream criminologies could still be characterised as heteronormative” (Dwyer, Ball, and Crofts, 2016:2), queer criminologists have suggested that queer informed approaches may be an important site for intervention (Panfil et al., 2022; Ball, Buist, and Woods, 2014). More explicitly, it is a “diverse array of criminology-related researches, critiques, methods, perspectives, and reflections” (Ball, Buist, and Woods, 2014:2) that has been used to destabilize heterosexuality (Early and Grundetjern, 2022) and weaponized to “regulate” queerness (Ball, 2014:544).

In this regard, queer criminological approaches exist without a rubric (Ball, Buist, and Woods, 2014), like other approaches, such as endarkened feminism (Dillard, 2000) and crip criminology (Thorneycroft and Asquith, 2021). Put more simply, there is not a single or “true” way of defining queer criminological work. For example, controversy has swelled around use of the word “queer” to question whether it denotes work centered on queer communities or if it can extend to anyone who exists “outside” normative definitions of identity and behavior (Panfil, 2018:2). Largely, these perspectives are caught in a tension between reifying hetero and homonormative categories as foundationally distinct or risk “diluting demographically–relevant social differences” that shape navigations (Woods, 2014:30). Regardless, expansive views of queer

criminological approaches recognize that there are “multiple ‘queer/ed criminologies’” (Ball, 2013:24). Furthermore, it may be more productive to encourage both “identity-based” and “deconstructivist” approaches to interrogate the importance of shared identities in addition to who gets excluded based on identity (Woods, 2014).

Importantly, qualitatively queer criminological approaches can also problematize hegemonic understandings of identities and behaviors (Panfil et al., 2022). For example, instead of framing substance use among queer communities in victimization-only and risk-based frameworks (Race et al., 2017), a queer qualitative criminological approach also considers how these experiences can be pleasurable (Power et al., 2018; Race, 2009), differ via social place (Gruskin et al., 2007) or context (Florêncio, 2021), and can impact identity formation (Pienaar et al., 2022). As another example, Early and Grundetjern’s (2022:18) use of queer criminological approaches to analyze how cisgender heterosexual and queer women navigated compulsory heterosexuality within the rural methamphetamine market destabilized the innateness of heterosexuality and heterosexual desire; largely in understanding how heteronormativity can be “constraining...even for those who can benefit from and replicate normative structures,” this work underscored the importance of queering criminology as a discipline. In this regard, queer criminological approaches can trouble conceptualization of gender, sexuality, behaviors, and interactions with the criminal justice system.

PRESENT STUDY

DATA AND SAMPLE

This paper uses data from semi-structured interviews with 49 racially, ethnically, gender, sexually diverse, and self-identified LGBTQIA+ or queer people who have spent

time in queer social spaces to explore how they define and navigate queer and heterosexual social spaces. Conducted in the fall of 2019-fall of 2020, most of the interviewees were located in the United States and two were in the United Kingdom²⁵. Before the COVID-19 pandemic in March 2020, four interviews were completed in locations selected by participants (e.g., a queer coffee shop). Recognizing that some queer people may feel more comfortable in queer social spaces (Holliday, 1999) or may not be openly queer (Dindia, 2013), the decision to have participants select where to conduct the interview was a queer informed choice. Subsequently, the remaining interviews were held virtually through mediums chosen by participants (e.g., Zoom, Instagram call, phone call).

Rather than consolidating their identities into succinct categories, all participants were asked to describe their identities in their terms as part of a queer criminological interview approach. Participants' ages ranged from 21 to 62 years of age and the average age was 29 years old. As displayed in Table 1., of the participants, 55% were white, 19% were Latinx, 12% were Mixed, 10% were Black, and 4% were Asian. In regards to gender, 34% were cisgender women, 26% were nonbinary, 22% were genderfluid, 8 % were transgender, 4% were cisgender men, 2% were queer, and 1% was genderqueer. Considering sexuality, 24% were queer, 20% were gay, 20% were pansexual, 12% were lesbian, 8 % were bisexual, 6% were asexual, 4% were questioning, and 2% were panromantic.

TABLE 1. DEMOGRAPHICS

Name	Age	Race/Ethnicity	Gender	Sexuality	Pronouns
Skyler	23	White, Non-Latinx	Nonbinary	A-sexual	They/Them

²⁵ Since the purpose of this project was to study how queer people navigate substance use and queer social places more broadly, recruiting was not limited by geographical boundaries.

Peyton	27	White, Non-Latinx	Nonbinary	Nonbinary Lesbian	They/Them
Kai	21	White, Non-Latinx	Genderfluid	Queer	They/Them
Suri	24	Asian	Woman	Queer,	She/Her
Joan	27	White	Cisgender Female	Bisexual	She/Her
Aspen	32	Black	Male	Gay	He/Him
Rican	28	Latinx	Genderfluid	Pansexual”	They/He/Him/She/Her
Vesper	24	White	Female	Queer	She/Her
Riley	34	White	Queer	Queer	He/Him
Roses	22	White	Nonbinary	Pansexual	“Don’t care, based upon how I present”
Vein Gogh	28	Black/British	Transgender male	Pansexual	He/They
Sayer	25	Mixed	Genderfluid	Pansexual	They/He
Rickie	26	Afro-Latinx	Nonbinary/ Two Spirit	Panromantic	She/Her
Nova	30	Mixed	Female	Gay	She/Her
Azure	25	Black	Queer	Pansexual	She/Her or They/Them
Vennox	28	Latinx	Nonbinary/ Two Spirit	Gay	They/Them
Oakley	24	Mixed	Nonbinary	Gay	They/Them
Quinn	27	White	Cisgender Female	Queer	She/Her
Danny	22	White	Nonbinary	Aromantic	They/He
Kadin	36	Mixed	Nonbinary	Queer	She/Them
Roan	34	White	Cisgender Woman	Questioning	She/Her
Alien	31	Latinx	Nonbinary	Pansexual	Her/They/He
Cookie	26	Latinx	Genderfluid	Asexual	She/They/He
Lu	27	Mixed	Nonbinary	Pansexual	They/Them
Provvidenza	29	White	Genderqueer	Queer	They/Them
Robin	23	White	Genderfluid	Bisexual	She/They/He/They
Tanner	27	White	Transmasculine/Nonbinary	Queer	He/They
Noel	27	Mixed	Cisgender Male	Gay	He/Him
Remy	28	White	Nonbinary	Lesbian	They/Them
Rock	28	Mixed	Nonbinary	Pansexual	They/Them

Hayden	22	White	Cisgender Female	Pansexual	She/Her/He/Him
Majic	25	Black	Nonbinary	Pansexual	They/He
Kelsey	29	White	Cisgender Female	Questioning	She/Her
Alfie	25	White	Nonbinary	Gay	They/Them
Archer	27	White	Transgender Male	Pansexual	He/Him
Finley	62	White	Genderqueer	Gay but “Dyke”	She/Her
Indigo	26	White	Cisgender Female	Gay	She/Her
Jaden	39	White	Cisgender Female	Lesbian	She/Her
Maddox	31	White	Cisgender Female	Lesbian	She/Her
Harley	25	White	Nonbinary	Queer	She/Her/They/Them
Glen	54	Black	Cisgender Female	Lesbian	She/Her
Channing	20	White	Female	Bisexual	She/Her
Adrian	34	White	Cisgender Female	Bisexual	She/Her
Tori	50	White	Cisgender Female	Queer	She/Her/They/Them
Zephyr	28	White	Transgender	Queer	They/Them
Zola	28	White	Cisgender Female	Gay	She/Her
Wren	24	Asian	Genderqueer	Queer	She/Her/They/Them
Tobin	29	White	Nonbinary	Pansexual	She/They
Kylar	27	Mixed	Cisgender female	Lesbian	She/He

POSITIONALITY AND REFLEXIVITY

Using a queer criminological approach, I have perspectives informed by how identities are created by, in conflict, and in resistance with systems of power that structure how people move through space(s) and place(s). The author, a Black queer woman and queer criminologist, has extensive training in queer and feminist approaches which are sensitive to and prioritize the experiences of people who have been marginalized²⁶. For example, having spent a significant amount of time in one queer social space that hosts

²⁶ For example, I have given several guest lectures, designed three workshops, and have written on the importance of including queerness in the classroom and research.

drag shows, I initially attempted to recruit in this environment. While some might consider my previous relationship to be a potential source of bias, a queer criminological approach recognizes my history as an invaluable insider's asset (Panfil, 2022). Although the connectedness of local queer communities certainly rendered me as an outsider, my identities further complicated this matter and transformed me into an insider/outsider (Dalton, 2016). As a Black queer woman, I am hyper-aware of the violent and intrusive academic surveillance of my communities; and as a queer person, more generally, I find queer social spaces extremely important. For a researcher, sampling within the environment under study is a strategic approach that should be utilized. Yet, as a queer criminologist, I hold various identities and the conflict between them, meaning, the Black queer woman and the researcher, has provided a reflexive conundrum. Ultimately, I desisted from that approach to prevent jeopardizing the safety of that place for me and other queer people.

At this point, you might be wondering why I felt uncomfortable recruiting from within a physical queer social place vs. comfortable doing so in a virtual queer social place. Although I am still wrestling with this question, I can offer some initial introspection. To put it simply, attending and recruiting from a virtual drag show felt less intrusive. Similar to research on cyberbullying, virtual communications can be structured more easily than in-person interactions (Ging and Norman, 2016). For example, while physically recruiting requires the interaction between me and another queer person on display, recruiting virtually can limit the publicity of that interaction. For example, after shows had concluded, I directly messaged performers who, if they wished, could block/ignore my messages. In-person, however, it might be harder to ignore my presence and my physicality could make that environment uncomfortable. Furthermore, the

decision to recruit virtually limited the risk of losing my or my potential participants' access to that space because of this ability.

Although queer criminological approaches facilitate the co-production of knowledge, this research, just as all research is not “value-free” (Greenbank, 2003:798), and was undoubtedly shaped by my identities. As an example, while all participants were aware of my queer identity, one participant admitted that they had almost worn a binder to the interview to “look more queer” and justify their inclusion in the study. Furthermore, and in line with a queer informed approach’s rejection of the rote essentialization of identities (Panfil and Miller 2015), this work explicitly asked participants what their identities meant to them. For example, while the term “nonbinary” typically refers to a person’s gender, one participant used it to refer to their sexuality as “nonbinary lesbian.” Similarly, while it is common to ask participants of color about their relationships to their race or ethnicity, white participants were also asked when they first understood that they were white. In this regard, a queer criminological informed approach allows me to disentangle assumptions and hegemonic epistemologies.

RECRUITMENT AND INTERVIEWS

Participants were recruited from a four-pronged effort informed by a queer approach. Although a few participants were recruited from fliers placed at mainstream queer locations (e.g., queer coffee shops), the majority were recruited via personal networks, queer virtual groups or performances on social media, and snowball sampling. For example, as a member of several queer Facebook and social groups, I was able to easily post and distribute my fliers. As another example, while the pandemic forced all queer establishments to physically close down, queer social spaces were recreated

virtually in digital drag shows and hangouts. Observing this phenomenon, I attended more than 17 virtual drag shows (and one queer play), took field notes, and asked performers if they would be interested in being interviewed.

Three out of four of the interviews conducted in-person were done at a queer coffeeshop where the participants felt comfortable meeting me. As another queering approach to research, I invoked my “insider status” by using language such as “we” and “our community” in all recruitment information to denote that I am queer (Miller and Palacios, 2017). All participants were told prior to the start of the interview that I would be unable to offer financial compensation.

The semi-interview guide (Appendix A) was also developed from a queer framework, which emphasizes the importance of a participant’s own definitions of interview topics. As an example, rather than asking “what is your gender” or “what is your sexuality,” participants were asked “how they would describe” their identity characteristics. In asking the question phrased as “how” rather than “what is,” the interviewer assumes that gender, for example, is not fixed and allows for an interviewee to answer freely and draw from their own definitions. To consider the role of substance use and space, the participants responded to questions such as: “How would you describe a LGBTQIA+ space?”; “What kinds of LGBTQIA+ spaces are there?”; “What do people usually do in LGBTQIA+ spaces?”; “What kinds of substances have you noticed people using in LGBTQIA+ spaces?”; and “How does, if at all, your comfort shift when you use substances in queer versus heterosexual spaces?” Generally, the types of questions explored how each interviewee developed their queer identities, participated in recreational substance use, entered queer versus heterosexual spaces, and used substances within queer social spaces.

To further queer the research process, I ended interviews with an opportunity for participants to become the interviewer and ask me any question they wished. While a few declined because they felt uncomfortable or nervous, most participants felt emboldened. Some topics that were discussed included questions about my childhood, coming out story, use of substances in queer social spaces and places, my degree and what I want to do post-graduation, and challenges that I have faced as a Black queer woman and criminologist. One of the most interesting conversations was centered on the shared kinship between me and one of my participant's coming out stories. After explaining that it took approximately 7 years for me to come out, I was surprised to know that her participant similarly took several years for them to come out to their religious father. This conversation lasted 30 minutes after the interview's conclusion. This simple act, that is, being interviewed by a participant, can help mitigate the inherent power imbalance by encouraging an exchange of vulnerability.

Generally, interviews lasted one to two hours, with a few that extended past two hours. While it is common for the researcher to assign participants' pseudonyms, in this study, all participants had the opportunity to choose their own pseudonyms; participants who were uninterested were given androgynous names. As suggested by Allen and Wiles (2015), allowing participants to choose their own pseudonyms disrupts some of the implicit biases that may emerge in the researcher's naming of participants (e.g., choosing a stereotypically "Black name" for a Black participant). Interviews were audio recorded using a digital tape recorder owned by me and subsequently transcribed. To mitigate the power imbalance between me and my participants, all participants had the opportunity to review, edit, and procure their audio files or transcripts so that their story was properly represented. However, no participants utilized this opportunity.

ANALYSIS

I, like many queer theorists (Panfil, 2022), used grounded theory, a method in which data collection and analysis are connected (Charmaz, 2014). Inductive analysis, which is the examination of emerging themes within the data, is the “primary” method of analysis for a grounded theoretical approach (Bowen, 2006:13). The analysis was, as Manalansan (2014) would note, “messy.” Theoretically grounded work is “far from linear” as the researcher, in their continuous development of “hunches,” must always return and (re)return to the data and notes (Wuest, 2012). Rather than sanitizing the research process, grounded theory forces “researchers to develop a tacit knowledge of or feel” for their data that informs analysis (Suddaby, 2006:639).

The interviews produced emerging topics such as the importance of queer social spaces, the dangers associated with heterosexual social spaces, and the blurring of the two. Furthermore, sensitizing concepts²⁷, such as portrayals in media or academic literature that frame queer substance use as inherently abusive, sparked the project’s undertaking. My conceptual framework, as derived from sensitizing concepts (Bowen, 2006), was further connected to my concepts and manifested from literature on space, place, social spaces, social places, queer social places, queer identity development, and substance use.

To further analyze the data, all transcripts were uploaded and coded in Dedoose, a qualitative analysis software. In earlier stages of the analysis, basic tabulations were created for each participant that included all mentions of queer social places, heterosexual

²⁷ As described by Charmaz (2003:259), sensitizing concepts are the “starting points for building analysis” which help guide the research’s thinking and shape the research process. For example, the author’s experiences in queer social space and place coupled with the routine portrayal of queer communities as intimately connected to substance use and the paucity of positive portrayals in literature suggested that a project examining the intersection of queer identity, social spaces, places, and substances is imperative.

social places, identity development, substance use, and the various overlaps between and within concepts; these concepts were also reviewed alongside field notes that were taken before and during recruitment. Finally, and as part of an interactive process, thematic codes were defined and refined into three central themes that highlighted the ways in which participants moved through queer and heterosexual social spaces, how substance use was impacted and utilized within social spaces, and how queer identities were developed through social places and substance use.

CHAPTER 3: THE DEFINING, CONSTRUCTION, AND MESSINESS OF QUEER AND HETEROSEXUAL SOCIAL SPACES AND PLACES

INTRODUCTION

Research has investigated the ways that spaces can be distinguished via symbols and expectations for identity, culture, and behavior (Goffman, 1969). For example, primary queer social spaces, such as bars, clubs, and Pride parades (Demant et al., 2018; Felner et al., 2020), are often “marked” as queer by rainbow flags (Halferty, 2008:20; Wolowic et al., 2017), the use of “sexual languages” (Boellstorff and Leap, 2004:12; as cited in Pennell, 2016), and queer-coded music genres (Hubbs, 2007). Conversely, heterosexual social spaces are often distinguished in their absence of queer monikers and often characterized as the wider “hetero-normative world” by some queer people (Valentine and Skelton, 2003:855). Although often positioned in opposition, queer and heterosexual social spaces are constitutive of and flow amongst each other. In other words, while queer and heterosexual spaces are poised as opposites, movements within and between them can complicate this distinction.

Focusing on the importance of spaces and places, this chapter will examine the differences, overlaps, and blurrings between queer and heterosexual social spaces and places. Drawing from a queer criminological framework, this chapter investigates the boundaries and the “messiness” (Manalansan, 2014:99) of queer and heterosexual social spaces and places. While this project considers how social spaces are distinguished and

navigated, this chapter specifically asks: How are queer and heterosexual social places defined or distinguished by some queer people? In this regard, this chapter argues that the boundaries of social space and place can be simultaneously distinguished and blurred.

This chapter makes two contributions to the literature on social spaces, places, identity, behavior, and queer criminology. In arguing that social spaces can be distinguished via their functionality, gendered or sexual atmosphere, and notions of safety and violence, this work suggests that social spaces are composed of social places that are imbued with unique identities that impact how they are navigated. Yet, while social spaces do have distinctive elements, they can be intentionally or unintentionally deconstructed by the navigations of those inhabiting them. Put more simply, it is argued that queer and heterosexual social spaces do not explicitly exist in a binary. Rather, boundaries that distinguish queer and heterosexual social spaces can be “messy” or unsettled as people move within and between them (Manalansan, 2014:569). Largely, from the physical construction to the various emotions or violences that a place can elicit, queer and heterosexual social spaces are sites of exploration, freedom, negotiation, and contestation (Halferty, 2008).

SPACE, PLACE, SOCIAL SPACE, AND SOCIAL PLACE

Dating back to Plato (360 BC) and Aristotle (n.d.), human geographers have considered how surroundings can impact how people behave, feel, and attribute meanings to their surroundings (Relph, 1976; Tuan, 1997). While both space and place are used to understand relationships of people to particular environments, some have considered space to denote more “movement” and elicit a “sense of [place]” (Withers, 2009:638). Others have considered the “dialectically” interrelation between the two as people

navigate spaces based upon meanings given to places and vice versa (Relph 1976; as cited in Seamon and Sowers, 2008:4; Schroer, 2021). Yet, the various technological advances, as noted by Coleman and Collins (2006) and Agnew (2011), have collapsed these distinctions into one category of “space.” As such, contemporary research is reflective of “space...[as] conquering place” (Agnew, 2011:5).

Durkheim (1989; 1912) furthered the use of space as an analytical approach Durkheim (1989; 1912) to pioneer the notion of social spaces. In doing so, he considered how groups of people define, perpetuate, and transform hegemonic structures (Buttimer, 1969; Reed-Danahay, 2019). According to this perspective, social spaces are environments composed of groups of people and are replicative of “social facts” or socialized behaviors (Durkheim, 1989; 1912; Schroer, 2021). Yet social places, as described by Oldenburg (1989:18), are “third places” where people gather to explore and build community. Furthermore, because these places exist outside of employment or domestic spheres, social places are environments conducive to identity formation (Oldenburg, 1989). However, while social sciences has explored the ways in which “social space” is gendered (McDowell, 1983; Bondi, 1992), racialized (Hunter et al., 2016; Gotham and Brimley, 2002), and demarcated by sexuality (Knopp, 1992; Bell and Valentine, 1995), the term “social place” is often reserved for class- or social-based interpretations; In other words, the interchanging of space and place has obscured the ways in which meaning-making processes within a place structure how people navigate themselves and their environments.

QUEER SOCIAL PLACES AND SPACES

Arising from the embeddedness of heterosexuality within social spaces, queer social places are often distinguished in their encouragement of queer-specific languages, behaviors, symbols, music, and notions of safety (Stults et al., 2018; Pennell, 2016; Brett et al., 2002; Wolowic et al., 2017; Hubbs, 2007). Historically, queer social spaces tend to manifest predominantly as bars or (night)clubs and were one of the few environments where queer people could socialize and develop community (Demant et al., 2018; Race et al., 2017). As sites of resistance and “disidentifications” from heteronormative structures and identities (Myslik, 1996; Muñoz, 1999:1); Adams, 2020), queer social spaces are a project of “queer-world making” or the reimagining of places as affirming and uplifting of queerness (Holland-Muter, 2018:213). In other words, social spaces become queer in the transformation of the very fabric of place and the dissolving of heteronormative borders that mark queerness as deviant; it is the “creation of [queer] spaces without a map” (Yep, 2003:35).

Considering the construction of heterosexual social spaces, Bell et al., (1994) suggests that all spaces, particularly within Western societies (Kirby and Hay, 1997), are heterosexual by default. Largely, the positioning of heterosexuality as “natural” creates a “(hetero)sexing of space[s]” that is structured by systems of power (Visser, 2008:1345; Valentine, 2003). For example, defining heterosexuality as synonymous with morality and appropriate desire regulates gendered and sexualized behavior to privilege heterosexuality (Hubbard, 2000; Rushbrook, 2002). Additionally, homophobia, transphobia, and violence are utilized as tools to synonymize place as heterosexual which produces sites of risk and vulnerability for queer communities (Valentine, 1993;

Violence, 1989; Adler and Brenner, 1992). As such, it is not that social places are “naturally” heterosexual. Rather, they are “actively produced and heterosexualized” through language, behavior, music, and notions of safety (Binnie, 1997:223; as cited in Oswin, 2008:90).

THE MESSINESS OF QUEER AND HETEROSEXUAL SOCIAL PLACES AND SPACES

Spaces, just as identities, are fluid (Love, 2017) and shaped by the people who are within them (Goffman, 1969). As such, places are “messy,” meaning, precariously nestled within balancing acts of negotiations and concessions, that are often blurred and rematerialized (Manalansan, 2014; Bell et al., 1994). In this regard, explicitly comparing and contrasting queer and heterosexual social space can hide the movements and transformations within social space (Oswin, 2008) and obscure the ways in which all space can be “sexualized or desexualized by different people at different times” (Hubbard, 2000:192). More explicitly, if heterosexual spaces are not “restricted to heterosexuality” and queer spaces may be heterosexualized (Bell et al., 1994:33; Casey, 2004), then both spaces are in a state of constant subversion.

Considering the queering of heterosexual social spaces, scholars have argued that the development of queer social spaces can be a form of queering space and place (Giesecking, 2017). Because queer communities were (and arguably are) expected to be hidden or exist solely as a subculture, the visibility of queer social spaces functions as a site of resistance to, occupation, and transformation of heterosexual social space. Others, such as Bell et al., (1994:33), suggest that some queer identities can further queer heterosexual social space. Lipstick lesbians and gay skinheads, for example, adorn a

“heterosexual drag” that utilizes hyper-feminization and -masculinization to traverse and occupy heterosexual social spaces unbeknownst to heterosexual people.

Some scholars have also explored the mechanisms through which queer social spaces can be heterosexualized. Drag themed events such as shows or brunches “mess” the overlapping of heterosexual and queer social place by transforming the latter into the commodification of queerness (Rushbrook, 2002; Siddons, 2019; Patillo, 2022)²⁸. For example, drag brunches are primarily advertised for heterosexual audiences as opportunities for “expose[re]” to queer culture and to make it “fun and festive like brunch can be” (Patillo, 2022:n.p.); Branton and Compton, 2021). As another example, bachelorette parties are sometimes considered a heterosexual invasion of queer social spaces because they are “site[s] of performative heterosexuality” and reminders of the historical inability for queer people to get married (Nelson, 2019:47; Branton and Compton, 2021).

In line with research that has explored the identities of social spaces and places, this chapter expands on how queer and heterosexual social places are distinguished via their functions, gender and sexual atmosphere, and experiences of safety and violence. Additionally, this work furthers the queering of social places through an analysis of the “messiness” of space.

RESULTS

The following illustrates the ways in which queer and heterosexual social places were distinguished by participants. While some noted that queer social spaces could

²⁸ Here, queer social spaces were transformed into sites for “urban, middle-class white men and women ‘slumming’ (or touring) drag balls” (Heap, 2008: as cited in Baldor, 2019:421-422).

range from law centers to kink workshops, all participants highlighted bars, clubs, and Pride parades as three of the main social spaces. These spaces were described as being caught in a tension between existing as a queer contrast to, and in a racialized and gendered homonormative parallel to, the wider heterosexual world. Conversely, distinctively heterosexual social spaces, such as sports bars or strip clubs, were recognized in their functions as broader microcosms of the wider world. Generally, these places ran parallel to the wider heterosexual world in their reinforcement of heteronormative regulations of gender and sexuality.

Participants presented four main themes to describe both queer and heterosexual social places. First, places were distinguished by their functionality for creating or affirming queer communities and identities. Second, the freeing or constraining gendered and sexual atmospheres, constructed from and within environments, marked social places as queer or heterosexual. Third, anticipations of danger within heterosexual social places and expectations for security within queer social places complicated notions of safety and violence. Fourth, while queer and heterosexual social places were distinguishable, the boundaries between them became “messy” or blurred by the shifting presence of identities inhabiting them.

THE FUNCTIONALITY OF PLACE

Queer social places were described as environments conducive to queer affirmation and community building, and encouraged “queerness [to] live and not be threatened,” as Noel explained. Some used religious motifs and romanticized language such as “temple,” “worship,” and “sanctuary” to describe how queer social places functioned as sites of respite from the wider heteronormative world. Generally, these

places were used to build out queer community and connections. Conversely, heterosexual social places were characterized by a compulsory and strict adherence to gender roles, misogyny, and gendered language that reaffirmed the “naturalness” of heterosexuality. Many immediately thought of “sexis[ism]...[and] just very misogynistic trauma,” as Vennox stated. In this regard, heterosexual social places stood in direct contrast to queer social places in their absence of a queer community or opportunities to exist as queer.

Several participants explained that the construction of queer social places was intimately tied to intentionality, love, and respect. As Harley explained, the places themselves elicited community building because they were “joyful...friendly...and welcoming no matter what flavor queer you are.” Further detailing this functionality of queer social places, Rican said:

I would describe it as safe. Almost like a temple...like [a] sanctuary, where you are being heard, you're being seen. You're being loved by who you are. You're being worshiped by who you are...it's like you walk into a queer [social] space and people are like, ‘Yes! Yes!...Oh my God! I love what you're wear[ing].’...It's so inclusive. It's intersectional....It's what the world should be. The world should be queer.

Similarly, Vennox explained:

Oh, my God, the best way I can think about is like heaven...the ultimate family utopia... You are surrounded by these people that are like you, or...appreciate who you are as a person rather than, you know, your orientation or anything like that.... But yeah, [a] queer [social] space, for me, is a sense of home...you're accepted for who you are. You have these people that...just welcome you with a hug.

For Rican and Vennox, queer social places were places where they could feel comfortable and supported. While a sanctuary is often described as a place of rest and a temple is typically a religious establishment, Rican uses both to describe queer social places as

environments where queer people are “loved,” “seen,” and “worshipped²⁹” for being who they are; in this regard, queer social places are “inclusive” and “intersectional” in their appreciation and support for queer identities and expression. Drawing from similar religious motifs, Vennox believed queer social places were “like heaven” by creating an “ultimate family utopia.” As such, having a physical space where queerness is accepted and queer people can exist as humans rather than oddities stands in contrast to some experiences within the wider heteronormative world. In other words, rather than encouraging a fixation on “[sexual] orientation,” queer social places allowed them to be “accepted for” who they are and created “a sense of home.”

Heterosexual social places were not only recognized in their absence of such affirmations, but as replicative of larger systems of heteronormativity. As a result, heterosexual social places were not often described as within specific spaces. Because heterosexual social spaces were not often delineated, queer people marked them as constants or barriers that must be overcome. As such, the omnipresence of heterosexuality manifested in “the rest of the world...[as the] dominant culture, the norm, the default” and was an aspect that all queer people had “to traverse on a regular basis,” as Glen commented. Heterosexual social spaces were often framed in opposition to queer social spaces. Some, like Azure, described them in relationship to constraint and repression:

I feel like a lot of straight spaces or heterosexual spaces...just tend to have an aversion to things that seem weird and expressive...feel like there's less authenticity when it comes to being expressive in some ways because people are

²⁹ Interestingly, this language of sanctuaries and temples queers the association of seeking asylum or sanctuary in religious establishments with the historical violence of religious establishments as places where one can claim asylum or sanctuary with their historical perpetuation of homophobic and transphobic violence.

restraining. Sometimes I feel like it's less celebrated so there's more restraint to be expressive.

Although often used in a disparaging way, Azure's use of "weird" suggests that a central difference between queer and heterosexual social places stems from the inability to be "expressive" within heterosexual social places. Whereas queer social places were defined as and created from "weird[ness]" or queerness, these same identifiers are "less celebrated" within heterosexual social places. As such, "aversion to" "being expressive" trickles down to the expected behavior to inhabitants of heterosexual social places.

CULTURES WITHIN SOCIAL PLACE AS FREEING OR CONSTRAINING

The atmospheres within queer and heterosexual social places were discussed in terms of music, gendered and sexual behavior, symbols, and politics. Within heterosexual social places, the playing of simplified or "two-step" music, the hyper-feminization and -masculinization of its inhabitants, the gendering of bathrooms, and the visibility of Trump supporters restricted the navigations of queer people. Queer social places, on the contrary, were centered on the disruption of (hetero)normativity by promoting the music of "queer icons," wearing scant or sexual explicit clothing such as latex or leather, the adornment of queer specific symbols like Pride flags, and hosting queer civil rights events. As such, queer and heterosexual social places evoked specific feelings that characterized each place as either freeing or constraining.

Several participants explained that the atmosphere within heterosexual social places forced queer people to monitor their language and presentation. Remy, for example, explained that heterosexual social places can put queer people "on edge" because of the expectation to present as a cisgender heterosexual person. Illustrating

these encounters, Majic recounted receiving “sideways” glances whenever they were read as queer in a heterosexual social place. Some, like Robin, attributed these spatialized reinforcements to the belief that because heterosexual social places are “designed with only cisgender heterosexual people in mind” they reject “the existence of any other kind of person.” Others, like Aspen, described these places as a physical construction of heterosexual culture which he thought of as “boring, conventionally limiting, unimaginative...[and] really critical.” Dramatizing this dynamic, Rican offered:

Heterosexual culture is mind blowing to me. I don't see it often, unless I'm watching reality TV. So, I'm like, "Wow." Like, it's so like, structured and it needs to be like this and like that. And "I'm the man, so I must provide. I'm the woman I need to not be so bossy." And I'm like, "Oh my god. Y'all better calm the fuck down." "Oh, I don't cry or whatever." And I'm like, "Oh, Jesus. Oh, my God. Yes. You can. Let those tears flow babyyy."...It's cringy, honestly...And people are not listening...So it almost feels like...they're in this one channel and it's like that one channel only. And...when you start changing the transmission, they're like, "Wait, what is happening? Oh my god. Oh, there's noises" and you're like, "Can you just take a breather. You're gonna realize it's a lot calmer on the other side." I mean, maybe people find calmness in that structure... Yeah, it doesn't feel as flowy. It feels very stagnant.

Using the satirical example of a “cringy” reality television show, Rican highlights the restrictions and dynamics that are constitutive of heterosexual social places. In this spectacle, masculinity is constrained within the boundaries of being a “provid[er]” and an inability to show emotion. Conversely, women are portrayed as overly expressive and concerned with being too “bossy.” If, as Rican describes, heterosexuality is stuck on “one channel..[and]...one channel only,” introducing queerness or “changing the transmission” can introduce a panic within heterosexual social places. Yet, while some heterosexual people may “find calmness in that structure,” it can feel “stagnant” or “less flowy” to some queer people. As such, Rican believes that heterosexual social places, and culture

more broadly, should divest from these strict adherences to gender roles to “calm the fuck down.”

The atmosphere within queer social places often drew upon popular notions of “camp,” meaning, an exaggeration or eccentric display of queer performance, dress, and behavior. As Riley noted, queer social places “should be...delicious...luscious...curtains...[and] it should ooze with...a sense of style.”

Largely, these environments were considered formulaic in their physical construction that encouraged gender expression and relied upon the use of queer symbols. For example, Pride, as a quintessential queer social place, encourages the visibility of queer kink subcultures such as “leather and latex and mesh,” as Harley commented. Describing the atmosphere of a queer social place, Oakley joked about all of the “hairy legs” and “some sort of flag” that implied a sense of corporal and queer freedom. Blending physical symbols with physical appearances, Remy further described the atmosphere within queer social places:

I could be facetious and say that it's because of all the dyed hair and the tattoos...[laughter]...And the people wearing Elizabeth Warren support T-shirts. Just the little cues you get from people and the eye contact that doesn't linger in a sexual way... you look at somebody and you're like, “Oh, you're one of my people.” ...[it's] this feeling of going inside the door and seeing those little signs...it could be a huge Pride flag on the wall or it could just be [that] the cashier has an undercut with dyed hair...just kind of knowing no one's gonna pull any shit in here.

Remy’s “facetious” comment details the atmospheric characteristics that mark queer social places as queer. “Little signs” and symbols of nonconformity, such as multi-colored hair, tattoos, and an employee with an undercut, signaled to them that they were in an affirming and queer social place. Remy also noticed political or politicized

clothing, such as Elizabeth Warren shirts, also defined a place as a political liberal environment that they found reassuring. Other “cues,” such as non-expectant and platonic eye contact, which was off-putting within heterosexual social places, further convinced them that they were in a safe environment. Through the use of queer symbols and embodiments, queer social places created a reassuring atmosphere for Remy, and other queer people, that within these places, “no one [would] pull any shit.”

SAFETY AND VIOLENCE

Generally, spaces can be read as safe or threatening via their physical construction, the kinds of behaviors or languages they elicit, and the presence of particular people. Because queer social spaces are often smaller than heterosexual social spaces, they were considered more intimate and secure environments where queer people could turn off their “sensors,” as Skyler explained. This notion of safety within queer social spaces was destabilized, however, by the racialization and genderism that mediated the experiences of queer people of color and those who thrive outside of the gender binary. In comparison, heterosexual social places were marked as transactional and dangerous environments inhabited by people who were always “tryna get ass,” as Suri commented. Additionally, the presence of cisgender heterosexual men or being read as queer further characterized these spaces as unsafe. In this regard, anticipations and expectations complicated notions of safety and violence within queer and heterosexual social spaces.

Largely, the inability to use certain language or the types of reactions to alternative forms of gender or sexual expression transformed heterosexual social places into environments antithetical to queerness. Vein Gogh, for example, explained that if

two perceived cisgender men walked into a heterosexual social space holding hands, they would be met with ignorant comments such as “she’s a he.” Thinking about how he described his gender in heterosexual social places, Archer explained that he “always” used trans rather than genderqueer because heterosexual people “have a hard time understanding things outside of that realm.” Majic explained that heterosexual social places forced them to be “much more aware of” their queerness because, as Adrian commented, it’s difficult to be...visibly...affectionately queer.” Further thinking about the intersection of queer visibility and safety within heterosexual social spaces, Archer remembered:

The only time I've ever been drugged was at...[a] straight sports bar...And I was in drag. It's whenever I get in straight spaces, even just holding hands with an ex of mine, walking down the street, [and]...having people yell stuff at us...And for some reason, it [queerness] inspires hostility in people...I know that and I've lived it and I've experienced it. I have to have my guard up in those spaces. I'm not saying you can't be drugged at a gay bar or a queer bar, it has absolutely happened to people, but it's not like the norm for me. Whereas when I go to these straight sports bars, I feel like the norm is something bad's probably gonna happen and I gotta be careful.

Archer’s experiences highlight the trauma, violence, and fear that some queer people experience while navigating heterosexual social places. Being drugged at a “straight sports bar” while in drag and “having people yell stuff” at him and his ex functioned as physical and verbal reminders that being visibly queer is dangerous in these environments. Put more simply, Archer’s embodiment of queerness, recognized through queer practices (drag) or queer-coded behaviors, was marked as a “hostil[e]” threat to heterosexuality and, therefore, heterosexual social places. Yet, while he recognized that he and his ex *could* be victimized in queer social places as well, he, as many others,

anticipated that they *would* be victimized within heterosexual social places. Largely, these places demanded that queer people had to “be careful” or suffer the consequences.

Some heterosexual social places were also coded as racially traumatic and frustrating for several queer people of color. For example, Rock always described heterosexual social places in terms of white cultural stereotypes such as “a bunch of Chads and Karens complaining about when they're gonna get their order.” Commonly associated with racist homophobic or transphobic white cisgender heterosexual men and women, Rocks use of the terms “Chad” and “Karen” invokes a “particular constellation of entitled white supremacy and class privilege” that reinforces white heterosexuality (Negra and Leyda, 2021:350). Similarly considering the ways in which race complicates heterosexual social places, Glen remembered what it was like to be a Black lesbian navigating a Black cultural house at a historically (white) women’s college:

I had more difficulty...at [the Black cultural house] and being accepted by my straight sisters who didn't want anything to do with me 'cause I was queer. That was a bigger problem for me because...I wasn't expecting [it]; I was expecting white folks to be white folks. I was not expecting to not have the safety of [the Black cultural house]...That was not a safe space for me, unless those lesbians took it over for a dance on a Friday night or so....Outright...And [there were] subtle messages [and] constant talk about guys. I remember...somebody said to me, “You probably won't be very happy here,” ...I wasn't welcomed there, shunned...The people wouldn't say hi to me.

Although the Black cultural house was created to be a safe haven for all Black people at a historically white women’s college, it was transformed into a site for heteronormative expulsions. While Glen had expected to be victimized by “white folks [who were going] to be white folks,” being “shunned” by her “straight sisters” destabilized her notion of a “safe space.” Contingent upon sexual orientation, and the “lesbian takeovers” on Fridays, the Black cultural house became an embodiment of sometimes “outright” or “subtle

messages” and “constant” heteronormative conversations that rendered her queerness as unwelcome.

In comparison, the queer social spaces were often considered safe because of the “intention[s]” of the space and the people inhabiting it. Robin explained that queer social places are explicitly “organized” around the desire for queer people to “gather and be safe.” Thinking about the importance of safety within these environments, Rican said “it’s fucking awesome” because queer social places are rooted in queer people “being...more safe around each other.” Generally, these forms of security manifested in using gender affirmative language and “celebrating being queer,” as Zola noted. These dynamics were further reinforced in the actions of queer people protecting their spaces. For example, consider the experience of Hayden who recounted an uncomfortable interaction with an assumed cisgender heterosexual man in a queer social place:

I never felt like I was in any danger 'cause I knew that there were other people around me that were gonna back me up and that were going to help me get through the situation...I definitely noticed some other people at a table watching intently...they were on their toes. They looked like they were ready to attack if something went down. So like I felt really safe in that space...people had my back.

While the interaction with an assumed cisgender heterosexual man momentarily made Hayden feel unsafe, the presence of other queer people mediated these emotions. Although they had no prior relationship with their watchful guardians, they felt confident that other queer people would help them “get through the situation.” In this regard, the threat of victimization at the hands of the cisgender heterosexual man was dissolved by queer solidarity empowered through a queer social place. Put more simply, because queer social spaces attract and cater to queer communities, Hayden’s unpleasant interaction with the cisgender heterosexual man did not detract from any notions of safety. Rather, it

reinforced the space's safety in creating an opportunity for other queer people to have Hayden's "back."

However, genderist and racialized violence destabilized the safety of queer places and complicated the experiences of those who thrive outside of the gender binary and queer people of color. Generally, cisgender gay (and often white) men own the majority of queer environments, and some queer people with alternative identities felt unwelcome within some queer social places. For example, Azure, a pansexual person, recognized these places as "alienating" because the places were evocative of and were saturated with cisgender gay men making "penis jokes." Tanner, a transmasculine nonbinary person, explicitly avoided "mainstream" queer or gay male social spaces because they would get harassed about their bathroom choice or be ignored if they were coded as a cisgender woman. Others, like Danny, a nonbinary person, were told by cisgender gay males that they could be gay but not "trans *and* gay." In this regard, many, like Sayer, a genderfluid person, questioned whether queer social spaces were "really even safe spaces anymore." Further thinking about the spatial dynamics within queer social spaces populated or owned by cisgender gay men, Tobin explained:

One of the examples that I can think of gatekeeping people about being trans is if you don't experience gender dysphoria, you're not a "real" trans person. Or, if you don't wanna surgically transition, you're not a "real" trans per[son]... X, Y, and Z. Or if... You're not nonbinary if you are fine with your body.

According to Tobin, cisgender gay men within queer social spaces perpetuate a form of "gatekeeping" that uses homonormative frameworks to define who is "a 'real' trans per[son]." Gender dysphoria³⁰, for example, is often used as a common trope to define the

³⁰ Gender dysphoria is a medicalized and pathologizing term used to describe distress in relation to gender assigned at birth vs. current gender (Dhejne et al., 2016); it is often used to reproduce the very [violent] cissexist ideologies employed by medico-legal establishments in the regulation of trans bodies (Edelman and Zimman, 2014:678).

experiences and identities of those who thrive outside of the gender binary as synonymous with corporal discomfort. Similarly, the expectation for trans people to “surgically transition” reinforces the binary linkage of gender to specific genitalia.

While gender and sexual violence perpetuated by cisgender gay men certainly structured notions of safety within queer social places, the whiteness embedded within these environments further complicated the navigations of queer people of color. Gen, for example, struggled with defining a queer social place because, “back in the day...all the advertisements were [for] white [people].” Joking about this disparity, Vein Gogh always bet on whether they were “the only Black person in the room.” Black drag performers, like Rock, witnessed white drag performers doing Blackface without any repercussions. Others, like Aspen, experienced “dozens of” racialized interactions such as being randomly asked if he has “the BBC³¹” by white cisgender gay men. To avoid “racism...[and] fetishizations, which also comes from...entitled white gays,” as he detailed, several participants sought out specific queer social spaces that catered to people of color. Explaining this importance, Azure said:

I feel most comfortable as a Black queer person in queer spaces that are specifically designated for people of color, just 'cause I feel like there's a lot of tokenism that happens [in white queer spaces]...I feel like there's been a lot of those spaces that have been unapologetically....If you're white, you better be tipping higher...You better be buying more drinks, better be tipping the bartenders better...we are here not to...appease the white sensibilities, but we are here for Black people and for people of color just to feel comfortable in their own skin in a queer space...we are here...to celebrate our own culture and celebrating that in drag because people don't always get that...if people perform beautiful numbers all in Spanish...I enjoy the spaces where they're unapologetic about it.

³¹ The term BBC, meaning, “big Black cock,” can be “traced back to colonialism” where all Black male penises were hyper-sexualized, and marked as objects of forbidden eroticism (Stacy and Forbes, 2022:374).

Spaces that were “specifically designated for people of color” mitigated “a lot of [the] tokenism” that can happen in general, or in white, queer social spaces. By explicitly rejecting pandering to “the white sensibilities,” queer people of color spaces, as described, can subvert racialized power dynamics through the expectation for white people to tip “higher” and purchase “more drinks.” Furthermore, the spatialization of an “unapologetic” attitude prioritizes the cultures of queer people of color and can redefine queer social spaces as racially safe. In this regard, drag, as a performance art rooted in Black and Brown cultures, is reclaimed through singing “beautiful numbers all in Spanish” and placing the responsibility of translation on others. As such, intentionally queer spaces of color make it possible for “Black people and for people of color just to feel comfortable [and safe] in their own skin.”

THE MESSINESS OF SPACE AND PLACE

Although the majority of participants were able to distinguish queer from heterosexual social spaces, these boundaries were often “messy.” For example, while the characterization of spaces or places as “queer” was used to mark them distinct from heterosexual social spaces, the overwhelming presence of white gay men problematized this consideration. As another example, some participants believed that queer social places could be created in and actively transgress the boundaries of heterosexual social spaces. Yet, the creation of heterosexual social spaces within queer social spaces produced a tension between a perceived invasion or a potential avenue for allyship.

While several participants used the words “gay” and “queer” interchangeably in reference to identities, others suggested that queer and gay social places were fundamentally different. For example, gay social social places invoked images of white cisgender gay men who, in their proximity to masculine and white privilege, regulated

what kinds of bodies were allowed to inhabit spaces. Thinking about this distinction, Azure explained that queer social places have “more than just gay [white] men” because they celebrate “a variety of people of races...trans people...lesbians...and other queer people.” As such, the expectation for queer social spaces to be intersectional and inclusive explicitly made a place queer. Further contrasting queer and gay social places, Riley states:

Queer spaces, to me, invokes a kind of utopian like a José Muñoz kind of sense...really teasing out exploring, playing with the possibilities when it comes to different kinds of sexualities, different kinds of gender embodiments, trans embodiments, that includes fashion, that includes clothing, that includes like expression in those ways... I think of also...a radical inclusion and...radical anti-racism and radical acknowledgement of class and other kinds of difference, disability, etc. [Because]...the world at large...can be deeply oppressive...in queer spaces, there should be an effort to counter those things and find pleasures that are on the other side of them.

Constructing a “utopian³²” image, Riley describes queer social places as sites of “exploring” and “playing with the possibilities” of queer existence. For example, the encouragement of “different kinds of sexualities...[and] gender embodiments” coupled with a commitment to “radical inclusion” positions queer social places as welcoming in comparison to gay social places. In widening his critique to include “the world at large,” Riley suggests that queer social spaces and places have a responsibility to “counter” or challenge “deeply oppressive” structures and allow queer people to “find pleasures.”

This discussion of queerness as a tool to transform place, rather than an inherent property of a social space, was also extended to heterosexual social spaces. Describing

³² Jose Muñoz is a Cuban American queer theorist famous for coining the term “disidentification” to describe how queer performance arts, such as drag, and embodiments are created from the transformation of heteronormative regulations of appropriate gender and sexual identities or behaviors.

queerness as an embodiment of subversion, some, like Provvidenza, explained that “even just occupying a space” could queer heterosexual social spaces. For example, while gun ranges are often associated with “crazy Trumpers,” “Nazi white supremacists,” and “pro-police type people,” Maddox’s queer gun club’s frequenting of these environments made them more accessible for queer people. Rather than having to traverse this environment alone, they felt safer and more secure with other queer people present. In this regard, it was often the presence of other queer people that created queer social places “anywhere,” as Rican commented. Underscoring this notion, Provvidenza said:

Honestly, anywhere is a queer space if you make it...I think that subversion can look a lot of different ways. I think to me, it is like being in a public space. And I think that queerness is still a bit dangerous...And I think that even...a coffee shop and just putting a bunch of queers in it...It's a coffee shop but it's like underneath it all, there could be these sort of new intimacies forming, whether it's friendships, whether it's flirtation across the room...I love queer people and I think that we are a silly people, so, even something like getting your coffee in the morning feels like a subversion sometimes.

Reminiscent of Bell et al.’s (1994) characterization of all public space as heterosexual, Provvidenza’s imagery of “a bunch of queers” in a coffee shop highlights how “anywhere” can be made into a queer social space. Because being queer is “still a bit dangerous,” navigating heterosexual social spaces can be tricky. Yet, through the formation of “new intimacies” or subtle “flirtation[s] across the room,” the presence of queer people can transform the “mundane” behavior of getting a coffee into an act of “subversion” (Manalansan, 2018:500).

Although the occupation of heterosexual social space by queer people was considered a form of rebellion or transgression, the presence of heterosexual people within queer social spaces was often read as an invasion or heterosexualizing presence.

Recognizing that “the crowd was not queer [and] was overwhelmingly straight,” Jaden stopped frequenting a particular queer social space. Some, like Finley, adopted a particular “fuck you” attitude towards cisgender heterosexual men within queer social spaces as their presence created a “lesbians titillating straight men” dynamic. As another example, Tanner noted a “taking up [of] a lot of space” or heterosexualization that occurred when heterosexual people entered queer social spaces:

So, when the neighboring bars would close at 2:00am, there would be a large amount of drunk straight men that would come to this queer space. And...that wasn't what their intentions were. And I feel like it is probably safer for straight women to go drink and be more free in a queer space?...And also [the] excessive drinking...can also turn into disrespect for the space very quickly because of people being, "I'm safer here, so I'm just going to get...completely blackout drunk and do damage to the space or have something bad happen to me,"...I feel there's this illusion that it's a safer space and that because that's known, [it] draws people that behave in a predatory way.

Although there's an “illusion” that queer social spaces are “safer” than heterosexual social spaces, the flocking of “drunk straight men” and women complicated this perception. According to Tanner, cisgender heterosexual women used queer social spaces to “drink and be more free” whereas cisgender heterosexual men brought ill “intentions.” As an example, because cisgender heterosexual women felt more comfortable in queer social spaces, some would get “blackout drunk and do damage to the space.” As a whole, these behaviors created a “disrespect for the space very quickly” and centered queer social places on the interactions between cisgender heterosexual men and women.

Yet, a few believed that the idea that heterosexual people in queer social spaces functioned to heterosexualize queer social spaces was problematic and reflective of homonormativity. For example, because queer identities can manifest differently, Sayer

questioned how anybody could know if “somebody’s straight in a queer space.” They also believed that the hyperregulation of queer “gatekeepers” was “worse” than the presence of cisgender heterosexual people in queer social spaces. Others, like Rock, suggested that the inclusion of cisgender heterosexual allies could strengthen queer social spaces rather than function as a site of heterosexualization:

If you have a good [heterosexual] dude...and they are a good ally and on your side, and that will fight for trans rights, fight for gay rights, all of the above, and they know their lane, I don't see any issue with it. I have a drag daughter who is a heterosexual man, and he does drag. I think it's amazing because he knows his privilege as a white cis-het male. He knows his place in society and he knows that his voice can travel very far...and he knows drag culture and its history...And I also think of like bachelorette parties for example. They tip a lot, I'm not gonna judge a bachelorette party any day of the week. They tip us, they make us happy and they cheer for us the most. That is also fact...I fully stan bachelorette parties too. They're amazing.

Rather than suggesting that all cisgender heterosexual people disrupt queer social spaces, Rock said the ways in which they interact with queer cultures and places should define access. For example, their drag daughter’s respect for drag culture, history, and recognition of his “privilege as a white cis-het male” justified his inclusion in queer social spaces and places. Furthermore, they suggest that incorporating a “good ally” within queer social spaces could further the “fight” for queer civil rights. Similarly, Rock’s applauding of bachelorette parties for being an financial or supportive asset rather than an invasive presence further underscores the messiness of cisgender heterosexual people’s inhabitation of queer social space. Largely, their comment suggests that perhaps places themselves do not explicitly become queered or heterosexualized by the presence of particular people. Rather, this process is contingent on the delicate balance of respectful engagement versus harmful co-optation.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Although research has examined the ways spaces can be distinguished via symbols and expectations for identity and behavior, few have explicitly considered the ways in which this manifests within queer and heterosexual social spaces *and* places. For example, while queer social spaces are often described in relation to the presence of queer or “sexual languages” (Boellstorff and Leap, 2004:12), heterosexual social spaces are often marked in the absence of queer monikers or manifestation as the wider “hetero-normative world” (Valentine and Skelton, 2003:855). While queer and heterosexual social spaces are defined in contrast to each other, the navigations of queer and heterosexual people between and within them shapes how social spaces and places are perceived and defined. As such, queer criminological analysis highlighted how some queer people distinguished between queer and heterosexual spaces and places and explored the mechanisms through which the boundaries become “messy.”

Generally, participants used four themes to discuss queer and heterosexual social spaces and places. While queer social places functioned as affirming and conducive to community building, heterosexual social places were marked as hyper-regulatory environments critical of queer identities. For example, some queer people explicitly refused to go to heterosexual social spaces to avoid being read as queer or forced to monitor their use of queer-coded language. In comparison, the majority of participants preferred queer social spaces and places because they were politically liberal, recognized in their use of queer symbols such as Pride flags, and celebratory of nonconformity. As such, participants distinguished queer and heterosexual social spaces and places via atmospheric differences that coded each environment as either welcoming or inhibiting.

Third, while queer social places primarily invoked feelings of safety and security, heterosexual social spaces were considered sites of anticipatory violence and trauma. The smaller size of queer social spaces, for example, produced an intimate environment where participants felt safe and respected. In comparison, heterosexual social spaces were considered “predatory” and dangerous because of the presence of cisgender heterosexual men. Although it may be easier to consider queer social spaces and places as completely safe, the various manifestations of racism and genderism that queer people of color and those who thrive outside the gender binary complicated this notion.

Fourth, while queer and heterosexual social spaces and places were easily distinguishable, these boundaries were “messy.” Although queer spaces were not created for cisgender heterosexual people and labeled as such, the presence of white gay men challenged this characterization. In this regard, some only defined queer social spaces and places as *queer* if they were centered around the intentional inclusion of non-homonormative identities such as trans and queer people of color. Others highlighted the messiness of social spaces through queering heterosexual social space by occupying heterosexual social space. Yet, the occupation of queer social space by cisgender heterosexual people produced a “messy” tension between their presence as an invasion or a potential avenue for allyship.

In sum, this work expands the literature on social spaces, places, identity, behavior, and queer criminology. The examination of the distinctions of social spaces and places emphasizes that social spaces and places have unique identities and are imbued with identity-driven expectations. Additionally, while these distinctions certainly impact how some queer people navigate queer and heterosexual social spaces, movements within

and engagements with spaces and places produce a tension between contestation and reconciliation.

CHAPTER 4: USING SUBSTANCES AND STRATEGIC USE WITHIN SOCIAL PLACES AND SPACES

INTRODUCTION

Drug consumption is shaped by social contexts that can encourage or discourage use (Goode; 1970; 1972; Becker, 1963). Nestled within social places, social contexts are composed of expectations for identity and behaviors (Zinberg, 1984). As such, substance use in one context might be advantageous or anticipated (Zinberg, 1984; Turchik, 2009). For example, because the predominant cultural and historical social places for queer communities are bars, clubs, and parades which are dependent on the consumption of substances (Demant et al., 2018; Hunt et al., 2019), some queer people use substances to build community. While literature on substance use within queer communities has suggested that queer people are more likely than their heterosexual counterparts to engage in substance use (Koeppel, 2015; Marshal et al., 2008; Talley et al., 2010), the social contexts of and places in which queer substance use occurs are rendered a “passive backdrop” (Jayne et al., 2016:117).

Rather, these higher rates of use within queer communities are often explained through frameworks of victimization and (ab)use (Felner et al., 2020) that suggest that the stress of being queer³³ within a heteronormative world *can* encourage some to cope through substance use (Mereish et al., 2017). As such, while this work has highlighted the

³³ However, what is unique to queer people is the overlapping experience of “identity concealment” (McConnell et al., 2018:2), where the conscious or subconscious suppression of a queer identit(ies), coupled with homophobic or transphobic disenfranchisement(s), can force some queer people to grapple with internalized homophobia, “a common manifestation of minority stress” (Hatchel et al., 2019:2); For example, some queer people of color must simultaneously navigate racial/ethnic discrimination in queer places and homophobic stigmatization(s) within their racially/ethnically similar communities (McConnell et al., 2018).

ways in which *some* queer people use substances, the common characterization of queer substance abuse as inherently risky can eclipse other valid experiences. For example, if the behavior(s) of queer people, particularly queer people of color, are labeled an embodiment of risk (Nygren et al., 2016; Dwyer, 2015), these frameworks may not be suitable for understanding queer substance use.

Scholars have suggested that substance use is more acceptable within queer relative to heteronormative populations (Demant et al., 2018; Race et al., 2016). Similarly, research has explored the ways in which substance use is intimately linked to queer identity formation (Race, 2009). As “technologies of the self” (Foucault, 1988:18), using substances can chemically assist corporal and psychic transformations (Foucault, 1988:18; Pienaar et al., 2020) and the transgression of normative expectations for identity (Race et al., 2016). Furthermore, some queer people use substances strategically to navigate their environments such as consuming to feel “more queer” or to feel more comfortable in heterosexual social places (Demant et al., 2018).

The centrality of social places informs how some queer people approach substance use. While the “party n’ play” atmosphere within queer social places can encourage substance use (Van Hout et al., 2019), hegemonic regulations of gender and sexuality within heterosexual social places can deter some queer people from use (Gruskin et al., 2007). Because substance use can lower inhibitions (Hunt et al., 2019), some queer people feel safer using substances in queer social places and avoid anticipated physical or linguistic violence within heterosexual social places (Hunt et al., 2019). In this regard, investigating social places can highlight the strategies and navigations of queer substance use.

This chapter explores the ways in which social places impact queer substance use and navigations. In doing so, this work utilizes a queer criminological framework to ask one question: How do social places shape how substances are used by some queer people? In doing so, this work argues that different kinds of social places and contexts can produce particular kinds of substance use through building community or expressing sexuality, for example. Additionally, this chapter suggests that some queer people use substances strategically to navigate or experience different social places such as deepening connections to queer social places or divesting from heterosexual social places.

Largely, this work can inform a breadth of literature around queer criminology, substance use, social contexts, and social places. Emphasizing the spatialized centrality of substance use among many queer communities (Hunt et al., 2019; Southgate and Hopwood, 1999), this project can illustrate the importance of social places in shaping how some queer people approach substance use. Specifically, the use of a queer criminological framework details how social places, and the social contexts within them, can inhibit or encourage queer substances. Furthermore, because all place outside of queer social place is constitutive of heterosexual social place (Bell et al., 1994), little is known about how queer people approach substance use (outside of coping) within these environments. As such, this chapter highlights that substance use, in general, is not synonymous with (ab)use. Rather, it can be a strategic tool to traverse and interact with different social places.

SOCIAL CONTEXTS OF DRUG USE

Literature has examined how a person's psyche or "set," "settings" (Zinberg, 1984:1), and social contexts (Duff, 2005; Okamoto et al., 2014) can impact substance use. While much of this work has focused exclusively on "historical and structural factors" that impact substance use, post-structuralists have emphasized the importance of contextual factors and meaning-making processes that structure substance use itself (Duff, 2007:504). For example, Goode's (1970:23) analysis found that people often smoke marijuana in gatherings of close or personal groups that create "a kind of subcommunity." Now, while the chemical properties of marijuana certainly shape user experiences, he emphasizes that the social context of use can facilitate identification and bonding over the process of using marijuana (Goode, 1970).

In other social contexts, substance use may be inaccessible or dangerous, which can limit or structure use. As an example, because alcohol can lower inhibitions and increase vulnerability, some queer people actively avoid drinking in heterosexual social places to limit physically or linguistically violent interaction (Gruskin et al., 2007; Hunt et al., 2019). In this regard, social contexts, as an interplay among or "an assemblage of" places, can encourage or inhibit substance use behaviors.

QUEER SOCIAL PLACES AND SUBSTANCE USE

In particular, social places are important for those whose identities have been marginalized, such as queer people. For example, the historical violent regulation of queer identities or queer-coded behaviors, apparent in homophobic laws and or state-sanctioned violent police raids (Agee, 2006), limited the ability of queer people to safely congregate (Hill, 2011). As such, queer social places were created for queer people

to gather and cultivate a sense of community (Hill, 2011; Race et al., 2017). Historically, these places have predominantly manifested as bars, clubs, and, more contemporarily, parades (Demant et al., 2018; Felner et al., 2020). Largely, the importance of queer social places is rooted in the ability for queer people to “step out of the hetero-normative world” and exist within an affirming environment (Valentine and Skelton, 2003:855). Yet, while queer social places are commonly associated with substance use, little research has explored how this overlap and the particularities of social contexts within queer social places can impact queer substance use.

Social places can facilitate substance use (Goode, 1970; Duff, 2007). Recognized as safe environments, queer social places can offer temporary freedom or respite from the heteronormative fabric of society (Stults et al., 2017; Adams, 2020). As such, because substances can lower inhibition and increase a sense of vulnerability, some queer people may feel more comfortable using substances within queer social places than in heterosexual social places. Similarly, because bars, clubs, and parades are considered sites for substance use, consuming substances are undoubtedly part of the experience of frequenting such environments (Parks et al., 1998). Coupled together, these social contexts within queer social places can produce spatialized expectations or even pressures to participate in substance use. As one young queer person in a study by Demant et al., (2018:10) noted, within queer social places, “there’s a lot of ‘we’re gonna celebrate’ and there is...a lot of substances.”

While social contexts within social places can encourage or inhibit substance use, substances themselves can be constitutive of social places. Many queer social places share an almost symbiotic relationship with substances. A queer bar, for example, cannot exist without the successful distribution of alcohol (Hunt et al., 2019). Similarly, efforts

to make a Mardi Gras parade in Australia drug free failed because queer-party attendees specifically attended to use substances and amplify their experiences (Southgate and Hopwood, 1999). Furthermore, the dependency of queer social places on substance consumption is heightened by the manufacturing of a “party n’ play atmosphere” (Hunt et al., 2019). For example, the booming music and vibrant light displays within queer nightclubs can encourage the use of stimulants so much that they have “become a normal part of going out to clubs and dancing” (Duff, 2005:6). In this regard, substances and substance use define and are fundamental to queer social spaces; they have also “brought into being” queer social places (Race et al., 2017:43).

INTENTIONAL AND STRATEGIC USE OF SUBSTANCES ACROSS PLACES

Substance use literature frequently defines use as synonymous with (ab)use (Reid, 2012). Here, all use outside medical regimes is reduced to a state of immateriality and frivolity (Race, 2009). Coping, for example, is a common theme within queer substance use literature that suggests that queer people consume substances as a response to victimization related to their gender and sexual identities (Felner et al., 2020). While a queered understanding of this process would suggest that this form of coping is a tool used to navigate the wider heterosexual world, common narratives position this behavior as risky and maladaptive (Race et al., 2016). Additionally, while some queer people may define their own use as problematic (see Meriesh et al., 2014), the common characterization of all queer substance use “as an escape from an oppressive social order” can eclipse the equally valid, agentic, and strategic ways in which substances are consumed. Put more simply, considering how substances can be used strategically underscores “the agency of drug users” (Race, 2009:166).

Attributable to the wider acceptance and normalization of substance use within queer communities (Lea et al., 2013), some queer people have explained that using substances is part of queer culture and social places (Demant et al., 2018; Hunt et al., 2019). Referring to the importance of substances for queer people, a young queer person in work by Demant et al., (2019:10) explained that substances function as an “access card to” queer communities and social places. In this regard, some queer people strategically use substances to bond and build community. As another example, the use of multiple substances within queer Chemsex sessions³⁴ can help some queer participants navigate socio-spatial expectations such as prolonged sex over the course of days (Van Hout et al., 2019; Ahmed et al., 2016).

Although a small yet growing body of research has emphasized the strategy of using substances to navigate queer social places, little research has explored how some queer people use substances to navigate heterosexual social places. For example, while work has found that some queer people actively abstain from using substances within heterosexual social places (Gruskin et al., 2007; Hunt et al., 2019), little is known about how some queer people use substances within heterosexual social places. As such, this chapter considers how substance use can build or be constitutive of social places, can be influenced by social contexts, and be strategically used to navigate social places.

RESULTS

This section describes the ways in which queer and heterosexual social places influenced how participants approached substance use. Although nothing physically limited participants in engaging in substance use in either type of social places, some

³⁴ Chemsex sessions are gatherings where substances are used to enhance sexual activities (e.g., having prolonged sex with multiple partners).

used substances strategically, and social contexts either encouraged or inhibited use. Heterosexual social places, for example, were marked as dangerous places that were exacerbated by the presence of drunk cisgender heterosexual men. In contrast, queer social places were considered MOSTLY safe environments where queer people could drop their guards and indulge. Additionally, substances were also described as constitutive of queer social places different from heterosexual social places that were tied to queer culture, dependent on the consumption of substances, and encouraged queer consumption.

Considering these contexts and dynamics, participants described the overlaps between social places and substances in three distinct ways. First, social places were characterized as either encouraging or inhibiting of substance use. Second, participants described substances as constitutive of queer social places. Third, substances could be used strategically to navigate social places such as deepening relationships to queer social places versus tolerating heterosexual social places. In sum, the distinct characteristics of social places and contexts can produce specific kinds of navigations or experiences.

SOCIAL PLACES AND SPACES AS FACILITATING OR INHIBITING SUBSTANCE USE

Participants described the ways in which social spaces and places facilitated or inhibited their substance use. Heterosexual social spaces were often considered inhibiting towards queer substance use. Largely, the presence of cisgender heterosexual men, exacerbated by their consumption of substances, within these environments created hostile and violent atmospheres that made the majority of participants uncomfortable or fearful. Consequently, these perceptions were also recognized in the construction of heterosexual social spaces which were untrustworthy and lacking accountability. On the

contrary, queer social places were characterized as safe and “freeing” environments that encouraged some queer people to use substances.

Several participants described the imperativeness of staying sober within heterosexual social spaces. Kai, for example, explained that they could not “trust” heterosexual social spaces because they were “dangerous.” Some, like Peyton, rooted this distrust in the fact that heterosexual social spaces tended to be larger than queer social places which created a lack of “accountability.” Further describing the danger of using substances within heterosexual social spaces, Aspen commented:

It's more hostile. It's more to look out for. I'm not as safe because I'm surrounded by more people [and] there may not be common themes or there may not be [a] sort of acceptance and I don't want my use of substances or anything to strip my awareness or to put me in a compromising position because...substances affect, you know, how you party. How you interact with people. So, I wouldn't want to be in a position where...I'm engaging in something that I don't need to be engaging in or harmed in a way that causes more issues beyond me cussing out some white gay [man] in the club, and because, to me, being in a hetero space is more violent, it could be more violent.

According to Aspen, heterosexual social spaces were more “hostile” because they are inhabited by heterosexual people. While queer and heterosexual identities do not exist in a monolith, his recognition that heterosexual people may not have “common themes” or be as “accept[ing]” of queerness could approximate him to victimization. Using substances further complicated his use of substances in heterosexual social places because they could “strip” him of his “awareness” or potentially put him in a “compromising position.” As such, while using substances within queer social spaces could produce some tension, such as “cussing out some white gay [man],” consuming substances in heterosexual social spaces could be dangerous or “more violent.”

Further thinking about the ways in which heterosexual social spaces deter substance use, some specifically pointed to the inevitable presence of cisgender heterosexual men as dangerous or threatening. Marked as perpetrators of homophobic and trans violence, cisgender heterosexual men were characterized as an invasive and harmful presence. As a result, many, such as Archer, refused to use substances in heterosexual social places in an effort to “stay sharp” or vigilant. Further thinking about the ways in which cisgender heterosexual men complicated queer substance use in heterosexual social places, Maddox said:

Heterosexual spaces can especially...make me feel uneasy depending on what's going on. If there's alcohol, if there's aggressive, especially aggressive men.

Similarly wary of cisgender heterosexual men, Provvidenza explained:

I don't really believe [that] straight men are possible of being good. So, I don't trust that if I were in a consciousness that wasn't super present, that I would feel safe around straight people in general, but particularly men.

Both Maddox and Provvidenza emphasize concerns around using substances in heterosexual social spaces. While Maddox generally felt “uneasy” within heterosexual social spaces, alcohol combined with the presence of “aggressive men” further exacerbated their fears. Similarly, Provvidenza’s disbelief that “straight men are possible of being good” inhibited their use of substances largely because they were concerned that they would not be “super present” or able to take care of themselves.

In comparison, the perceived inherent safety of queer social spaces facilitated substance use for several participants. For example, Vennox explained that people use queer social places “to purposely get drunk” because it is safer for them to do so within those environments. Correspondingly, Joan explained that she felt comfortable using substances in queer social spaces because she was not concerned about safety:

I'm not worried about being raped in the queer space. I don't know why. I'm sure I could be, but not worried about it in the same way...But I think that I've only done MDMA and queer spaces, because I haven't been as worried for my bodily safety in the same way...I, for example, I use weed all the time for anxiety. I think of it as utterly separate from all the other drugs that I would use in a queer space or not a queer space, it's just different...But MDMA, definitely queer spaces...[because] gays love to dance so it's more fun to do MDMA in a [queer] club.

Joan's concerns for the proximity to sexual violence were more heightened in heterosexual social spaces and impacted how she approached using substances. Although weed was constantly used to manage her anxiety, MDMA was exclusively used in queer social spaces because she was "not worried about being raped in a queer social space." Although she was aware that sexual violence could occur in queer social places, the fact that they were queer indicated some sort of inherent safety that lessened the need to be concerned for her "bodily safety in the same way." Her account also hints at the overlap between substance use and functions of substances within queer social places. Although there may be dancing in heterosexual social places, Joan used MDMA in queer social places because "gays love to dance" and substance use facilitated "fun" in queer social places.

SUBSTANCES AS CONSTITUTIVE OF QUEER SOCIAL PLACES

Although all participants emphasized that not all queer people use substances, many described substances³⁵ as constitutive of queer social places. Referencing history, some discussed how queer social places manifested in response to the absence of gender and sexual affirming environments and encouraged "socializations...[through] a lot of

³⁵ The most commonly noticed and used substances in queer social spaces by participants were marijuana (weed), alcohol, cocaine (coke), methylenedioxymethamphetamine (MDMA, molly, and ecstasy), alkyl nitrites (poppers), methamphetamine (meth), heroin, dimethyltryptamine (DMT), psilocybin mushrooms (shrooms), and ketamine (K). However, most participants explained that "club drug uppers," or stimulants, were often more visibly consumed.

drinking and party drugs,” as Provvidenza explained. As such, several, like Riley, considered queer social places as “underground operation[s]” that have “historically linked substance use” to queer identities and expressions. Further detailing this social context, Alfie said:

Back in the day, the only way to express that queerness was to go to dark places, secret nighttime places...and that would be an experience where you could let go and lose your inhibitions and be yourself and not be fearful of the cis-hetero culture at large around you. And so, there was a required secrecy about it and that lends itself to the bars in the '90s, and then it being a celebration of, "Just do what you want." Part of that is drinking and celebrating and enjoying your life that way, and that's just sort of, I guess, carried into the present.

The historic and violent regulation of queer communities, as Alfie describes, forced queer communities to gather in “dark places” to avoid the “cis-hetero culture at large” that they feared. Because these spaces and places were born out of a “required secrecy,” they produced social contexts conducive to substance consumption. For example, as a shelter, queer social spaces were one of the few environments where queer people could “let go” and safely “lose” their “inhibitions.” In this regard, queer social places have always been intimately tied to “drinking and celebrating and enjoying” queer life.

Contemporarily, queer social places, predominantly manifesting as bars and clubs, remain constitutive of substances. Wren, for example, explained that all queer social spaces “always” had alcohol and weed. Specifically explaining the relationship between substance use and queer social spaces, Robin chalked it up to the fact that “drinking in the bars...[is] what you do there.” In comparison, Azure suggested that queer social spaces explicitly encourage substance use to “make money” and be recognized as “fun” environments. Some, like Rock, pointed to the connection between queer substance use and social spaces and places as reflective of physical embodiments of queer culture:

It's sort of apparent that the majority of queer spaces are centered around [substances], at least in the terms of it being a bar or a club. So that's sort of...what brings queer people together in queer spaces...in the queer community in general. Also, yes...in queer comedy or queer culture, pop culture, those are [the] common concepts of “we drink a lot. We do poppers. We...” It's a whole culture of it where you're kind of like fucking the culture at large by just enjoying life and not worrying about it.

According to Rock, queer social places are “centered around” substance use for several reasons. On one hand, the predominance of queer bars or clubs as important social contexts for queer communities explicitly “brings queer people together” within environments sustained on substance use. On the other hand, queer culture encourages queer people to “drink a lot” and “do poppers,” and frames queer substance use as a defiant act of “fucking the culture at large.” In this regard, the anti-assimilationist practice of using substances, holding queer identities, and inhabiting space creates opportunities for queer community building.

Other specific queer social places, like drag shows or raves, also created substance-friendly atmospheres through jokes about “pet skunk[s]” to refer to the smell of marijuana. Thinking about the ways in which substance use manifested in queer social places, Azure said:

I've done molly twice, both at a [queer] bar, but also it's just a, in general the rave party where it's meant to be done...[in]...those kind[s] of atmospheres. I've only done coke twice and each time it was at an afters.

On the surface, attending any kind of bar or party assumes some level of celebration which is often coupled with substance use (Gilson et al., 2021). Yet, the specific social place of a queer “rave party” or “an afters” can further facilitate queer substance use. For example, raves are commonly known (and attended) for playing electronic dance or pop music, genres commonly associated with drug use because of their energetic beats

(Salkind, 2018). Similarly, afters, social contexts that emerge after the conclusion of a primary party, are social places in which stimulants like “coke” are used to resuscitate and recreate a party environment. In this regard, substances can be used to define or build queer social places. Furthermore, Azure’s use of molly in a queer bar and coke at an afters underscores the importance of queer social contexts and places in shaping substance use.

STRATEGIC SUBSTANCE USE ACROSS QUEER AND HETEROSEXUAL SOCIAL PLACES

Several participants described using substances to navigate different social places. Substances were used to access queer social places and communities, intensify their connections to queer social places, and as a participatory aid in specific social contexts. Although substances were generally avoided in heterosexual social places, when used they functioned as a coping mechanism for having to be in that environment or to tune out of the experience entirely. Largely, these results suggest that using substances can be a strategy or a resource to navigate social places and contexts.

Using substances within queer social places was conducive for queer community building. Jaden, for example, used substances in queer social places “to be together” with other queer people. Joan, similarly, was actively searching for a “queer ayahuasca space” because she believed that social context would produce a “bonding and loving and connecting” experience with other queer people. In this regard, substances were used to deepen connections to queer people and, as Riley detailed through his consumption of mushrooms and molly, social places:

[Using substances] is a way to heighten one's relationship to others and to that space, and do it in ways that are like, sometimes can be unpredictable...the way

that I experience drugs in a queer space is to heighten and to be more sensitive to and to be more kind of in tune with that space. And that's something I want to do in a queer space more so than I want to do in a straight space. I wouldn't want to tune out of the queer space. I don't feel the need to be hyper-connected to [heterosexual social spaces]....To me, [that's what] the best drug experiences do.

Although coupling the term “unpredictable” with substance use could trigger negative images, Riley’s use emphasizes the ways in which substance use within queer social places was freeing for some queer people. As hallucinogens, mushrooms and shrooms are often used to intensify the experiences of their users. While Riley is uninterested in being “hyper-connected to” heterosexual social places, using within queer social places is desirable because it can “heighten one’s relationship to others and to that space.” Put more simply, he strategically used substances as a way to be “more sensitive to” and to be “in tune” with queer social places. As such, Riley’s suggestion that the “best drug experiences” are rooted in being “hyper-connected to” one’s environment suggests that substances can be an important tool for the navigation(s) of social place.

Using substances also aided participant’s’ ability to engage in specific social contexts within queer social places. For example, the “litmus” test for “the success of one’s night” within specific queer “afterhours” communities hinged on using substances to “keep the night going,” as Riley commented. More generally, events or parties within queer social places were sites of prolonged interaction, stimulation, and stamina. In order to keep up partying with their friends, Peyton would often “do one line” of cocaine before going out dancing. Zola, who spent a lot of time in drag circles, noticed that drag performers used substances to “stay up all night.” Detailing this particular relationship between the social context of drag and substance use, Tanner explained:

I feel like there's a lot demanded from us in terms of... You know how many times I like, I'm getting into drag to go out and I don't fucking want to, I don't wanna do it... you have to kind of force yourself to go out and do it 'cause you're being paid, you're working, and you have to be there. And if you bail consistently on performing, then that's gonna affect your career and work... And then, if my call time is at 9:00... I have to start painting by 7:00-ish to get there on time. And then I'm there till bar close. So, and when you have performers that perform full-time, where this is their only work, I mean, you're constantly in a bar. You're constantly in this culture of partying and you're the clown. You're the mascot, you're the... You're that person for this scene. And it's just available. Like it's just there. And in terms of having to deal with prolonged social interaction with large amounts of people, I, people tend to drink more.

Tanner's story explains how substances are integral resources in the social context of performing drag within queer social places. Although there are situations in which they would prefer to "bail," they would "force" themselves to perform and remain employed. In navigating "prolonged social interactions" coupled with the requirement for performers to remain until "close," they used substances to exist within a constant "culture of partying." As a performance art, drag is in itself an embodiment of entertainment that can transform a person into a "clown" or a "mascot," particularly in front of heterosexual audiences. As such, there is "a lot demanded from" drag performers that can be exhausting and time consuming. Because substances are constitutive of queer social places in that they are always "just available," Tanner was able to use and "deal with" the socio-spatial expectations of performing within a queer social place.

Within heterosexual social spaces, some used substances to assuage the negative feelings associated with being in that environment in the first place. Whenever Indigo would go to heterosexual social spaces, for example, they would drink heavily "to not be so on edge." Similarly, in cases where their mom forced them to go to heterosexual bars, Rock would always take "back a ton of tequila shots" to erase their memory of ever being

there. In this regard, substances were used within queer social places to “tune out” rather than “tune in.” For some, this reaction was also contingent on the social context of the heterosexual social place. For example, while Riley generally avoided using substances in heterosexual social places, he was comfortable taking DMT at a heterosexual Hot Springs environment. Distinctly different from being within physically bounded spaces, such as a bar, being in an outdoor space, coupled with the requirement to be silent, helped him feel at ease:

I actually took DMT for the first time and then we were doing some ketamine for that trip up at a hot springs in Northern California. And it was like, you know, 95% straight, but it was like, so lovely it was like, at night and like, the lights are great. And so anyway, so like, that was—I felt I did, but it was quiet. You have to be silent. So that's like a different kind of, like sensory experience, right? You don't have to, like, interact with people...I don't know, I don't—yeah, it doesn't, like, excite me to like go into a straight bar and like, do a line in the bathroom and then like, have drinks at the bar.

Although the social context of drinking at “a straight bar” and doing “a line in the bathroom” is unappealing, a “95% straight” hot spring environment is conducive to Riley's use of substances within a heterosexual social place. For example, the expectation for all attendees “to be silent” erased having to “interact” with heterosexual people and the “lovely” atmosphere was ultimately enhanced via DMT and ketamine use. Put more simply, it was the non-sociality within a specific social context of a heterosexual social place that produced a pleasurable and “sensory” experience.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Although research has suggested that queer people are more likely than their heterosexual counterparts to use substances (Talley et al., 2010), little work has examined

the social contexts and places in which queer substance use occurs. The primary reliance upon victimization frameworks that routinely categorize queer substance use, and substance use more broadly, as risky or inherently (ab)usive has obscured the ways in which social context, spaces, and places impact queer substance use. While it is important to consider how some queer people use substances to cope with experiences of violence or trauma, the predominance of this framing omits how social spaces and places can be constitutive of substance use. Furthermore, this positioning neglects to explore how substance use can be important, strategic, and impact how people move through places.

Largely, participants imparted three specific ways in which social spaces and places overlapped. Social spaces and places were described as either inhibiting or encouraging of queer substance use. Because heterosexual social spaces, for example, were considered dangerous or unwelcoming places, exacerbated by the presence of cisgender heterosexual men, using within them could approximate queer people to violence. In this regard, many participants avoided those spaces or felt that their substance use was inhibited not only by the social context of drunk heterosexual men, for example, but by the perceived lack of safety within the space itself. Queer social spaces, in comparison, encouraged queer substance use in their positioning as safe places where queer people could “let loose” and lose their inhibitions.

Second, substances are constitutive of queer social places. Historically and contemporarily, the predominant types of queer social spaces are bars, clubs, and parades. Several participants described how these places are entirely financially and socially dependent on the consumption of substances. For example, queer bars often “pushed” alcohol sales because they wanted to “make money.” Others cited specific social contexts within queer social places, such as drag shows or raves, in which substances were

described as part of the experience. As such, the intertwining of social spaces, places, and specific contexts characterized queer social places as synonymous with substance use.

Third, several participants detailed how substances could be strategically used to navigate social spaces and places. Within heterosexual social spaces, substances were used to assuage feelings of fear and uneasiness, and to “tune out” of the places. Substance use in queer social spaces, by comparison, was used to deepen and formulate connections with other queer people, increase stamina for participation within these places, and enhance the experience of being in a queer social place. In this regard, while substances were certainly used for general pleasure or recreation, participants’ use to navigate social spaces and places highlighted the ways in which using substances can be an important resource.

Generally, this chapter adds three contributions to queer criminological, substance use, social spaces, places, and contexts literature. In considering the intimate relationship that some queer communities have with substance use, this work emphasizes the importance of examining the social spaces, places, and contexts in which queer substance use can occur. Similarly, this chapter furthers the analysis, and destabilization, of heterosexual social spaces and places through understanding how some queer people move within them. Furthermore, the use of a queer criminological framework problematizes the routine characterization of queer substance use, or all substance use for that matter, as inherently (ab)usive or maladaptive. Rather, substances and queer substance use can be strategic tools or resources for traversing social spaces, places, and contexts (Race, 2009).

CHAPTER 5: DEVELOPING QUEER IDENTITIES THROUGH SOCIAL SPACES AND PLACES

INTRODUCTION

Spaces and places themselves can define “citizenship,” or who is accepted and welcomed within them (Bell, 1995:140). From a dramaturgical perspective, people’s navigations of space and place are impacted by the other people inhabiting it, in addition to the expectations associated with the environment and its inhabitants. As particular kinds of space, social places are imbued with meanings associated with aspects of identity (Durkheim, 1893; 1912). Put more simply, social place impacts how people understand themselves and are sites for identity formation (Dieseking, 2017). For example, queer social places were created as an environment for queer people to gather, feel safe, and build resilience against a heteronormative world (Stults et al., 2018; Myslik, 1996). Here, queer social places, as created inside queer social spaces, provide opportunities for queer identity formation. On the contrary, the positioning of heterosexuality as “natural” and queer identities as abnormal within heterosexual social places can complicate or hinder the process of queer self-making (Martínez-Guzmán and Íñiguez-Rueda, 2017; Kirby and Hay, 1997). In this regard, queer social places may be integral for identity formation for some queer people.

The “social” aspect of social spaces and places can give people opportunities to explore or formulate their identities through specific behaviors. Substance use within social places, for example, can be a “binding mechanism” that imparts a sense of “togetherness, identity, and solidarity” within others in the place (Grund, 1993:109). Yet,

different types of social places can produce distinct ways in which substance use and identity formation interact. For example, the intimate and historical linkage of queer identities, social spaces, places, and substance use has larger implications for queer identity formation. Within queer parades, substance use facilitates shared queer experiences, “pleasure[,] and celebration” of queer identities (Southgate and Hopwood, 1999:309). In other social contexts within social places, substance use can be utilized to perform queer identities. For example, some gay men use substances to heighten and demonstrate their masculinity or virility within chemsex (Ahmed et al., 2016). As such, the variations of social places can inform how substance use interacts with identity formation.

Drawing from a queer criminological approach, this chapter investigates the role of social places and substances in developing some queer identities. Specifically, I argue that different types of social places impact how queer identities are formed, enabled in part through substance use. Utilizing a queer criminological framework, this work specifically questions: How do different types of social places shape how some queer people use substances in identity building? This work explores how social places that are identity-affirming create identity-building capacities, and how substance use can operate in validating and facilitating identity.

QUEER IDENTITY FORMATION(S), SUBSTANCE USE, SOCIAL SPACES, AND PLACES

Social places can impact how people understand themselves and form their identities (Dieseking, 2017). As people move within and between social places, they navigate various socio-spatial expectations that are created and maintained by the people

already inhabiting that place (Goffman, 1956). Queer social spaces and places are conducive to queer identity formation because they are built by and for queer people, offer opportunities for community building, produce affirmative interactions, and function as safer alternatives to the wider heterosexual world (Stults et al., 2018; Myslik, 1996). In comparison, heterosexual social spaces and places may complicate or even “straighten” queer identities via explicit or implicit reinforcements of heterosexuality as natural or justify violence towards queer identities (Kirby and Hay, 1997). Bell (1995) describes this dynamic as representative of a spatial citizenship that dictates whose identities are welcomed and accepted. For example, the presence of cisgender heterosexual identities within a queer social space may be considered a “(hetero)sexualizing” of queer place which can complicate queer identity formation within that environment (Martínez-Guzmán and Íñiguez-Rueda, 2017).

Generally, the “social” aspect of social spaces and places can provide opportunities for identity formation through shared behaviors. Substance use in social places, for example, can create a sense of community or belonging which can bolster identity formation (Grund, 1993:109). Similar to the importance of substances in countercultures (Belser, 1991), substance use within queer social places functioned as a “technology of the self” through which queer people could deepen self-explorations of queerness (Foucault, 1988:18). For example, some queer people of color have suggested that substance use can help build resilience against the erasure of their identity in heterosexual social places that synonymize queerness with whiteness and queer social places that reproduce racialized discrimination (Newcomb, 2014; Slater et al., 2017).

However, because social places can be facilitatory or inhibitory of different identities and behaviors, identity formation through substance use can look differently across various social places. For example, Anderson, Daly, and Rapp's (2009:315) analysis of the intersection of crime and masculinity found that the social context of heterosexual nightclubs created violent and "clubbing masculinities" among some male patrons. Tying masculinity to excessive use of alcohol, competitions with other men, and "girl-chasing behavior," some men participated in crime to prove their masculinity (Anderson, Daly, and Rapp, 2009:315). Yet, the messiness of queer social places complicates the notion that all queer social places are conducive to affirming queer identity formation. For example, because queer people of color and trans people face harsher penalties related to substance use than their white and cisgender counterparts, some queer people of color may abstain or avoid substance use regardless of whether it occurs within a queer social space or place; this may also inhibit opportunities for queer people of color to use substances as a resource for identity formation. Similarly, substance use within queer circuit parties, as another example, are specific social contexts in which identity formation through substance use is often reserved for cisgender gay men (Lee et al., 2004). In this regard, social spaces, places, and contexts can impact how queer identities are formed through substance use.

RESULTS

This section details the role of social places and substance use in queer identity formation. Generally, participants described social places and substance use as important for queer identity formation via in-group or out-group dynamics. In safe environments, some participants used substances within queer social places in the process of forming

their queer identities. On the contrary, because heterosexual social places were inhibitory of queer identity formation, substance use within these environments functioned as a way to manage queer identities. Yet, substance use in specific social contexts within queer social places, such as parties that catered to cisgender gay men, complicated this binary characterization. In this regard, various social places and contexts produced distinct ways in which substance use interacted with queer identity formation.

Participants presented three ways in which different social spaces and places shaped how substances were used to inform queer identity formation. Within heterosexual social places, some used substances to cope with being queer. As one participant described, using substances allowed them to access and perform compulsory heterosexuality rather than having to deal with potential backlash for being queer within a heterosexual social place. Others used substances in queer social places to deepen their relationship to queer communities, and develop or explore their queer identities. Interestingly, some suggested that these interactions were reflective of substances being constitutive of queer social places more generally. Because queer social spaces and places were built from and centered on substance use, several described substance use as an aspect of queer identity or culture more broadly. As such, queer substance use within queer social places was discussed as inseparable from queer identity formation. Specific social contexts further created intra-conflicts or considerations, however, that left some, like queer people of color, disenfranchised.

HETEROSEXUAL SOCIAL PLACES, SUBSTANCE USE, AND QUEER IDENTITY FORMATION

Generally, participants discussed heterosexual social places as being constitutive of the wider world rather than specific places. As such, several participants described navigating systems of queer victimization, violence, and gender dysphoria arising from navigating environments that privilege cisgender heterosexual identities. One way that participants navigated these environments was through substance use. While the use of substances to suppress queer identities within heterosexual social places temporarily inhibited queer identity formation, those experiences were considered integral in shaping subsequent identity formation through substance use within queer social places. Similarly, some used substances as a palliative to navigate the various traumas that can come as a consequence of being queer within a heterosexual social place. Others described substances as a pharmacological resource for self-acceptance or reinforcement of their queer identities. In other words, the overlap between using substances to inform queer identity formations within heterosexual social places was multifaceted.

Some participants described using substances to manage or suppress their queer identities and navigate gender and sexual expectations within heterosexual social places. Vennox, for example, drank heavily around and would “walk away” from family gatherings because family members would refuse to use their appropriate pronouns or would ask when they were going to get a boyfriend. As another example, Zola often used substances to get “a bit of a boost” and feel more “comfortable” being queer in a heterosexual environment. Others, like Peyton, a nonbinary lesbian, explicitly used substances to blend in or acquiesce to compulsory heterosexuality:

Drugs were kind of like an escape...I always knew that I didn't really like men at all...I just felt like it was like what was expected of me and it was very easy. I had sex with a lot of men when I was younger and I feel like drugs also factored into that but...I've always kinda grappled with that. I've had sex with so many men...it was just like a...a chase...I enjoyed having power over them because I wasn't going to lose anything. I wasn't going to catch feelings, but...doing drugs...would help me be able to do those things instead of actually kinda getting into myself as a person...I was pretty much always drunk when I would have sex. And yeah, also coke sometimes...pretty often I was on cocaine too.

Without citing a specific heterosexual social place, Peyton's narrative highlights how the wider world can be interpreted as such. Although they always knew that they were uninterested in men, Peyton "felt like" having sex with them was a way to do "what was expected" of them. They used substances, such as alcohol and cocaine," to engage in compulsory heterosexual behavior rather than "getting into" their queer identity. Furthermore, Peyton's lack of emotional investment in men created a form of "power" which allowed them to tap into this role because they were not "going to lose anything" or "catch feelings."

Others described specifically using substances in heterosexual social places to assuage feeling afraid, nervous, or apprehensive. Riley, for example, explained that he used to use substances to grapple with "severe anxiety" that sometimes accompanied being queer in heterosexual social places. Illustrating where some of these emotions can stem from, Hayden said:

To calm our nerves and to help our mental stability when it comes to acceptance... I think that we are definitely always in the state of like, are they going to accept me? Are they going to accept me? And so we might use alcohol and substances to drown out those feelings where like a heterosexual person might not have those feelings and just does it for the party, you know? So like, we're using it as like a... I don't wanna say a medication, but a medication of sorts.

Evident in Hayden's description, some queer people may use substances for different reasons than heterosexual people. Because, as Bell et al., (1994) suggests, all place is constitutive of heterosexual place, navigating heterosexual social places while queer can be difficult. In this regard, some queer people use substances as a type of "medication" to help with "nerves" and "mental stability." In this regard, substances can be used to quiet or "drown out" a constant concern with being accepted within heterosexual social places.

Although all participants were proud to be queer, some discussed the stigma or difficulties that emerged from navigating heterosexual social place and complicated their identity formations. Azure, for example, explained that using substances can be a way to mitigate being "out in public" or recognized as the "awkward" queer person. Detailing how they grappled with holding a queer identity and existing within heterosexual social places, Archer stated:

Substance use in my life seems to be more so connected to trauma...it seems to be connected to my queer identity just in the fact that it has helped me cope with the side effects of how being queer has affected my life. And ways in which I've faced rejection and the things that have happened to me because of that.

Reflecting on being physically assaulted and harassed (as described in Chapter 4), Archer rooted their substance use as being "connected to trauma" associated with being queer in heterosexual social places. For example, they use the phrase "side effects" in relation to being queer which denotes queerness as similar to having a disease or a condition that can be treated through substance use. In this regard, using substances within heterosexual social places can help some, like Archer, "cope" with the experience of "rejection" in relation to their queer identities.

QUEER SOCIAL PLACES, SUBSTANCE USE, AND QUEER IDENTITY FORMATION

As safer alternatives to heterosexual social places, several participants found substance use within queer social places to be profoundly transformative. Generally, substance use within queer social places helped facilitate opportunities to connect, deepen relationships, and explore queerness. Some used substances to lessen anxieties around interacting with other queer people in queer social places. Similarly, others used to become more comfortable identifying as queer and exploring queer desire. Describing the ways in which substances could expand the mind, some used within queer social places as a bypass for heuristic navigations learned within heterosexual social places. Rather than suppressing or hiding their queerness, some used substances to uncover or form deeper relationships with their identities. Others discussed how substance use within these environments helped them become more comfortable with and confident in their interactions with other queer people. Furthermore, the recognition of substances as constitutive of queer social places coupled with substance use within these environments facilitated a celebration of queer identity for several participants. More explicitly, because queer social places are built from and centered on substance use and celebrating queerness, participants' identity formation was undoubtedly impacted by these spatialized dynamics. In this regard, using substances within queer social places was a way for some queer people to discover and develop their queer identities.

Generally, substance use within queer social spaces and places was used to discover, explore, and develop queer identities. For example, Hayden explained that using substances can help queer people with “letting go of ourselves and not feeling so trapped in our own bodies.” Others, like Kelsey, suggested that substances could be used

to “crack open” queer identities and facilitate interactions with other queer people. Considering how they used marijuana within queer social places, Riley explained that helped him strike up a “fun conversation with strangers or with friends.” Further commenting on how this dynamic informed their formation of their queer and drag identity, Roses said:

Cause drinking, that's the confidence booster... That's when I started really talking to people. That's when I was like, "Hey, what's up? How are you doing?" That's when I actually really got out of my shell and like started actually talking to the queens and talking, like, "Oh, I see you every week. How are you doing?"

Within queer social places, Roses used alcohol as a “confidence booster” and a tool to circumvent insecurities. For example, while they exited heterosexual social places and entered queer social places with a “shell” on, drinking helped them connect with “the queens” or other drag performers over their previous or current performances. As such, Rose's use of alcohol within queer social places informed an aspect of their queer identity formation through relaxed interactions with other queer people.

Other participants described the relationship between queer substance use, social places, and queer identity formation as reflective of substances being constitutive of queer social places more generally. The linkage of queer social places and substances to the formation of queer identities, as Azure explained, was a real aspect of queer culture that “romanticizes about queer life” and identities as constructed from “going out to clubs and drinking and doing poppers.” In this way, queer social places, in their constructions and meanings, impacted how some queer people formed their identities. Illustrating how this manifested, Alfie commented:

I would say alcohol is a typical part of queer spaces. I think part of it is that those spaces are designed for losing your inhibitions and celebrating

and enjoying life with one another. It's not often that you're at a queer space with under or work-minded... They're pretty much designed for celebration, and so that's something that culturally goes along with celebration. It is [the] alcohol and drugs too.

As Alfie describes, substances, such as alcohol, are “a typical part” of queer social places. Rather than being “work-minded” or oriented, queer social places function as places for “celebrating,” “enjoying life,” and building relationships with other queer people. Alfie also underscores the fact that because celebration, as an act, is commonly associated with “alcohol and drugs,” queer social places as “designed” celebratory environments can encourage queer people to use. Furthermore, because substance use can lower “inhibitions,” some queer people, like Alfie, using substances within queer social places helped dissolve barriers inhibitive of queer identity formations.

Furthermore, a few participants described the overlap between queer social places, substance use, and queer identity formation in terms of bonding, being understood as queer, and having fun with their identities. Suri, for example, said that she used substances in queer social places as a way to feel more “human,” which can provide a freedom to explore their identity and simply have “fun.” Similarly, Skyler explained these feelings as representative of a need to “gather over food or drinks” that can inform queer identities through socialization. Discussing how substance use within queer social places can create such opportunities, Adrian said:

Drinking and it's a lot of seeing and being seen, kind of looking at each other, laughing, flirting, watching drag shows or other queer kinds of performance, dancing...some drugs but also like talking and sharing, asking for help, validating each other.

Within queer social places, substance use can inform identity formation by creating environments where queer people feel “seen.” As a resource, substance use can facilitate

“validating” interactions, such as spending time with one another, “laughing,” and “flirting.” In this regard, sharing social place and using substances were ways to deepen relationships to queerness through shared experiences with other queer people.

SOCIAL CONTEXTS WITHIN SOCIAL SPACES, PLACES, AND IDENTITY FORMATION

Specific social contexts within queer and heterosexual social places shaped how substances were used in queer identity formation. For example, while the coupling of substance use and the engagement in queer or queer-coded behaviors for some participants ultimately informed their identities, doing so within a heterosexual environment or with heterosexual friends eclipsed initial formulations. For example, while some experimented with their gender and sexuality within heterosexual social places, those experiences were delegitimized by others and blamed on the substance use. Considering the racialization of social contexts, the use of substances within queer social places complicated identity formations for several participants of color. The whiteness embedded within queer social places and society more broadly, for example, heightened fears of becoming racialized stereotypes of caricatures that positioned substance use as a characteristic of being a person of color. Furthermore, using substances within specific queer social spaces, such as those catering to women, were also marked as catalysts for solidifying queer identities for some queer people. As such, substance use across various social contexts within social places can inform queer identity formation.

Some social contexts within heterosexual social places shaped how some participants used substances for identity formation. Largely, the use of substances within these contexts was dependent on the identities of the additional people within the social place. For example, when Vesper and her friends got “super drunk one night” and began

kissing each other, that experience, later defined as her “first queer moment,” was chalked up as “girl play” rather than queer behavior because of their friendship and the group identification as heterosexual. Similarly describing how social context, substance use, and queer identity formation can manifest in heterosexual social places, Joan said:

I was pretty heavily into binge drinking until that point in sophomore year because I felt like it was a way for people to be comfortable with me exercising my identity. It was more comfortable for people to say, "Well, I was also drunk so you and I making out wasn't a problem." And that's definitely a middle space for a long time that contributed to confusion, even though I was comfortable in my identity because I would have a really intimate moment with someone and then they would turn around the next day and say, "Well, it was alcohol so that's how it is."...Similarly with drugs, I would say that my experiences with acid have been similar in that people are more willing to experiment and try things under those circumstances but then shy away or don't internalize the experience similarly to me...I would say that, honestly, people were more likely to blame alcohol or use alcohol for means of experimentation or feeling comfortable experimenting with me.

Although Joan was comfortable with her queer identity, “binge drinking” and using substances within a heterosexual social place was a way for self-identified heterosexual people to have queer experiences. For example, “experimenting” while using substances produced a social context that rendered queer behavior as excusable because everyone was under the influence. So, while Joan would have a “really intimate moment,” the next day would yield a “shy away” or “blame” reaction that was isolating. Similarly, while the heterosexual people in those cases used substances to “try things” with Joan, she also used substances as a way for heterosexual people “to be comfortable” with her “exercising” her queerness. As such, using substances within these social contexts created a “confusion” for Joan that simultaneously made her queer identity visible and invisibilized through heterosexual invalidation.

Social contexts within queer social places also impacted the ways in which some queer people of color used substances to inform their identities. Often, queer social places were considered white queer social places, as they were predominantly owned and inhabited by white queer people. Several participants of color were cautious about public substance consumption because of the unique experience of discrimination and surveillance that people of color experience. Vesper, for example, worried that if she was caught smoking marijuana illegally that the “repercussions” for her would be “different” in comparison to her “white blonde friends.” Others intentionally used substances within these contexts as a way to deal with being a person of color within a white social place. Describing how using substances to help relax and recharge from racialized encounters, Rickie and Aspen explained:

It also...it helps to take off the edge—helps to have a good time. Yeah, it helps to...Like to let go of some stuff that you deal with, even if it's temporary, it's another form of escapism, honestly, I'm just like with a video game where I'm usually just kind of just me...letting go.

Similarly, Rickie noted:

I was surrounded by a lot of white people...I would hear a lot of racist things that I would let slide... because...also, yeah, cuz, also those people were giving it to us for free. So, I just, I let a lot of things slide to be able to use, I guess.

As illustrated, using substances within a white queer social context can be an important tool to protect the identities of queer people of color. Although queer social places, generally, are safe environments for queer identity formations in comparison to heterosexual social places, they can be victimizing for some queer people of color. As such, in order to maintain access to these environments, some, like Aspen, used substances to “take off the edge,” “have a good time,” and “let go” of some racialized

encounters. Others, like Rickie, used substances within these contexts to sustain their access to the social place and free substances, which helped them let “a lot of the racist things” that they experienced “slide.” In this regard, some queer people of color actively used substances within queer social places to be able to exist within white queer social contexts.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

While all places can impart which identities belong or are welcomed within them (Bell, 1995), social places, as unique aspects within social space, are intimately connected to the formation of identity (Durkheim, 1893; 1912). For example, while the affirmative nature of queer social places may be conducive for queer identity formation, heterosexual social places, as sites for queer victimization, can be inhibitive. As such, while research has explored the ways in which queer social places can impact queer identity formation (Dieseking, 2017), this chapter explicitly considers the ways in which queer identities are shaped by heterosexual social places. Similarly, while substance use, as a common aspect of social places, is also an important mechanism for queer identity formations (Race, 2009), this chapter explores the ways in which substance use within particular social places can inform queer identities.

Largely, participants described three ways in which different social places, and contexts within them, shaped how their substance use impacted queer identity formation. Although specific heterosexual social places were not distinguished, participants described them as constitutive of the wider world. Subjected to heteronormative expectations for gender and sexuality, some queer people used substances to cope or manage their queer identities. In this regard, substance use within heterosexual social

places inhibited some queer identity formations and helped some navigate those environments without having to grapple with identity. Similarly, some described this process as a “palliative” or salve to treat the wounds that can occur with being queer within a heterosexual social place.

Substances within queer social places, on the contrary, were used to connect, deepen, or explore queer identities. Rather than using substances to cope, substance use within these places helped expand the mental blocks that had previously limited some participant’s access to their queer identities. In becoming more comfortable with themselves and interacting with other queer people, substances became a vehicle for self-acceptance and affirming relationships. Interestingly, and reflective of the results in Chapter 4, the perception of substances as constitutive of queer social places also impacted queer identity formations. For example, because queer social places were built by and in celebration of queer identities through substance use, the act of inhabiting and using within these environments encouraged some participants to celebrate their own identities.

Third, specific social contexts within social places further complicated identity formations. While the use of substances within heterosexual social places occasionally held queer or queer-coded behavior, substance use became an excuse for that behavior, which ultimately detracted from some queer identity formations. In queer social places, racialized contexts created a tension between using to navigate racism and attempting to avoid conforming to a stereotype for some queer participants of color. As such, substance use across diverging social contexts within queer and heterosexual social places impacted how participants understood and formulated their identities.

Generally, this chapter has investigated the role of different social places and contexts in impacting how substances are used to develop some queer identities. In doing so, this work has argued that the interplay between social place, context, and substance use can encourage, manage, and inform the formation of identity. Furthermore, the integration of a queer criminological framework can help interpret how substance use, particularly within affirmative social places and contexts, can be pleasurable, validating, and functional.

CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION

CONCLUSION

Social place can be a difficult and tricky phenomenon to study. Outside of its conflation with the term “social space” or notions of status, it is often rendered static and immovable. Yet, because social places have their own unique identities constructed from and imbued by their inhabitants, they are in a constant state of fluctuation and contestation. Often, the relationship with the identities of people is often the catalyst for the creation of specific social places, like those within queer social spaces³⁶. Furthermore, negotiations between the identities of social places and of the people within that environment can shape how certain behaviors manifest, such as substance use. Although there are other aspects that inform and shape queer social place-building, substance use is central to the formation of queer communities and some queer identities (Race, 2009). For example, while substance use is more acceptable across queer populations, queer civil rights movements and social places encourage a rejection of normative expectations of identities and behaviors such as substance use (Hill, 2011). Similarly, although research exploring substance use has suggested that queer people are more likely to use substances than their cisgender heterosexual counterparts (Marshall et al., (2008); Talley et al., 2010), much of this work is primarily focused on experiences of victimization and (ab)use (Race, 2009). Although there are certainly some queer people who use substances to cope with experiences of victimization (Mereish, et al., 2017), the predominance of these frameworks has produced “controlling images” that present queer substance use as inherently maladaptive or abusive (Collins, 1990:69).

³⁶ As such, social places can also inform how identities are formulated.

Drawing from in-depth semi-structured interviews with 49 self-identified queer people who have used substances or frequented queer social spaces, this dissertation utilizes a queer criminological approach to tease out the complexities of social place, substance use, and identity formation. This work argues that social spaces, places, contexts, and substance use have implications for how people navigate their environments and formulate identities. For example, because social spaces and places can be racialized, sexualized, and gendered (Knopp, 1995), queer people, particularly queer people of color, navigate these environments based upon the meanings ascribed to them (Bowleg, 2013). In places that are affirming or created specifically for queer communities, some may use tools, such as substances, to explore and develop their queer identities (Power et al., 2018). In others, such as heterosexual social spaces and places, queer identity formation, particularly accessed through substance use, was inhibited via heteronormative regulations of gender and identity (Newcomb, 2014). Yet queer social places, as formulated within social spaces, existed and were created through the inhabitations of queer people (Bell et al., 1994).

Normative explorations of space, place, substance use, queer identity formation is bridged with queer criminological approaches in several key ways. First, whereas human geographers have distinguished place from space (Relph, 1976; Tuan, 1997), much of the contemporary language used to describe the phenomenon of place has been replaced in notions of space (Agnew, 2011; Coleman and Collins, 2006). Yet, because spaces are composed of places which give spaces meaning, it is perhaps irrelevant to further debate between the two. Rather, it is more fruitful to consider how spaces and places constitute one another and become messy through the navigations of people (Rushbrook, 2005; Bell

et al., 1994). In this regard, this dissertation revitalizes and bridges together place with space to emphasize how they are “dialectically” interrelated (Relph, 1976; as cited in Seamon and Sowers, 2008:4).

Second, notions of space, place, and substance use are recognized as inextricably linked to aspects of queerness (Southgate and Hopwood, 1999). For example, predominant historical and contemporary forms of queer social places are within spaces dependent on the consumption of substances (Hunt et al., 2019). As such, much of queer identity and community building within queer social places are shaped by substance use (Duff, 2005). Similarly, space, place, and substance use are also intimately tied to criminology as a discipline (Woods, 2014). While criminology is rooted in the classification of queerness as a form of deviance, the field remains largely heteronormative and the queer social spaces are largely understudied (Woods, 2014; Dwyer, Ball, and Crofts, 2016). As such, a queer criminological approach explores how the existence of queer places as sites of contestation and negotiations of environmental expectations for identity or behavior overlap with aspects of the criminal justice system.

Third, while the majority of research examining queer substance use is reliant upon victimization-only frameworks, a queer criminological approach also explores the ways in which queer substance use can be pleasurable and differ via different social places (Race, 2009; Gruskin et al., 2007). In doing so, queer criminological approaches can tease out the complexities of queer substance use such as how it can be used to inform identity formation. For example, using substances, particularly within queer social spaces and places, can encourage some queer people to explore their queer identities (Hunt et al., 2019; Gruskin et al., 2007). As such, investigating the overlap of social

place, substance use, and identity formation suggests that using substances within queer social places can facilitate queer identity formation for some queer people (Power et al., 2018).

Fourth, while a significant amount of research has considered how queer people move through queer social spaces and places, little work has examined how queer people move through heterosexual social places. Similar to the ways in which whiteness has been positioned as the backdrop to which all other people become racialized (Bonilla-Silva, 2010), heterosexual social space is the measure for which all other spaces are measured (Bell et al., 1994). As such, while it is important to understand the navigation of people who have been marginalized and spaces or places stemming from that marginalization, only doing so risks further cementing this divide (Seidman, 2005; Rumens et al., 2019).

Chapter 3 considers how queer and heterosexual social places are defined or distinguished by some queer people. In doing so, this chapter describes the various definitions, formulations, and navigations that can emerge between and within social places. While queer social places can range from public (e.g., a Pride parade) to private (e.g., a person's home) and were distinguished in terms of symbols, embodiments, and affirmations, heterosexual social places were often unbound by physical boundaries and marked as sites of victimization. Because spaces, similar to identities, are fluid in their inhabitations, the movement of people can change how they are interpreted (Love, 2017; 2016). The presence of heterosexual people within queer social spaces, for example, can destabilize that environment as a safe or queer place (Hartless, 2019). Similarly, the

presence of queer people within heterosexual social space creates opportunities for the creation of queer social places within heterosexual social space (Hubbard, 2000).

Furthermore, in theorizing heterosexual social places, this chapter has larger implications for queer criminology. Specifically, the deployment of messiness is a queered way of considering how the distinction of social place and space intermingle with expectations for identity and behavior. For example, although heterosexual social places were considered hostile towards queerness, several participants described actively creating queer social places within heterosexual social places. In comparison, the presence of heterosexual people, particularly men, within queer social places encouraged some, like Finley, to adopt a “fuck you” attitude that reified a spatialized expectation for that environment to remain queer centered. While the study of queer social places has certainly highlighted how some queer people understand and navigate their environments (Pennell, 2016), only doing so can reinforce the perception of heterosexual social place as normative or the standard from which all other places are compared to. Explicitly examining heterosexual social places reflects queer criminology’s roots in queer theory which troubles heterosexual social place as natural (Rumens et al., 2019). In sum, this chapter emphasizes that social places do not exist in a binary, rather, they are messy and can be sexualized and desexualized at any given moment (Hubbard, 2000).

Exploring the overlap of place, social context, and substance use, Chapter 4’s considers how social places shape how substances are used by some queer people. The predominant focus on victimization can obscure the other ways in which queer substance use can be strategic and profoundly transformative (Race, 2009). While queer social places produced substance use that facilitated community building and queer expression,

heterosexual social places mediated queer substance use. For example, because heterosexual social places were associated with intoxicated cisgender heterosexual men and anticipated or lived victimization, many queer people avoided using substances within them. In queer social places, substances were constitutive and were central to the creation and maintenance of place. Largely, queer people used substances within these environments because they were considered safe and an expectation for existing within a queer social place. As such, this chapter contributes to the small but growing body of queer criminological work on the functionality of substance use. Although research has suggested that queer people may be more likely to use substances than heterosexual people (Marshall et al., 2008; Bowers et al., 2015), the importance of different types of social places in which use can occur are rarely the focus of study (Jayne et al., 2016). Furthermore, social contexts, like the expectation of drinking alcohol within a bar, impacted how substance use was justified. As an example, rather than fixating on the negatives of substance use, other queer criminological approaches have underscored the functional aspects of substance use within particular social contexts. Studies of chemsex have highlighted how some queer people use substances to engage with environmental expectations to have prolonged sex (Ahmed et al., 2016; Van Hout et al., 2019). Others have demonstrated how substance use can be pleasurable, validating, and functional in creating and sustaining interactions with queer communities and social places (Demant et al., 2018; Power et al. 2018). In this regard, an integration of a queer criminological framework can help interpret how substance use and an underlying recognition of human agency can emphasize how substance use, particularly within affirmative environments, can be an important resource and shape how people navigate their environments.

Finally, Chapter 5 extends Chapters 3 and 4 to investigate how social places can produce distinct ways in which some queer people use substances to build identities. Although this chapter certainly extends queer criminological approaches to agency as discussed in Chapter 4, this chapter also considers how specific social places can encourage queer identity formation facilitated in part by substance use. While substance use within queer social places deepened or uncovered relationships to queerness, heteronormative expectations for identity within heterosexual social places produced substance use as a form of coping or management of queer identity. This comports with other work finding that those who thrive outside of the gender binary, such as trans and nonbinary people, are often subjected to genderist violence that can encourage substance use and complicate identity formation (Langenderfer-Magruder et al., 2016; Rimes et al., 2019; Newcomb et al., 2020). Similarly, some queer young people are regulated and punished more heavily than their cisgender heterosexual peers which can also limit opportunities for affirmative identity building (Snapp et al., 2015). However, different contexts within social places further structured how substance use and identity formations occurred or were inhibited. The intertwining of drag culture and substance use (Tillewein and Kruse-Diehr, 2021), for example, encouraged some to use and participate in a central aspect of queer culture within queer social spaces. In a different context, such as being within proximity to drunk cisgender heterosexual men in heterosexual social space, some worried about expressing their queer identities with and without the aid of substances.

STUDY LIMITATIONS AND DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

While this study makes several contributions to social space, social place, substance use, and identity formation literature, it also has some limitations that provide

directions for future research. While I initially began with in-person face-to-face interviews, the emergence of COVID-19 required the project to quickly pivot. Although in-person interviews are a staple of qualitative methods, virtual and telephonic interviews have surfaced and are more widely accepted within social sciences (Hine, 2005). Virtual interviews can pose some unique problems, however. During one of the virtual interviews, for example, the Zoom call froze after I had asked a demographic question; when the call had resumed, the participant had begun crying because they had been triggered by the question. As a dynamic research process, qualitative interviews are reliant upon body language and other nonverbal cues that structure how the researcher asks or does not ask questions (Seitz, 2016). If that interview had occurred in-person, I would have been able to see more quickly that the question had disturbed them.

Additionally, while my multi-pronged recruitment strategy produced a diverse sample in some regard, future research can better this approach. For example, although the pandemic revitalized and created queer virtual social spaces and places, the majority of the ones I saw were predominantly run by white drag performers located on the East and West Coasts. Because a large number of queer people are concentrated on the coasts (Black et al., 2002), I was unable to fully consider and represent the experiences of queer people living in other parts of the country. Not only was the majority of my sample drag performers, but the primary social context in which I recruited was drag events, although I did attend a queer virtual play. In this regard, the unique perspectives of my participants, as drag performers of different ages and living in particular locales, reflect the experiences of people who spend a lot of time in coastal queer social spaces, places, and some may have a financial investment in those environments.

Next steps in this work are centered around three themes. First, because place, particularly those arising from identities that have been marginalized, is intimately connected to history, this work would benefit from an oral historical perspective; doing so would provide more context or insight into the very construction and urgencies behind place. Second, although the narratives of the two people I interviewed who lived outside of the United States heavily mirrored those of American participants, there were a few small cultural differences that would be interesting to explore. In this regard, while queer identities created a sense of shared experiences, research looking at social space and place could benefit from a more explicit attention to cultural and geographic differences. Similarly, because the navigations of queer people of color, particularly Black queer people, are impacted by additional levels of discrimination and violence, this work could be strengthened by further including their experiences. Third, because this work has demonstrated the linkage between queer social space, place, substance use, and identity formation, it could be extended to develop explicit theories on queer substance use. Fourth, the landscapes of substance decriminalization, such as Portugal's decriminalization of all substance use, impacts how substances are used in both private and public space or place. As such, future research could explore the overlap of specific cultural, social, and political contexts with decriminalization efforts that can impact how social places are formulated and utilized.

Generally, my dissertation suggests that social places do not exist in a vacuum. Rather, they can actively produce or inhibit specific behaviors and embodiments such as substance use and queerness. While queer identities can be formed through different mechanisms, substance use can be an important tool in that process (Pienaar et al., 2020).

Furthermore, using substances can be a way for some queer people to subvert or transcend heteronormative expectations for gender and sexuality and embrace queer identities (Valentine and Skelton, 2003). This work also highlights the importance of queer criminological approaches and queering the field more broadly. In emphasizing agency and intentionality, queer criminological approaches reorient the dictation that all substance use is inherently problematic, which could, as Valentine and Fraser (2008:410) note, “give rise to new narratives and counter-narratives of drug use that could, in turn, give rise to new knowledge.”

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APPENDIX A. INTERVIEW GUIDE

Thank you for agreeing to be a part of my study. I want you to speak as freely as possible and feel free to ask me any questions at any time. During the interview, please try not to mention your name or any names of the individuals you discuss. Remember, this is completely confidential and you may refuse to answer any question that you like.

Demographic Information

To begin, I would like to ask you a bit of background information.

1. How old are you?
2. How would you describe your racial and ethnic background?
3. What is the highest degree or level of education that you have completed?
4. How would you describe your gender?
5. How would you describe your sexuality?
6. What pronouns do you use?
7. What is your current employment status?
8. Have you ever been married?
 - a. If yes: Are you currently married?
 - b. If no: Are you involved in an intimate relationship?
9. Do you have any children?
 - a. If yes: How many and how old are they?

Childhood

I have just a few questions about your family and childhood.

1. Generally, what was it like growing up?
 - a. Who primarily raised you?
 - b. Do you have any siblings?
2. Were there ever any problems growing up?
 - a. Any drugs or alcohol?

- i. If yes: Would you mind telling me a bit more about that?
- 3. What kind of work did your guardians do?
- 4. What is your relationship like with your family today?
 - a. How often do you see or communicate with them?
- 5. Did you have any hobbies? What were they?

Queer Identity

- 1. How would you describe your identity?
 - a. Why do you describe it that way?
 - b. Has that description changed over the course of your life?
 - i. If yes: How so?
 - ii. If no: Why not?
- 2. When did you know you were _____?
 - a. How did that realization occur? What was that like?
- 3. Would you mind sharing with me your coming out, if you have?
 - a. If yes: What was that experience like?
 - b. If yes: Who did you come out to? Why did you choose to come out to them?
 - c. If yes: Who are you out to currently?
- 4. Is being _____ central to your identity?
 - a. If yes: How so?
 - b. If not: Why not?

LGBTQIA+ “Queer” Spaces or

- 1. How would you describe a LGBTQIA+ space?
 - a. Why do you describe it that way?
- 2. When was the first time you entered a LGBTQIA+ space?
 - a. Why did you decide to enter it then?
 - b. When was the next time you entered an LGBTQIA+ space?
- 3. What kinds of LGBTQIA+ spaces are there?
- 4. Why do you go to LGBTQIA+ spaces?
 - a. What do you like about LGBTQIA+ spaces?
 - b. What do you dislike about LGBTQIA+ spaces?
- 5. Have you ever entered an LGBTQIA+ virtual space?
 - a. If yes: What do LGBTQIA+ virtual spaces look like?
 - b. If yes: What do you like about LGBTQIA+ virtual spaces?

- c. If yes: What do you dislike about LGBTQIA+ virtual spaces?
- d. If no: Why not?

Heterosexual Spaces

1. How would you describe a heterosexual space?
 - a. Why do you describe it that way?
2. What kinds of heterosexual spaces are there?
3. Why do you go to heterosexual spaces?
 - a. What do you like about heterosexual spaces?
 - b. What do you dislike about heterosexual spaces?
4. How does, if at all, your comfort shift when you use substances in queer versus heterosexual spaces?

LGBTQIA+ Spaces and Behavior

1. What do people usually do in LGBTQIA+ spaces?
 - a. What kinds of substances have you noticed people using in LGBTQIA+ spaces?
 - b. Have you noticed people using drugs?
 - i. If yes: What kinds of drugs?
 - c. Have you used drugs in LGBTQIA+ spaces?
 - i. If yes: What kinds of drugs?
 - ii. If no: Why not?
2. Do you mind me asking, just generally, what kinds of drugs do you use recreationally?

(Have the participant list them)

 - a. How old were you when you first used ____?
 - b. Who were you with when you first used ____?
 - c. Where did you get that drug?
 - d. How much did you use?
3. How often do you use drugs recreationally?
4. Who do you typically use them with?
5. Have you ever sold drugs?
 - a. If yes: Can you walk me through a typical time you sold to someone?
 - i. What kinds of quantities did you sell?

- ii. How did you contact your customers?
- iii. How did you set the prices?
- iv. Did you ever have any partners you worked with?

Intersection of Race/ Ethnicity & LGBTQIA+ Identity

- 1. How do you think your race/ ethnicity intersects with your _____ identity?
 - a. If respondent is of color: What's it like being a _____ person of color?
 - b. If respondent is white: How do you think your experience as a _____ white person is different from a person of color's experience?
- 2. As a _____ person of color, are there LGBTQIA+ spaces you feel most comfortable in?
 - a. If white: As a _____ white person, are there LGBTQIA+ spaces you feel most comfortable in?
- 3. As a _____ person of color, are there LGBTQIA+ spaces you feel uncomfortable in?
 - a. If white: As a _____ white person, are there LGBTQIA+ spaces you feel uncomfortable in?

Recreational Drug Usage & LGBTQIA+ Identity

- 1. Do you think there is a lot of recreational drug usage in the LGBTQIA+ community?
 - a. If yes: Why do you think so?
 - b. If no: Why not?
- 2. Do you think that the LGBTQIA+ community does more drugs than other communities?
 - a. If yes: What makes you say so?
 - b. If no: Why not?

3. If participated in drug use: Do you think you participating in recreational drug usage is related to your LGBTQIA+?
 - a. If yes: How so? Why do you think so?
 - b. If no: Why not? Do you think that for some people it does?

Recreational Drug Usage, Queer and/or Nonbinary Identity, and Race

1. If participated in drug use: What is it like using drugs recreationally and being a _____ person of color?
 - b. If white: What is it like using drugs recreationally and being a _____ white person?
 - i. Are there any advantages? (For both POC and white)
 - ii. Are there any disadvantages? (for both POC and white)
2. If participated in drug use: Do you see any intersection between your drug use and your sexual orientation and/or gender, identity, race, or any other identity?

The Effects of Being LGBTQIA+

1. How has or hasn't being _____ has impacted your life?
 - a. If yes: How so?
 - b. If no: Why not?
2. How has or hasn't being _____ has impacted your relationships with your family?
 - a. Your intimate relationships?

The Effects of Recreational Drug Usage

1. Do you think recreational drug use has impacted your life?
 - a. If yes: How so?
 - b. If no: Why not?

Wrapping Up

1. Thank you so much for your time and vulnerability!
 - a. Is there anything else you want to add about your identities?
 - b. Is there anything else you want to add about your experiences with LGBTQIA+ social spaces?
 - c. Is there anything else you want to add about your experiences with substances or substance use?
 - d. Are there any questions that I should have asked?
2. What do you have planned for the rest of the day?
3. Are there any personal questions that you would like to ask me?