

**Negotiating Everyday Spaces, Making Places:  
Queer & Trans\* Youth in Montréal**

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## ABSTRACT

**Title:** Negotiating Everyday Spaces, Making Places: Queer & Trans\* Youth in Montréal

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This thesis qualitatively maps the spatial experiences of queer and trans\* youth in Montréal by relying on community-based research with Project 10, a local Montréal community organization that supports LGBTQ youth. The purpose of this thesis is to address the particular social and spatial exclusions that young queer and trans\* people face, and to highlight the ways they seek, access and build safer spaces for themselves. The research examines the spatial experiences of a largely Anglophone group of queer and trans\* youth between the ages of 15 and 18 years of age by relying on data collected through a focus group, semi-structured interviews and participant observation. The thesis begins by reviewing the literature on queer geographies, children's and youth geographies, and cultural studies on queer and trans\* youth. Next, reflections on the complex experience of conducting research with a community organization are presented. The empirical chapters examine the multiple identities of the queer and trans\* youth participants; how they negotiate their presence in everyday spaces such as the home, school and public spaces of the city; and how they create spaces for themselves through relationships, virtual spaces, and community organizations, particularly Project 10. In these chapters I present their particular stories, reflect on how their unique embodiments inform their experiences and consider the intersections between their identities. I argue that while queer and trans\* youth face significant spatial exclusions in everyday environments, they find ways to negotiate these exclusions and to participate in and create meaningful places for themselves. Their spatial experiences, therefore, provide insights into how positive spaces for queer and trans\* youth may be created, fostered and made most meaningful.

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Finally I want conclude by noting that my graduate studies occurred during the 2012 student strike. This was an incredible time of valuable reflection, critical engagement and difficult negotiations and I want to credit the incredible dedication and inspirational work of my fellow students who tried, and at times succeeded, in reimagining the status quo. While we have not yet attained our greatest dreams, we came a long way, and that counts for something. All of these efforts, to make space for queer and trans\* youth, to fight for equity and fair access to education, are important and while I wish the struggle was over, I feel so grateful to share in the passion and energy for a desire for change that framed my studies and experiences during this time.

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## CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

Despite meaningful gains, particularly in urban settings, the prevailing Western cultural context remains one where heterosexuality and narrow articulations of masculinity and femininity present hegemonic models of sexual and gender identities (Doderer, 2011; Hubbard, 2008; Johnston & Longhurst, 2010; Skeggs, 1997). Given that identities are significantly shaped by social interactions during adolescence (Kroger, Martinussen, & Marcia, 2010; Rose, Rodgers & Small, 2006) and that prevailing practices are organized and expressed as heterosexual and gender conforming, queer and trans\*<sup>1</sup> youths' experiences are often described as disjunctive and marginalized (Letts, 2011; Russell, 2002; Talburt, 2004). For youth who spend a significant amount of time in institutional spaces that support normative regimes, for example, school and the home, this can have meaningful consequences for the formation of queer and trans\* identities.

Moreover, even in places where LGBTQ communities flourish, the spaces they constitute are not necessarily accessible to youth. Lepischak (2004) points out: "...recent decades have witnessed the exponential growth of large, visible lesbian and gay communities in Canada. Unfortunately, they are largely adult-focused" (p. 82). When most queer and trans\* spaces conform to adult needs, young people in these communities face additional barriers. Since the sub-disciplines of queer and youth geographies have long traditions of exploring complex exclusions they offer critical tools to explore social practices surrounding sexuality and gender among adolescents from a spatial perspective. However, discussions that consider teenagers, and especially those between 14 and 18, have largely been absent within queer geography, and queer and trans\* perspectives lacking in youth geography (Schroeder, 2012). Broadly speaking, studies that include queer and trans\* youth's

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<sup>1</sup> I use trans\* with an asterisk to make space for the many identities embodied by trans people. See page 4 of this chapter, or the Glossary, for clarification.

experiences can illuminate how space is produced in ways that reinforce heterosexual norms and manifest specific gender identities, and also how these spatial expressions of gender and sexuality create inclusions and exclusions for LGBTQ youth.

In this thesis I explore the spatial experiences of teenagers who participate in Project 10 [P10], a local Anglophone organization that offers support services to lesbian, gay, bisexual, transsexual, transgender, intersex, queer, questioning and two-spirit youth between the ages of 14 and 25 (Project 10, 2013). I argue that while queer and trans\* youth face significant spatial exclusions in everyday environments; they find ways to negotiate these exclusions and to participate in and create meaningful places for themselves. To explore this argument, I locate my research within existing geographic and cultural studies on queer and trans\* communities as well as on young people. By doing so, I hope to contribute to layered understandings of these populations by considering the experiences from a diverse community of youth on being and becoming, identifying, acting, passing, and disturbing as queer or trans\*. Additionally, in an effort to promote these youth's inclusion in the research process I also draw from research frameworks proposed by participatory action research [PAR], which seek to avoid constructing research participants as objects of inquiry by proposing collaborative models of research. While I conducted my research as a graduate student in geography, my commitment to the research came primarily from a place of experience as a queer person and as a youth worker who is interested in making social change that might improve the lives of queer and trans\* youth.

The goal of this thesis is to consider the social and spatial boundaries that queer and trans\* youth negotiate as part of their everyday lived experience. Spatially speaking, I begin with the body at the micro-scale and extend outward, examining how these teenagers navigate their gender and sexual identities within home, at school and in the city more

generally. I juxtapose reflections on those spaces, which are characterized by contradicting experiences of belonging and alienation, with an exploration of the diverse manifestations of ‘community’ they identified. These are sites that young queer and trans\* people seek out, find and establish for themselves; through friendships, in virtual spaces and within community organizations. My research emerges from the desire to not only reconsider geographies of youth, sexuality and gender, but also contribute to bodies of research that will influence education and community practices in ways that resonate with needs articulated by queer and trans\* youth themselves.

I describe the youth involved in this research as ‘queer’ and ‘trans\*’ and these are terms that I use throughout this thesis. I see queer as a complex identity and concept, with multiple, changing, and contradicting meanings. Geographers Browne, Lim, and Brown (2007) argue that this word is more than simply an umbrella term for lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans\*. They point out that ‘queer’, a once derogatory term, has been reclaimed and is intentionally used to challenge pervasive discourses that shape relationships between sex, gender, desire and practice<sup>2</sup>. As Eves (2004) explains: “...queer work has re-conceptualized sexual identities as shifting and unstable, as positions offered by discursive structures rather than properties of individuals. The logical link and correspondence between biological sex, gender and desire has been challenged” (p. 482). Building on this, Browne and her colleagues (2007) point out that queer can be “...used as an appellation for sexual positionalities that contest not just heteronormativity<sup>3</sup>, but also homonormativity” (p. 12). In other words,

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<sup>2</sup>The reclaiming and use of this identity emerged through radical politics and activism within LGBT organizing beginning in the 1990s (Désert, 1997). It has been repeatedly redeployed, for example, through the activism of HIV-advocacy groups like ACT-UP in the late 1980s, and more recently by people seeking an identity that intentionally avoids making connections between a person’s gender and sexuality.

<sup>3</sup>Platzer (2006) defines ‘heteronormativity’ as general term that: “shifts the focus away from individual attitudes toward a more general understanding of how negative attitudes are embedded in social practices and

queer identities can disrupt the normalization of heterosexual sexualities, and can also call into question mainstream articulations of gay, lesbian and bisexual identities, politics and practices. With this history and politics in mind, I employ the dual sense of this term throughout this thesis: I use it as an umbrella term for LGBT, but above all, I use it with the intention of carrying on the queer tradition of challenging and reinventing ideas and practices regarding gender and sexuality.

Given that an important part of queer practice is complicating sexual as well as gendered identities, my research seeks to underscore connections between gender and sexuality while clearly making the distinction between these categories of identity. Throughout this thesis I consider general gendered differences insofar that these relate to individual's spatial experiences, and also pay particular attention to the experiences of those who identify as trans\*, transgender, transsexual, two-spirit and gender non-conforming<sup>4</sup>. Bell and Valentine (1995) suggest using 'trans' "...in place of transgender and transsexual to indicate multiple and complex embodiments and subjectivities" (p. 116). However, as Nash (2011) has more recently pointed out, 'trans' is frequently employed as "...an umbrella term for an admittedly diverse and not necessarily commensurate series of gender-variant subject positions" (p. 193). In an effort to present the diversity of identities that can be embodied by 'trans' people I use 'trans\*' with an asterisk throughout the thesis, unless I directly quote or refer to someone who used the term in a more specific manner. The use of the asterisk has been suggested by trans\* activists and community organizations who use it to emphasize how varied trans identities can be. As one online social justice site explains: "Trans is one word for a variety of identities that are incredibly diverse, but share one simple, common

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institutions; through these social practices, heterosexuality is privileged and seen as more normal and desirable and this contributes to the oppression of lesbians and gay men. (p. 7).

<sup>4</sup>See Glossary for further definitions.

denominator: a trans\* person is not your traditional cisgender wo/man. Beyond that, there is a lot of variation” (Killermann, 2012).

I begin this thesis by identifying the conceptual frameworks that guide my research. I follow this by considering queer geographies in a number of ways; tracing the development of these from gay and lesbian studies through studies of heterosexism and space (particularly in urban environments) to the current queering of geography and questioning of homonormativity<sup>5</sup> and consider also the geography of trans\* people. I focus particularly on literature that critically analyzes how queer sexualities and alternative gender identities are expressed, practiced and regulated in socially constituted space. Next, I consider the literature on youth geographies, focusing on the construction of age as a category as well as on the ways that adolescents navigate boundaries, adult spaces and other age-based interdictions. The theme of exclusion runs deep within queer and youth geographies; the focus in both of these bodies of literature tends to be on how either sexual and gender minorities, and children and youth are excluded spatially through practices that serve the interests of dominant groups. What is more, these are new and growing sub-disciplines that have yet to consider the experiences of all groups of people. Importantly, the perspectives of adolescents are largely absent from both of these areas of study. Accordingly, the third section of the literature review proposes directions for queer and trans\* youth geographies by assembling literature from varied disciplines, including cultural studies and developmental theories that address these exclusions.

In Chapter III I present the methodologies I used in my research. This project was initially conceived of as participatory action research, however as I describe in this chapter, I

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<sup>5</sup>The concept of homonormativity is used to “describe and critique the ways in which particular forms of ‘assimilated’ homosexuality have themselves become normative and incorporated within the logic of heteronormativity” (Brown, 2009, p. 1496) will be considered in more depth in Chapter II.

eventually took a critical ethnographic approach. To complete this thesis I relied on the data I collected through participant observation, a focus group and semi-structured interviews with the youngest participants of P10's drop-in. This chapter presents my methodological framework, as well as an overview of the process of working in a community setting and a discussion of some of the ethical considerations and logistic challenges I encountered throughout this process. I conclude by including thoughts on my role as a researcher within this process.

The following three chapters are organized in a way that mirrors the spatial realities of the participants. Chapter IV presents the first of my findings: the body is a site of varied articulations of queer and trans\* youth' identities. In this chapter, I focus primarily on participants' sexual and gender identities. However, I also consider other aspects of their identities beyond this paradigm and draw attention to identities they indicated were important, including their racial, religious or cultural, and class backgrounds. While the emphasis in this chapter is on the significance of their identities, I also discuss how many participants avoided labelling themselves in any way. In other words, I discuss their dis-identification with specific gender and sexual identities.

In Chapter V, I consider how queer and trans\* youth navigate everyday spaces. Here, I begin with their experiences regarding gender and sexuality within the home, which I present as a site of safety for some, danger for others, and for many, a site shaped by multiple and contradictory meanings. Next, I consider their experiences of their school environments regarding sexuality and gender, by exploring how these were integrated, or not, into their curriculum (through workshops or clubs), and how they were addressed by teachers and staff. I then explore how schools were described and understood as social spaces: I look at how youth developed and negotiated their gender and sexual identities

among their peers. Finally, I extend the geographic scope of my research and examine participants' perceptions of neighbourhoods and areas within (and in some cases, beyond) the city. First, I look at where they described feeling included, and then, I consider the sites where they said they experienced exclusions or faced danger; I explore the specific qualities of the parks, street-spaces, public transit, and the city's 'gay village' as described by participants.

Chapter VI turns toward the making of communities by queer and trans\* youth. I begin by studying the significance of friendships among participants. I focus on how and where these relations occur and then discuss the role that romantic relationships play in their lives. Next, I consider virtual spaces in terms of how they can provide youth with particular types of information related to gender and sexuality, but focus primarily on how the Internet can offer virtual spaces of belonging. I then present P10 as a site for queer and trans\* youth to access community. I point to how each participant came to access the space, and present some of characteristics that make it a welcoming environment to return to, looking at both social and physical aspects of the space. Finally, I present the ways that participants described their involvement in community activities and organizations, including gay clubs at school, other LGBTQ youth groups, and other community organizations.

## **CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW**

This chapter reviews the existing literature in three areas: queer geographies, youth geographies and broad interdisciplinary literature on LGBT youth. The purpose of this chapter is to draw ideas from each of these bodies of work to provide a framework for my analysis. I highlight the general lack of geographic inquiry in research on queer and trans\* youth, specifically the lack of research on youth in queer studies, and the paralleled absence of sexual and gender identities within youth studies.

The chapter begins with an overview of the theoretical foundations of queer geography, drawing links between feminist geographies and the geographies of sexualities. I explore the contributions of queer geography to understandings of queer and trans\* people's experiences in space. I also review some of the tensions that have emerged with this sub-discipline and point to the ways that contemporary queer geographers, as well as trans\* geographers, seek to challenge multiple and intersecting forms of injustice. Next, I review the literature on youth geographies, looking first at how 'youth' as a category has been constructed. I then consider the spatial implications of such constructions. I also review the geographical literature on youth and urban space and outline new directions for research in this area. Finally, I combine insights from these two literatures to develop a research framework for the study of queer and trans\* youth's geographies. This section includes an overview of their specific challenges, questioning their position as victims and outlining the types of spatial practices that are important to them.

### **2.1. QUEER GEOGRAPHY**

Queer geography has evolved as a sub-discipline from studies on the geography of gender and sexuality, which began as early as the 1980s (Bell & Valentine, 1995; Brown &

Knopp, 2008; Browne et al., 2007; Oswin, 2008). These studies of space and sexuality developed and drew from feminist geography and queer theory to explore the spatial experiences of queer people. Today, there is still much overlap between the geography of sexuality and queer geography; however they are two different approaches. On the one hand, queer geography questions the production of geographic knowledge from a queer perspective, whereas geographies of sexualities are more empirical.

Bell and Valentine's anthology *Mapping Desire* (1995) pointed out that, "...despite a growing awareness amongst geographers in the [1980s] of the need to study the role of class, gender and ethnicity in shaping social, cultural and economic geographies, sexualities were largely left off the geographical map" (p. 4). Their collection provided one of the first geographic examples of how the relationships between space, place, and sexualities could be studied. Other early examples of geography of sexualities studied gay and lesbian identity in cities (Adler & Brenner, 1992; Knopp, 1998), accounts of LGBT activism (Geltmaker, 1992), and queer, or lesbian and gay, spaces in the city (Ingram, Bouthillette & Retter, 1997; Valentine, 1995). These studies highlighted how geography can be used as a lens by which to understand gay and lesbian experiences, were frequently used in the interest of undoing the injustices that have historically defined gay and lesbian people's lives, and laid the groundwork for the more recent study of queer geography.

Contemporary studies in human geography propose that social relations occur spatially and also that spatial relations are socially effected. This is a conceptual framework that queer geographers employ when considering relationships between space and sexual identities (Hubbard, 2008; Skeggs, 1999). Browne, Lim and Brown (2007) explore how queer geography provides a framework to take up the challenge of "...how to materialise and spatialise the insights of queer theory [in the geography of sexuality]" (p. 14). One outcome

of queer geography is that spatial ontology has been reimagined entirely; queer theory has been used to rethink spaces and the social relations that they constitute. This has led to a particular way of thinking about space, one that seeks to challenge otherwise largely accepted and essentialist categories as well as normative understandings of sexuality and gender in space. Knopp (2007a) describes the project of queer geography:

Various essentialisms underlying much of the existing scholarship were critically deconstructed. It is out of this deconstructionist project, in which issues of sexuality and desire are foregrounded but consciously not essentialized, that queer geographies (and queer theory generally) have emerged (p. 48).

Moreover, in an attempt to distinguish between feminist geographies, studies on sexuality and space, and queer geography, Knopp (2007a) explains that this sub-discipline's "...distinctive contribution was the application of specifically postmodern and/or poststructuralist perspectives to sexuality and space studies, especially gay and lesbian geographies" (p. 48). In contrast with geographies of sexualities, queer geography has largely been concerned with deconstructing the perceived neutrality of spaces, has focused on the role that power plays in shaping spatial interactions, and has contributed to "...debates concerning the epistemology, philosophy and methodology of human geography, [and] challenging many taken for granted assumptions about subjectivity, power and representation" (Hubbard, 2008, p. 640). In other words, studies in the sub-discipline have contributed to a queering of geography: more than simply describing the lives of sexual and gender minorities spatially, queer geography is about taking a critical approach to categories and normative understandings of gender, sexuality and space.

Drawing on queer geography, some geographers have directed their attention toward relationships between gender and space specifically, most recently on the experiences of trans\* identified people (Brown, 2012; Browne, 2004; Doan, 2010; Nelson, 1999). Existing geographic studies on trans\* people's experiences have drawn connections between power,

gender and sexuality and have largely focused on undoing harmful representations of trans\* people. This has been done in a few ways, for example, by addressing the exclusions trans\* people face in LGBTQ scenes. Nash (2011) identifies how this occurs in lesbian spaces, and similarly Doan (2007) examines exclusionary practices inside queer spaces in urban settings. These geographers have pointed out that trans\* people's experiences have inaccurately been conflated with those who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual or queer. This has resulted in many consequences, such as a neglect of the specificities of trans\* people's lives within geographic inquiry and their marginalization within LGBTQ communities more generally. Nash (2010) explains how this also has social repercussions: "...many trans individuals experience unsettling combinations of reification and celebrity and/or exclusion and rejection in LGBTQ spaces" (p.579). However, Browne and Lim (2010) have argued that while it is important to consider trans\* people's experiences within these communities, the focus should also be on their everyday realities. They explain the importance of this move:

Our critical interventions for this article were inspired and confounded by trans people's discussions of the places in which they found hope, solidarity and comfort. To focus only on the lack of understanding of trans issues [...] elides the possibilities for change that can be related, in part, to belonging within an LGBT collective (Browne & Lim, 2010, p. 628).

And there have been some recent efforts to consider trans\* geographies beyond exclusions. They include, for example, Rooke's (2010) participatory research project on how young trans\* people in the UK make space, and Hines' (2010) studies on trans\* people's experiences in work environments. Nonetheless, geographic scholarship that focuses specifically on trans\* people's experiences remains relatively small and could be developed in several directions, one of which is the everyday realities of trans\* youth.

### 2.1.1. GEOGRAPHIES OF HETEROSEXISM

A particular way that the conceptual deconstruction of social spaces has occurred within queer geography has been to point out how heteronormativity structures space. Queer geographers argue that the normative regulation of gender and sexuality can be disrupted by understanding how heterosexuality is embedded in social space. As Hubbard (2008) summarizes:

Far from being one sexual choice among many, [heteronormativity] stresses that heterosexuality is culturally hegemonic, with the reproduction of a heterosexual/homosexual binary an important structuring device subordinating the homosexual at the same time that it institutionalises the heteronormal (p.643).

Many within queer geography have, therefore, studied how the regulation of gender and sexual identities in public space produces specific ways of imagining (and consequently articulating) individual expressions of identity. For example, Johnston and Longhurst (2010) point out how:

...public rituals surrounding heterosexual sex are usually acceptable in cities, for example, a man and woman marrying in a public park, or a straight couple kissing on a bus. Other sex, such as homo-, trans- and bisexual is usually less acceptable (p. 85).

They explain how dissident genders and sexualities are implicitly excluded through the use of urban planning, policing, surveillance and municipal regulations that prohibit particular events, and identify how this can result in "...a type of moral cleansing of city streets depending on particular anxieties of the time" (Johnston & Longhurst, 2010, p. 85). Accordingly, many queer scholars have suggested that by focusing on how and where queer and trans\* people congregate, have social interactions, and live in opposition to dominant ideas about sexuality and gender, these normative geographies can be undone (Davis, 1995; Hertz, Eisenberg & Knauer, 1997; Knopp, 2007b; Weeks, 2007).

### 2.1.2. DIVERSE QUEER URBANITIES

While some queer geographers have studied the ways that spatial practices produce and promote heterosexuality and normative genders, another focus within queer geography has been on identifying ‘queerscapes’: sites where queers establish themselves spatially (Ingram et al., 1997, p. 109). Historically, the anonymity afforded in cities has been attractive to queer and trans\* people seeking to abandon the closeness of small communities (Aldrich, 2004; Valentine & Skelton, 2003). As Warner (2002) points out: “...although they did not have a concept of community as we know it today, gays, bisexuals, or lesbians living in what we now call the pre-gay liberation era [1940-1960s] recall that distinctive, though underground, sub-cultures thrived in many urban centres” (p. 49-50). Consequently, one focus within queer geography has been on how urban centres were (and continue to be) perceived as spaces of liberation where individuals can express alternative desires, make particular lifestyle choices and build queer communities (Brown, 2007; D’Emilio, 1981; Johnston & Longhurst, 2010; Nash 2006). By the 1970s, the combined emergence of a wide-scale, militant and grassroots gay liberation movement, (corresponding with the surfacing of social movements more generally), along with resistance to increased police and state repression and raids, the gay and lesbian movements galvanized and increased the public visibility of queers (Kinsman & Gentile, 2010, p. 222). Since then, urban queer territoriality has increased, particularly in knowledge-industry-based and ‘creative’ cities, such as Montréal, where ‘gay villages’ present visible, commodified, queer sexualities (Hunt & Zacharias, 2008). As such, many contemporary studies within queer geography have focused on the development of gay villages in urban centres (Binnie & Skeggs, 2004; Browne et al., 2007; Casey, 2004; Nash, 2005, 2006; Hunt & Zacharias, 2008).

While queer geographers have made many interventions in studying queer communities, the increased visibility and the production of queer space has not occurred without contradicting perspectives and experiences of these. Some have pointed out how queer sites often generate spatial exclusions, regulate sexual and gendered identities, and produce what Bell and Binnie (2004) coin as ‘the new homonormativity’ (p. 1808). Brown (2009) explains:

In recent years, geographers and other theorists have, in various ways, begun to use (and occasionally question) an emerging conceptualisation of ‘homonormativity’ to describe and critique the ways in which particular forms of ‘assimilated’ homosexuality have themselves become normative and incorporated within the logic of heteronormativity (p. 1496).

Studies that explore this homonormativity have taken a number of different directions. A significant portion of this research highlights the role of neo-liberal urban governance and commercialization (Richardson, 2005). In one example, Binnie and Skeggs (2004) use the example of Manchester’s Gay Village to explore how capitalist impulses to seek new markets benefit from queer desires for territorialisation. They argue that despite the efforts of urban planners to brand Gay Village’s as authentic, open, and inclusive, the production of ‘gayness’ sold in the Village inherently excludes those who do not conform to a capitalist logic of consumption. Bell and Binnie (2004) develop these ideas by identifying this process as the production of “consumer citizenship” (p. 1809), wherein city planners and members of tourism departments market the city to attract specific communities (namely, gay white men) who are made to belong by consuming, not just goods, but an entire identity. Focusing specifically on the role that privatization and the ideological position of individualism have had on shaping the homonormative subject, Brown (2009) argues that neo-liberalism produces specific and narrow conceptions of gay identities. Other queer geographers have studied the role that economic forces, and gentrification in particular, have to play in

delineating the geographies of sexuality not only because of the way markets dictate the lives of all subjects, but also because this is particularly the case in spaces where queer identities and practices take place (Doan & Higgins, 2011; Rushbrook, 2002; Ruting, 2008).

Another way that queer geographers have considered differences within queer communities is to explore gendered disparities. For example, Podmore (2006) contributes to Peake's (1989) 'gender-aware' perspective that gender is tied to every aspect of urban experience. Podmore's (2006) research looks specifically at the gendered inequalities between gay men and lesbians, who she points out, do not experience visibility, territoriality, or access to socio-spatial infrastructure in the same ways. She attributes this to a number of factors, including historical and gendered class-based inequities, but also to variations in how identities and communities are conceived of between gay men and lesbians and queers. Moreover, her reflections also suggest that not only are there gendered differences between gay men and lesbians, but queer spaces themselves are gendered.

Other researchers have also demonstrated that gender shapes how LGBT populations engage with queer spaces, although most of this work has focused on lesbian's experience of gendered exclusions. For example, Pritchard, Morgan and Sedgley (2002) study how lesbians, although they are often excluded, appropriate spaces within Gay Villages to create places for themselves. Skeggs (1999) examines the experiences of lesbian and straight women in Gay Village spaces who seek out these areas to avoid the violence of heterosexual masculinity. In another example, Hammers (2008) explores the socio-spatial dynamics of lesbian and queer-exclusive bathhouse events in Toronto's Gay Village. She points out how these spaces give queers, who do not belong to the gay male culture that dominates most Villages, opportunities to feel empowered and confident in spaces where they can explore their sexuality. At the same time, she points out that "...contrary to queer's anti-identitarian

claims, in sexed spaces—where bodies do (greatly) matter—queer enacts its own exclusions and disciplining effects, while privileging some bodies over others” (p. 568). Finally, as demonstrated in a previous section, some newer research examines the gendered exclusions experienced by trans\* people in queer spaces. Browne and Lim (2010) point out how gay and lesbian neighbourhoods often limit variant gender expressions and replicate heteronormative gender dichotomies.

However, other exclusions have yet to be explored by queer geographers. Oswin (2005) has argued that queer geography is “...an area of enquiry that has arguably failed to make racism, colonialism and patriarchy central enough to its project” (p. 80). A few examples have emerged since Oswin’s criticism, however there remains much room to develop these ideas. In one example, Caluya (2008) explores how Sydney’s gay scene hosts space for both sexual liberation for some and simultaneous racial segregation for gay Asian men. He argues that: “Sydney’s gay commercial scene confines gay Asian males into [...] ‘micro-ghettos’ through the creation of racial boundaries” (p. 285). Tucker (2009) considers queer exclusions in Cape Town’s Gay Village, drawing connections between explicit instances of racism and gendered inequalities. Visser (2008) considers black gay men’s leisure spaces in South Africa and points out that “...although aspects of white gay male leisure (mostly Western tourists) spaces have received some attention in countries such as the Caribbean, South Africa and Thailand, the leisure geographies of black gay African men has remained invisible to the geographical scholarly gaze” (p. 414). Since so few have considered race within their studies of sexuality and gender and an absence of racial inequities is glaring in Western queer geography, more studies that consider racial dynamics with queer geographies are required so that we might undo social inequities within our own production of geographic knowledge.

Finally, another glaring absence in queer geography is attention to the ways in which age shapes the experience of space, including queer spaces. Valentine and Skelton (2003) remain some of the few geographers who have considered the intersection between age and queer sexuality in their research on the gay scene as one that produces both positive space, but also holds dangers. They explain how these spaces contain paradoxes:

On the one hand, it can be a positive, liberating and supportive space that offers a sense of identity, community and belonging. On the other hand, it can simultaneously be a site of danger where young lesbians and gay men can encounter a range of social risks and be subject to abusive relationships and social exclusion (Valentine & Skelton, 2003, p.863).

Their research suggests that there remains much to explore regarding young LGBTQ people's spatial experiences; for their realities are complex. Moreover, as I have highlighted in this section, homonormativity, produced within queer spaces through practices imbued with power imbalances, enacts exclusions on the basis of gender, race, culture, class and, of course, age. Queer geographic inquiry on youth could explore these exclusions, but also carry on the traditions of the sub-discipline by considering their everyday realities in a way that situates them as agents.

## **2.2. YOUTH GEOGRAPHIES**

Acknowledging the shortcomings that exist within queer geographies regarding the representation of youth, I turn now toward the existing literature on youth geographies, to better situate the spatial experiences of queer and trans\* teenagers. Studies concerned with youth, their cultures, and the spaces in which these are articulated emerged in the 1960s, with the first ones describing gang culture in particular offering opportunities for geographic intervention (Holt, 2009). Since then, studies on youth in geography emerged in parallel to what some geographers have dubbed 'the cultural turn' within the discipline that saw the

emergence of studies in human geography on gender, sexuality, race and class (Holt, 2009; Oswin, 2005), as well as a focus on youth as social agents (Matthews, Limb & Taylor, 1999a).

Over the past few decades, human geographers have focused on children and youth's spatial experiences in a variety of different ways. An entire academic journal, *Children's Geographies*, emerged in 2003 to provide "...an international forum to discuss issues that impact upon the geographical worlds of children and young people under the age of 25 and of their families" (*Children's Geographies*, 2013). This journal draws from multiple disciplines to provide a thorough and ongoing analysis of "...what it is like to be a young person within different societal contexts" (*Children's Geographies*, 2013). In general, studies in youth geographies make efforts to centre youth in geographical research. This works to "...challenge negative stereotypes of children and young people, to empower children and young people, and to challenge barriers to children and young people's participation in policy decisions" (Evans, 2008, p. 1660). As such, youth geography has tended to be relatively progressive in its approach, as the starting point has been one that seeks to empower this otherwise, largely systematically disempowered, population.

### 2.2.1. 'YOUTH'

One important contribution from geographers is to show that the concept of youth is variable temporally and spatially (Holloway & Valentine, 2000, Skelton & Valentine, 1998). For example, Holt (2009) points out that "...youth is an embodied social construction attached to young people. It is socio-spatially specific, with 'youth' meaning different things in varying times and spaces" (p. 283). As such, youth geographers consider not only the spatial experiences of children and adolescents, but also the very boundaries of what these categories mean. Valentine (2003) identifies how the transition between youth-hood and

adulthood is not linear, but rather that the change between these periods is fluid. She points out how, despite the fact that laws may dictate otherwise, some youth experience few spatial restrictions due to their abilities to pass as older. On the other hand, she describes how certain adults (particularly trans\* men) are often denied access to privileges when they are perceived as adolescents (p. 38). Furthermore, she points out that some youth are required to adopt adult-like responsibilities, such as caring for parents or working at young ages. Valentine also suggests that the institutions of marriage, family and employment, markers of transition commonly used to imply adulthood, are not universally accessed by all adults. Similarly, Hopkins and Pain (2007) argue that young people may be perceived as adults according to one criterion, but then not according to another. For example, they point out that a youth's body may physically appear adult, but their behaviour and decision-making may not correspond with that. Based on this understanding of age as subjective and shifting, Hopkins and Pain (2007) argue for the creation of relational geographies of age, wherein age is not understood as linear, but rather complex and changing. In other words, youth geographies can employ and strengthen critiques of essentialism (echoing the post-structural tenets of queer geography) by showing how age is socially constructed and enacted through practices occurring spatially.

### 2.2.2. YOUTH IN PUBLIC SPACES & BEYOND: BOUNDARIES OF INCLUSION & EXCLUSION

While the category of youth may be unstable, shifting and socio-spatially specific, youth's lived experiences can be defined by their ability to navigate and transcend a variety of enforced boundaries. If any experience connects most adolescents (whatever that itself constitutes) it is that this is a time in which individuals navigate the world according to rules, laws and boundaries, set out, for the most part, by adults (Sarre, 2010). These geographies of

exclusion and inclusion have been taken up in a variety of ways by youth geographers. For example, Vanderbeck and Dunkley (2004) explain that:

...the very coalescence of children's geographies into a recognizable subfield has in no small part been predicated on an exclusion of geographies, i.e. the exclusion of young people's lives and experiences from the mainstream of human geography, mirroring broader patterns of social relations which peripheralize young people's experiences and perspectives (p.178)

They describe the many ways that youth can be excluded from full participation in society's activities. This exclusion occurs formally (through laws that regulate the lives of youth and where they can and cannot be) as well as through every day practices (through decisions that parents make). Moreover, they point out how much of the focus on youth geography has been on the ways that youth's lives are organized and regulated by adults, but suggest that experiences of inclusion and exclusion may also be enforced through the practices of youth and their peers. As they put it:

Young people challenge and reproduce wider narratives of social difference and construct their own local 'otherings', resulting in spaces that are comprised of differentiated and meaningful micro-territories where some young people feel comfortable and others do not belong (Vanderbeck & Dunkley, 2004, p. 182).

In other words, while the practices of inclusion and exclusion may direct the lives of young people, youth have agency in 'operating their own spatialisations' (Vanderbeck & Dunkley, 2004, p. 182), for better or worse, in everyday practices between each other.

As such, geographers make interventions on the lives of adolescents by studying age biases in accessing spaces, by identifying the ways that adult values, perceptions and laws can regulate the spatialized experiences of adolescents and generally elaborating on this theme of exclusion. Evans (2008) explains that research on youth in geography has tended to try to address the concern that youth are often narrowly perceived as 'not adults' and thus not a significant enough concern to be considered in planning. This being in-between means that youth are granted no space, no identity and, often, nothing to do. Childress (2004) points out

how: "...teenagers have limited ability to manipulate private property. They can't own it, can't modify it, can't rent it. They can only choose, occupy and use the property of others" (p.196). Similarly, Lieberg (1995) argues that because young people are denied access or control over private spaces youth "...often have nowhere to go except public spaces when they want to be by themselves" (p. 721). Even though this is generally the case, Evans (2008) points out that: "...young people's presence outside the home [is] seen as problematic, and so young people [are] absent from consideration in the design and planning of public space" (p. 1659). Indeed, youth are frequently considered to be nuisances or seen as bothersome by adults in public spaces.

As such, a large focus of youth geographies has been on public spaces in particular, such as parks, malls and streets, to study how youth are excluded from these areas. For example, Collins and Kearns (2001) explore socio-spatial boundaries experienced by youth in public space by studying juvenile curfews. They argue that these "...impose strict spatial and temporal controls on young people in an era when many adults view them as a menace to be contained" (Collins & Kearns, 2001, p. 389). They also point out that morality plays an instrumental role in social control over potential youth behaviour: "...the young have continued to be constituted as folk devils—as violent criminals, drug users, gang members, student radicals, football hooligans, 'lager louts' and 'welfare mothers'" (Collins & Kearns, 2001, p. 391). As such, research within youth geography has been careful to point out how adult responses to youth's appropriation of public spaces varies according to the social category a youth belongs to. More specifically, Childress (2004) argues that, "...in America, where curfew and loitering codes already target young people, public-space gatherings among teens of color are likely on two different counts to be seen as socially aggressive and thus result in police or security-force intervention" (p. 201). Similarly, O'Brien, Jones, Sloan

and Rustin (2000), who studied gender and racial disparities between children's experiences in public space, found that compared to boys, "...in general, girls and minority ethnic children appeared to be more restricted in their use of urban space" (p. 267). They insist on the importance of responding to these unequal experiences of young people:

Being home-based by choice in a materially rich, spacious house is a world apart from enforced exclusion in an overcrowded inner-city flat. Attention to differentiation in children's access to space in the public real raises considerations about principles governing distributive justice and fairness in contemporary urban settings ... lack of attention to the different ways children use their cities will hinder advances in social policies designed to enhance participation for all children (O'Brien et al., 2000, p. 274-275).

Extending on what has been proposed by queer geography, queer and trans\* youth may face additional struggles in public spaces, as they contend with social norms that order the expression of gender and sexuality. Schroeder (2012) reminds us that the "...spatiality of queer youths' everyday lives is highly contingent on adults and adultist practices" (p. 647), delineated by the "regulatory surveillance of heteronormativity" (p. 647).

However, while much of the research on teenagers focuses on their exclusion, other geographers have tried to draw attention to "...the ways they young people can gather to affirm their sense of difference and celebrate their feelings of belonging" (Matthews, Limb & Taylor, 2000, p. 64). Holloway and Valentine (2000) specify that geographers could also consider how children experience and shape their spatialities by considering "...everyday spaces in and through which children's identities and lives are made and remade" (p. 770). These spaces of geographic inquiry move beyond consideration of exclusions and consider also the discourses and strategies youth engage with as people with agency.

Youth geographies consider the discursive spatialities of age, the complex negotiation of boundaries and adult spaces, and highlight the importance of exploring the spaces identified as for youth. While we have a good understanding of adolescent exclusions

in public space, we know little about how adolescents produce their own spaces. We also know little about how sexuality and gender variance impacts adolescent geographies in everyday spaces. Moreover, in terms of queer and trans\* youth, it is important to understand how they negotiate heteronormativity and homonormativity, in urban space.

### **2.3. DEVELOPING A QUEER & TRANS\* YOUTH GEOGRAPHY**

The first two sections of this literature review point to the multiple and intersecting challenges that queer and trans\* youth face, as spaces are largely hetero- and homo-normative as well as largely delineated by restrictive adult rules. Specifically, I now argue that many queer and trans\* youth experience marginalization even in contexts where homosexuality and deviant gender presentations are increasingly visible (Lepischak, 2004). This is due, in a large part, to the fact that most queer spaces are defined as adult spaces that limit access to adolescents through legal, cultural and economic restrictions, as well as through the creation of an exclusionary ambiance, expectations, dress codes, and so on. While Gay Villages and other queer spatialities established by previous generations may be sites where adult identities are expressed and validated, adolescents generally remain excluded from such spaces. Hackford-Peer (2010) laments: "...while queer adults have gained more access to queer possibilities and futures, this right is not just important for queer adults" (p.554). Queer and trans\* adolescents, therefore, experience acute spatial exclusions.

#### **2.3.1. CHALLENGES FACING QUEER & TRANS\* YOUTH**

According to one study of queer and trans\* youth: "...in addition to the typical challenges of adolescence (i.e., identity formation, career planning, independence from

parents), queer and trans youth face unique challenges of social stigma, social isolation and ‘coming out’” (Rose et al., 2006, p. 132). Research confirms that despite some improvements, adolescents who come out as LGBTQ continue to face pervasive and complex forms of discrimination and harassment in the spaces where they spend their day-to-day lives (Biegel, 2010; Corrine, Bertram, Crowley, & Massey, 2010; Russell, 2002). In one example, Blackburn (2007) explores how heterosexism is enforced through social practices in school environments and identifies the consequences this has on the lives of gender and sexual minority youth. She identifies how this occurs by citing from studies conducted by the *National School Climate Survey* (2004). This study of LGBT students across the United States reveals that:

...91.5 percent of these youth heard homophobic remarks frequently or often; 54.7 percent reported frequently or often hearing comments about students not acting “masculine” enough; and 38.1 percent frequently or often heard comments about students not acting “feminine” enough. These youth experienced verbal harassment in schools, not only because of their sexual orientation but also because of their gender expression. (Blackburn, 2007, p. 34)

Blackburn and McCready (2009) also highlight how high school staff can be complicit in perpetuating physical violence, verbal abuse and emotional harassment by not intervening when discrimination toward queer and trans\* youth takes place. Moreover, Biegel’s (2010) research demonstrates that harassment and teasing commonly goes unaddressed in school curriculum, and in day-to-day interactions, and also on a wider scale, in classroom cultures. This may have particular consequences for trans\* youth, as McGuire, Anderson, Toomey, & Russell (2010) explain in their survey of 2600 youth across the United States:

Studies that investigate school climate for transgender youth confirm that transgender youth experience significant harassment ranging from having their sexuality questioned to verbal and physical assault. Transgender students report verbal, relational and physical harassment, including being the target of mean rumors and being deliberately excluded. (p. 1176).

Research shows that similar patterns exist in Canada and the United Kingdom. According to the National Climate Survey on Homophobia and Transphobia in Schools in Canada, "...three-quarters of LGBTQ students feel unsafe in at least one place at school, such as change rooms, washrooms, and hallways. Transgender students are especially likely to see at least one of these places as unsafe (87%)" (as cited in Taylor, Peter, Schachter, Paquin, Beldom, Gross & McMinn, 2008, p. 3) This study found that victimization impacts queer and trans\* youth's abilities and desires to attend school, or reach out to their teachers, peers, or parents. According to this study, not only do many LGBTQ youth experience depression, many feel that they do not receive adequate support from those around them (Taylor et al., 2008). In a similar study conducted in the United Kingdom, Valentine and Skelton (2003) found that the cultural acceptance of homophobia can lead to self-destructive behaviour among youth, including: alcohol and substance abuse, running away, lying, committing crime, engaging in unsafe sex, forming unhealthy or violent relationships, withdrawing from friendship and family networks, and (attempted) suicide.

*Put this on the Map* (2010), a documentary made by Re-Teaching Gender and Sexuality, a Seattle-based organization led by queer and trans\* youth, challenges such exclusions by featuring the narratives of youth seeking to address the lack of queer visibility they see in their communities. They share their stories about their experiences in schools and within their families and point out how the challenges that they face are structural. As one anonymous youth put it: "...this is about way more than bullies in our schools, this is our school boards, our homes and our country ...this is about how people talk about us and treat us and about how we talk about ourselves and treat ourselves...It's about being queer" (Kennedy & Jordan, 2010). In other words, this youth suggests that sexual and gender identities are influenced by a complex series of institutional, political, social and cultural

discourses and that these practices define queer and trans\* youth's experiences of everyday spaces.

Others studies on queer and trans\* youth cultures have pointed out how discrimination on the basis of gender and sexuality may be further exacerbated if a youth is marginalized in other ways, amplifying the effects of classism or racism (Gosine, 2003; Grace & Wells, 2009; Ma'ayan, 2011; Weis & Fine, 2000). Blackburn and McCready (2009) explain:

...queer youth in urban communities, who are increasingly non-White, immigrant and attending schools in lower-income, under resourced communities, experience a multitude of oppressive forces that stem from their social identities as people of color, non-standard English speakers, non-Christians, and gender non-conformists (p. 228).

Given these findings, work with and on queer and trans\* youth would benefit from critical reflections being made by queer geographers on the dynamics of power and inequity that structure and intensify marginalized people's experiences. The particular combination of heteronormativity, homonormativity and adultism as they intersect with other forms of marginalization all shape the specific spatial experiences of queer and trans\* youth to create conditions of social exclusion.

### 2.3.2. VICTIM OR AGENT? QUEER & TRANS\* YOUTH AS RESEARCH SUBJECTS

While there has been little research on queer and trans\* youth in geography, researchers in other fields have written about how to study this population and the particular social challenges they face. They highlight some of the specific concerns that should be considered when researching queer and trans\* youth. For one, while negative attitudes towards queer and trans\* youth and systemic discrimination are ever-present, research frameworks that position them as 'victims' only serves to strip them of social agency.

Marshall (2010) criticizes the victim/agent dichotomy because of the way that it reinforces the understanding that youth need to be helped by benevolent adults:

Researchers in queer studies have argued that an effect of the reliance on the victim trope has been to actively undermine or de-emphasize queer youth agency by universalizing understanding of the queer youth as a subject who needs to be saved by external (often institutional and adult) agents (p. 65).

He points out that this disempowering understanding has particular currency within youth and community groups that seek to support young queer and trans\* people as a justification for their creation. Gay Straight Alliances (GSAs), for example, often position queer and trans\* youth as victims in need of protection. Hackford-Peer (2010) demonstrates that despite good intentions, the discourses produced in the establishment of GSAs in schools can informally limit possibilities for queer and trans\* youth. For Hackford-Peer (2010), the perception that queer students deserve to feel safe relies on several problematic assumptions:

It implies that all students who are not queer are indeed already safe in their schools and feel accepted and respected. This is certainly not the case as inequities due to race, class, gender, (dis)ability status, religion, language, and citizenship run rampant in educational institutions. These discourses also imply that safety means the same thing to all queer people [and] that being out, or being visible in our queerness is and should be the goal of all queer people. (p. 549-550).

She also explains that young queer people may have more pressing needs than finding a safe space for them to express their sexuality or gender, and that the focus on 'coming out' within the work that many GSAs do marginalizes queer youth who may have significant reasons for remaining closeted. She argues that these considerations should be met if GSAs want to honour and support the complicated realities that queer youth live.

Moreover, queer and trans\* also have diverse experiences that cannot be captured by the victim/agent dichotomy. As Blackburn (2009) argues, while it is important to identify the ways the positioning queer youth as victims can be harmful, understanding them as agents instead creates a false divide. She explains that all individuals occupy multiple subject

positions and that we need to recognize queer youth's "...various identity markers, such as gender, sexuality, race, and class, but also one's varying identifications across situations" (Blackburn, 2009, p. 37). This initiative is sometimes termed 'intersectionality'. As Blackburn and McCready (2009) explain, researchers should attend to the multitude of identities queer youth might have, beyond their sexual or gender identities and how these overlap, exacerbate and affect each person individually. As they put it:

If one takes these social, cultural, and economic dynamics into account, it becomes clear that, to work effectively with queer youth in urban communities, one has to embrace the complexities of their multiple identities and develop the capacity to understand the intersections among them (p.228).

In other words, understandings of queer and trans\* youth ought to consider the possible array of identities that queer and trans\* youth, beyond their sexual or gender identities, and how these relate to each other so that a more complete story might be told.

### 2.3.3. SPACES FOR QUEER & TRANS\* YOUTH

While young queer and trans\* people experience significant social exclusions, as agents of space, they challenge these exclusions by simple virtue of asserting their identities in contexts where they are not at all accepted (Driver, 2008; Lasser & Wicker, 2008; Rofes, 1989). Furthermore, in a variety of ways, queer and trans\* youth make space for themselves, not only by coming out, but by seeking each other out online, by encouraging their peers to come out themselves, or in supporting them as allies, by setting up Gay-Straight Alliances, and by participating in events like Pride Parades. As Valentine and Skelton (2003) have argued, spaces for queer and trans\* youth can offer individuals with the chance to escape discrimination or violence and find pleasure, and safely explore desire in a space that lies outside of heteronormative social surveillance.

Since youth spend a great deal of their daily lives at school, spaces created within these institutions offer a refuge from heteronormative space. For example, in their study of Gay-Straight Alliances (GSAs), Grace and Wells (2009) found that youth can enact “queer critical praxis” (p. 24), to interrupt the heteronormative climate of schools. Analyzing the personal vignettes of three gay Canadian high school students who started GSA groups at their high schools, they found that although these youth experienced various forms of harassment as out gay youth, GSAs played an important role in changing and improving their school climates. Blackburn and McCready’s (2009) research of queer youth in urban settings has also pointed out that when queer youth establish GSAs in their schools, particularly those that are multi-ethnic environments, these spaces can accommodate important cross-cultural dialogues. They also describe examples of ways that queer and trans\* students challenge the hegemony of heterosexism in urban schools. For example, they write about one young lesbian who “...found ways to make space within the parameters of her curricula by including materials and information about herself as a lesbian, which, in turn educated her classmates and teachers about the lives of queer people” (p. 226).

Other research on GSAs further demonstrates the concrete role that these spaces can play in youth’s lives. Mayo (2003) uses queer theory to explore accounts of students involved GSAs in their high schools, pointing out how these clubs offer invaluable space for youth to reconsider identities, name differences and maintain relationships, specifically because of the ‘alliance’ nature of these groups. One self-identified heterosexual student cited in Mayo’s (2003) study explains that after attending her GSA she realized that “...she is more like the gay students in her school so she more easily associates with them” (p. 32). In other words, this GSA gave queer students and their allies a space to overcome their differences and find commonalities in one other. This kind of bridging responds to the calls

put forward by Hackford-Peer (2010) and Blackburn (2009) to consider the wide array of identities and experiences youth have to build safer and more inclusive school spaces.

Community organizations outside of schools also play an important role for queer and trans\* youth. McGuire and Conover-Williams (2010) rely on data collected from focus groups with youth who use LGBTQ community organizations to identify concrete examples of ways that community organizations can support trans\* youth. They explain that community organizations can assist these young people in meeting basic needs, such as accessing appropriate health care and housing, and can advocate on individual youth's behalf for respectful and safe working environments. Community organizations can also do outreach to school administrators to encourage secure learning environments, and can help gender-variant youth negotiate the use of public bathrooms by promoting gender neutral washrooms in public spaces and by advancing public anti-harassment campaigns. McGuire and Conover-Williams (2010) also highlight the social role that such organizations play: beyond providing counselling, social support and facilitating family relationships, they also offer youth a space to hold social events, activities, and assist in workshops. One youth in their study explains the importance of community organizations by stating: "I came here to be more comfortable with my sexuality. When I realized that I was transgender I liked having the support of people to be able to come out to. I just feel more comfortable with my gender" (McGuire & Conover-Williams, 2010, p. 1). Similarly, as one youth in the *Put this on the Map* put it, community organizations are important because these spaces are "...about the power of a young queer person meeting another queer person" (Kennedy & Jordan, 2010).

The fact that queer and trans\* youth need age-responsive social spaces beyond school is substantiated by Lepischak's (2004) research on a Toronto-based LGBTQ youth organization, Supporting Our Youth (SOY). She found that SOY was popular among youth

because it provides its members with age-appropriate programming; she pointed out that many events in queer communities do not appeal to younger audiences, or that services for trans\* youth tend to be too health-care oriented. In her work Lepischak (2004) identified primary principles of SOY that make it a successful community organization for queer and trans\* youth. Their values include:

...a shared community understanding of needs; significant and diverse community involvement in visioning and direction setting; ownership by those involved in carrying out the work; as much attention to process as to out-come; and sufficient financial and other resources to undertake the work (Lepischak, 2004, p. 97).

Organizations, therefore, require reflective, accountable structures so that they can build meaningful community participation. This is critical because not only can community organizations that cater to LGBTQ youth provide individuals with important resources, events and programming, they can also offer the space for individuals to come together, and in this way, challenge the power of isolation and exclusion so commonly experienced by queer and trans\* youth.

## **2.4. CONCLUSION**

The goal of this chapter has been to review the research relevant to doing community-based research with queer and trans\* youth focusing on three primary literatures. I began by tracing the conceptual foundations that define queer geography, as well as the historical trajectory of the study of queer spaces and their exclusions. Next, I reviewed the literature on youth geographies. Finally, I examined the parallel processes of exclusion that queer and trans\* adolescents experience as sidelined subjects within queer and youth geographies, and as marginalized agents in the various spaces they occupy in their day-to-day lives. I pointed to the particularities of their exclusion, but suggested that to understand queer and trans\* youth only as adolescents facing oppression, and at best simply overcoming

it, is to impose unnecessary restrictions on them. Rather, this section demonstrates the importance of placing agency in the hands of queer and trans\* youth and offering them the tools, agency and most of all, the space to self-represent. Accordingly, a queer and trans\* youth geography might consider how young people challenge norms themselves by asserting their identities and articulating these visibly or by making LGBTQ community, while paying close attention to the tensions and contradictions within these communities, as well as the various identities of these youth. The following chapters examine how I engaged with this literature through my research with Project 10.

## **CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY**

This chapter focuses on my methodology. I present the process of working with a community organization and their participants and locate my research practices within existing geographic inquiry on adolescents as well as on queer and trans\* people in general. I begin by presenting my research framework and approaches. Specifically, I focus on the methodological changes throughout my research; I began the project with ambitions to do participatory action research [PAR], but came to complete a critical ethnographic case study. I follow descriptions of how these changes shaped my research with an overview of the process of working with P10. Here, I describe conducting qualitative interviews and a focus group with participants, and describe my participation in the regular activities of P10. I then point to some of the ethical considerations I took while working with queer and trans\* youth, and include thoughts on the limits and difficulties of this kind of research. I conclude with thoughts on my individual location and my identities within the research and consider on how these can simultaneously limit and enhance work with queer and trans\* youth.

### **3.1. RESEARCH FRAMEWORK & APPROACH**

An important component of this research, in terms of not only the methods I used, but also my access to queer and trans\* youth, was my own role as an individual. My queer identity and experiences in queer communities have given me many opportunities to reflect on the ways that gender and sexuality are performed and embodied spatially, on how these performances or practices become the material stamp of those identities, and on how narrow conceptions of desire and identity regulate possibilities for sexual and gendered expressions. Accordingly, I was particularly invested in producing meaningful research that explores and

ultimately might improve the environments in which young queer and trans\* people live their lives when I set out with my research.

As such, my project comes from a desire to rethink the process of research as producing absolute truths according to the findings of an outside researcher. I wanted to engage in collaborative research between myself and the participants; I wanted to build connections between individuals. Van Den Hoonaard (2012) describes this approach as ‘undermining the hierarchy of credibility’ (p. 36) which she explains can be done by “...giving individuals in less influential positions the opportunity to explain, in their own terms, how they experience and understand their everyday lives” (p. 36). In studies that consider the lives of youth, the ‘hierarchy of credibility’ often prioritizes the perspectives of adult professionals. Cahill (2007) confirms, “...while youth research is a burgeoning field, there is still not enough research on young people’s everyday lives from a youth perspective” (p. 297). Hopkins (2010) suggests that this conventional ordering of representations of young people, can be subverted by paying close attention to the issues that emerge through an individual’s own experiences with the understanding that marginalized people have the greatest knowledge about their own lives and that they should guide the research questions, collection of the data, and even direct the analysis (p.30). As Talburt (2006) suggests: “...in a world in which queerness is changing, adults and researchers concerned with sexuality, society, and youth may have something to learn from queer youth rather than about them” (p. 93).

My project was also inspired by existing research, in particular by one example of participatory action research [PAR] wherein Cahill (2007) conducted an in-depth research project with six young women in New York City’s Lower East Side. Her research began as a broad study to explore the everyday lives of young women and resulted in a collaborative

and creative project led by the participants that was titled “Makes Me Mad: Stereotypes of Young Urban Womyn of Colour” (p. 300). They developed a website, initiated a sticker campaign, and produced a report that addressed racial and gendered discrimination they faced in their everyday lives. Based on this experience, Cahill (2007) argued that PAR “...helps challenge social exclusion, democratize the research process, and build the capacity of young people to analyze and transform their own lives and communities” (p. 298). As I was interested in working with a similarly marginalized group of adolescents, Cahill’s example provided a fitting case to base my studies on. Furthermore, because PAR is concerned with making research an on-going process and not an end goal in itself, and because it draws upon people’s everyday lived experiences, it can readily accommodate an analysis of the ways that people interact with, create, use and shape spaces; making this framework particularly appropriate for geographic inquiry.

I also looked to Schroeder’s (2012) recent work on collaborations between queer youth and adults in school and community settings as an example of research with a similar focus. His project, situated in studies on children’s and sexuality geographies, draws on “...interview data to analyze the formation and operation of three adult-led initiatives intended to create ‘safe space’ for queer youth” (p. 635) in school-based groups in Ohio. This project provides valuable contributions to geographic research on queer youth and addresses the gap in the aforementioned sub-disciplines, though it focused largely on adults. I went into my project hoping to expand on this body of research by integrating youth’s perspectives, and in contexts outside of schools.

### 3.1.1. FROM PAR TO CRITICAL ETHNOGRAPHY

In an effort to produce a research project that prioritizes youth's self-representations, I began my research project by relying on tools proposed by PAR. Barnsley and Ellis (1992) describe PAR as "...the systematic collection and analysis of information for the purpose of taking action and making change" (p. 9), while Hinchey (2008) specifies that it is "...conducted by those inside a community rather than by outside experts" (p. 4). Van Den Hoonard (2012) describes how PAR:

...involves collaboration between researchers and participants in all phases of the research, progresses through active involvement, reflects and mobilizes participants' desires and needs, emphasizes co-construction of knowledge, promotes self- and critical awareness leading to individual, collective, and or social change (p. 37).

PAR, therefore, is also closely linked to grassroots activism, feminist and anti-racist organizing, and social justice pedagogy (Cahill, 2007). Because my research focuses on the experiences of a largely disempowered population, PAR initially offered an appropriate framework to explore queer and trans\* youth's experiences.

However, I quickly found that it is difficult to set out a research project with a definitive disciplinary lens, in this case geographic, when, in order for a project to truly be participatory, the participants ought to be defining the research themselves (Hinchey, 2008, p.4). I also found that a participatory project can only be named so if there are individuals involved who want to be actively involved. In my case, it proved difficult to engage youth in an on-going way, when the environment in which we engaged (during drop-in) was so casual<sup>6</sup>. While my research was conceived of, and began as, PAR, it developed into a critical ethnography that combined qualitative interviews, and participant observation.

Ethnography is an established, in-depth form of qualitative research, typically associated with participant observation or field research (Van Den Hoonard, 2012, p.53).

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<sup>6</sup>There were additional issues; see section 3.3. The Researched & The Researcher for more information.

Within geography, it can be “...used to understand how people create and experience their worlds through processes such as place-making, inhabiting social spaces, forging local and transnational networks, and representing and decolonising spatial imaginaries” (Watson & Till, 2010, p. 122). Ethnographic research has been criticized for producing uncritical cultural descriptions, as well as for de-contextualizing and appropriating the experiences of the researched; many researchers have made a call to ‘decolonize ethnography’ which requires more active collaboration with participants (Watson & Till, 2010, p. 122). It also involves “...having a more critical understanding of the underlying assumptions, motivations and values which inform research practices” (Tuhiwai Smith, 1999, p. 10). Many researchers address this by making a distinction between conventional and critical ethnography. As Thomas (1993) explains, conventional ethnography may reinforce social inequities, but “...critical ethnography proceeds from an explicit framework that attempts to use knowledge for social change” (p. 4). Accordingly, my research project uses some of the methods of conventional ethnography, is guided by PAR ethics, and informed by critical ethnography.

### **3.2. RESEARCH PROCESS AND METHODS**

Since I had pre-existing connections to various LGBTQ community organizations through my involvement in local queer activism and youth work<sup>7</sup>, I was already familiar with some of the staff members and volunteers of P10; in addition to providing me with a base for my research this background facilitated my contact with queer and trans\* teenagers. Van Den Hoonaard (2012) confirms that this kind of knowledge and connection facilitates collaboration and enhances the researcher’s ability to connect with participants (p. 84).

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<sup>7</sup>For example, I had worked with another community organization for youth, Head & Hands, on a sexual health education program for several years prior, and had done partnerships with P10 in the past.

### 3.2.1. WORKING IN A COMMUNITY SETTING

P10 began in 1991 and ran through a Youth and Family Centre in down town Montréal until around 2006. Their services initially focused on HIV prevention and promoting safer sex practices among young gay men, however they quickly extended the scope of their work to supporting lesbians and bisexual youth and eventually the entire spectrum. P10 left this community organization due to differences in attitudes; P10 is committed to supporting youth using a harm reduction approach, which was incompatible with the zero-drug tolerance policies promoted by the community organization. P10 moved into a small community space in Notre-Dame-de-Grace, a largely residential and Anglophone neighbourhood until they relocated to the Gay and Lesbian Community Centre in Montréal's Gay Village. They are moving into a new space for LGBTQ youth being opened this year on the western edge of the Village, operated by the Montréal Youth Coalition Against Homophobia.

P10 is run by 2 full time staff members, and is supported by anywhere between 1 and 3 interns at a time, as well as occasional part time contract employees. They rely largely on the support from volunteers, most of whom get trained in active listening, anti-racism, anti-oppression and youth empowerment before working with youth themselves. P10 uses the harm reduction approach to "...facilitate the empowerment of youth at individual, community, and institutional levels with a particular emphasis on supporting individuals and groups who experience multiple and intersecting oppressions" (Project 10, 2013). Their services are free, confidential and made available in English and French.

I began the process of working with P10 in February 2012 by meeting with staff members to propose my research project, discuss their ideas, and assess the needs of the

organization. Accessing these ‘gatekeepers’, “...individuals who have the power to deny or grant access to social settings” (Van Den Hoonaard, 2012, p. 63), was relatively straightforward because of my pre-existing relationship to the organization. In addition to the benefits outline above, this meant that the staff already trusted my intentions; I was quickly invited to present my research proposal to P10’s board. During the two board meetings I attended I introduced myself, described my preliminary research questions, and got feedback and direction regarding the kind of research they saw as relevant. I also worked to provide the staff and board with information on the potential benefits (providing evidence for their future funding applications, giving participants a chance to get involved in research etc. ... ) the research for P10. Since board members at P10 include staff, interns, volunteers, community members and participants, in other words, not just the ‘gatekeepers’, my participation at these meetings had the added benefit of making it that much easier for me to attend drop-ins to recruit interviewees because I was already a recognizable face at P10.

### 3.2.2. FOCUS GROUPS OR INTERVIEWS?

Through meetings and conversations with staff, board members and volunteers it was decided that I would conduct one focus group with four to five youth participants to identify the key concerns of the youngest participants attending drop-in. Before conducting my focus group all of my questions were presented to the staff and board who reviewed them for relevance, language, and appropriateness. I adopted this approach from Cahill (2007) who found that “...for the [participants] to ‘own’ the process it [is] imperative that they [are] involved in defining the focus and purpose of the project from the ground up” (p. 300). While I initiated the project, I consulted, listened to, and followed the interests of P10 and

their participants as much as possible. However, because it would have been too difficult to receive on-going feedback from the youth I was most interested in hearing from (those aged 14-18), we decided, in the initial stages of the research, that consulting the staff and board and conducting one focus group was adequate for defining the research project in an accountable way.

We chose interviews and focus groups as the methods that I would use; these tend to be youth-friendly because participants get to self-represent and use their own words. Hopkins (2010) summarizes the role and qualities of focus groups in research on youth:

[Focus groups] can be useful in that they can help to develop ideas, challenge themes and find out about the contested issues in young people's lives through the dialogue created in the group. Some young people may be more comfortable speaking in a group setting and regard it as less threatening than an individual interview. However group discussions can also be hard to recruit to, challenging to convene, and certain types of young people may dominate the discussion (p. 38).

He also argues that focus groups can make youth feel more comfortable because participants outnumber the researcher. He also points out that discussion fostered in a focus group may be enjoyable and the format tends to promote an ethic of cooperation, mutual aid and collaboration. There are, however, some limits; within focus groups the dynamics between participants can cause problems and the lack of privacy may make it more difficult to discuss sensitive topics.

The focus group and the individual interviews had slightly different objectives and outcomes. In the focus group, I asked participants to share their ideas<sup>8</sup> about queer spaces in the city, in their high schools and in community organizations. I found that the interview made space for a fruitful, but casual discussion; it was difficult to follow up with more complicated ideas when they were presented and the participants frequently went off-topic. Nonetheless, the focus group allowed me to develop an interview guide for individual

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<sup>8</sup> See Appendix A Sample Focus Group Guide or Appendix B for a version in French.

interviews, which was later approved by staff members and emailed to the board for feedback. We decided that I would interview participants individually because individual interviews are fitting for "...accessing deep understanding and experiences, exploring complex behaviours and motivations and, through being individual, they give priority to individual young people's experiences" (Hopkins, 2010, p. 35). Therefore, the interviews offered the opportunity to give participants the opportunity to describe their own unique experiences.

The interviews and the focus group, took place during P10's drop in, since this was the format requested by the staff and board. This arrangement meant that absolute anonymity could not be guaranteed, in that interviewees might be seen entering or exiting the interview. However, as Barnsley and Ellis (1992) point out "...the research project must also take into account any other special needs people have" (p. 12). In my case, for many of the youth attending P10, the drop-in was the only space considered safe for them to discuss or express their sexuality or gender. Accessing queer and trans\* youth presents particular challenges that make them more difficult to work with than the already hard to access population of 'youth' in general. Valentine, Butler, and Skelton (2001) explain:

Commonly, academics carrying out research with young people are able to contact them and to work with them either at school or in the 'family' home. Yet, the very nature of lesbian and gay young people's vulnerability means that both of these environments are potentially difficult spaces in which to access and work with this group (p. 120).

The space where I conducted my research was, therefore, essential, not only to access this population, but also to provide a safe space for their participation.

### 3.2.3. PARTICIPATING WITH P10

I began regularly attending P10 drop-ins in July 2012 and continued throughout the fall until late November 2012 to interview participants. P10 holds their weekly drop-ins in the basement of the building, in a space they rent from of a local AIDS advocacy organization. Youth usually begin showing up for drop-in around 6:30pm every Thursday; they start by coming to the kitchen to get (free) dinner, where they sign in with a volunteer. Trained volunteers are present during drop-in to spend time with the participants, monitor activities and to keep the space comfortable and clean, and they are also available for active listening, and offer (free) bus tickets. A given drop-in can see anywhere between 15 and 40 youth; in 2012 the average number of participants at drop-in was 25 and the average number of volunteers was 6. If the weather is nice, participants hang out on the steps outside of the building or play games on the lawn; otherwise they play cards, do crafts or just sit, talk and snack with their friends inside. Around 7:00pm participants are invited to join in an informal go-around. Those who wish to participate sit in a circle on the couches and cushions in the common area and present their name, preferred pronoun and answer the weekly ice-breaker question. Following the go-around, people make announcements regarding upcoming events, share details about an activity organized that evening (for example a sexual health education workshop or banner-making session), distribute information about a relevant campaign, or sometimes tell a personal story. Afterwards some youth participate in the planned activity, others choose to hang out with their friends; none of the activities at P10 drop-in are mandatory.

If you look around P10's drop-in at any given time it is incredibly clear how diverse the group is. There will be individuals between 14 and 25 from many different cultural and ethnic backgrounds, varied presentations of gender and sexuality, and people embodying a

wide-range of physical and mental abilities. While the majority of the participants speak English at P10 with each other, many speak in French or switch between the two; many of the youth are bilingual, and several speak in other languages as well. Some of the youth have piercings, some wear costumes as everyday apparel, others dress in visibly sub-cultural attire, and it is not uncommon for a youth to show off a new tattoo to other who are hanging out in the space. In such a diverse group the environment is very welcoming. Bertha, one of the participants, described the atmosphere in our interview:

It feels like a place where people come and, like, people who are lesbian, gay or bisexual or, like what I feel like, that when they come here they feel like accepted [...] <sup>9</sup> It's kind of like a place where they feel like they belong. <sup>10</sup>

In this space differences are normalized in a number of ways, for example, through affirmative, non-judgemental language adopted by participants, staff members and volunteers alike and sometimes through explicit ground-rules set out during the go-around. Another participant, Parker, pointed out how P10's welcoming environment feels different than other, everyday spaces. He explained that participants who come to drop-in "...are just looking to get away from the world around us if you want; the world where it's not always safe to be who you are. And then we come here and we get to be who we are".

There were some weeks when I did not interview anyone, and instead played games or chatted with volunteers and participants. Van Den Hoonaard (2012) recalls that, "...by participating in the daily routines [the researcher] gained first-hand experience of what daily life is like for his participants" (p. 67). I found this to be true; my involvement in regular activities at the drop-ins enriched my understanding of the participants' regular activities,

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<sup>9</sup> I use [...] throughout the thesis to signify parts of text or conversation that I have removed.

<sup>10</sup> All quotes from participants will be presented in a way that attempts to convey their voice; any 'errors' in vocabulary or grammar have been included.

gave many of them the chance to get to know me before participating in an interview, and offered me a context for knowing them as individuals. For example, Parker was a participant who was very shy in our interview; he second-guessed himself a lot and spoke softly and cautiously. However, as soon as we left the room he began roughhousing with his friends and making jokes. If I had not been around to witness that social interaction I would not have understood the multi-dimensions of his identity.

### 3.2.4. CONDUCTING & REFLECTING ON INTERVIEWS

I found participants to interview by introducing myself in a friendly and informal way to those in the space. I would present myself as a researcher and ask if the participant was eighteen or younger, and if so, if they were interested in participating in a research project on LGBTQ youth's perceptions of different spaces in Montréal. I would always mention that the interview was compensated and gave them an estimate of how long it would take. A lot of the time youth sought me out themselves because either they had read on P10's website that I would be there, or they had heard about my project through a friend or volunteer. I found that the youth were interested in participating for a variety of reasons. Some were motivated by the compensation of \$20, others were enthusiastic about helping P10, some wanted to do what their friends were doing, and others explained that they liked getting my focused attention on their story. Each week P10's staff gave me access to an office where I could conduct the interviews privately. I was always sure to ask the participant if they felt comfortable in a room alone with me, and if I could close the door. Before beginning the interview we would read through the consent form together; I made sure to leave space for the participant to ask questions. I conducted all of the interviews in English, however, I made it clear that if they wished to communicate in French they could. Three

participants spoke French within their interview, mostly to clarify certain ideas when they were at a loss for words, although they all chose to speak in English the majority of the time.

The interviews (excluding the time it took for us to read through the consent form) lasted anywhere between twenty-five minutes and an hour, and I held between one and three interviews a night. I conducted eighteen individual interviews and one focus group with four participants. I abandoned the data from one interview<sup>11</sup> and one individual interviewee had also participated in the focus group<sup>12</sup>. I decided to stop recruiting individuals for interviews once I found that I attended P10 several times without meeting any more youth between 14 and 18 who wanted to participate.

The interview format was semi-structured and the interview questions were revised on several occasions<sup>13</sup>. While I initially aimed to have the format unstructured, I found that over the course of the interviews I needed to come prepared with many interview questions and prompts, as most of the participants required a significant amount of encouragement to share their ideas. This meant that sometimes the interviews felt somewhat more structured than I had hoped; nonetheless I tried to let their ideas and comments guide the overall direction of the interview by paying close attention to the themes they identified and encouraging them to develop ideas that seemed to matter to them.

For the analysis, I let the participants chose the pseudonym I would use in my research in an attempt to give participants some agency in how they would be represented. Some of the youth chose not to and gave me permission to use my discretion, and some used names that were too close to the name they actually used; I chose to change those in an

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<sup>11</sup> See section 3.3.3. The Scope & Focus of Research for more information on this case.

<sup>12</sup> Due to the qualitative differences between the focus group and the individual interview this overlap did not compromise my findings.

<sup>13</sup> See Appendix A for a Sample Focus Group Discussion Guide, Appendix C for a Sample Interview Guide.

effort to keep things as anonymous as possible. Table 1 lists the pseudonym of each participant and the date of our interview<sup>14</sup>.

The research also had a participant observation component. While I gained a great deal of insight from attending P10 drop-ins and spending time with the youth at these events, I realized that I needed a structured way of recording these experiences. Therefore, I kept a journal to keep a record of these experiences to contribute to my ethnography. After each time I attended drop-in I would return home to make notes in my journal. I included descriptions of specific situations, I recorded quotes and moments that stood out and tried to write out what the evening had felt like. I also highlight problems I had or questions I needed to follow-up on with P10 staff.

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<sup>14</sup> Rather than cite the date of each interview throughout the thesis, this table can be used as a reference guide.

**Table 1: Dates of Participant Interviews**

<b>Pseudonym</b>	<b>Interview Date</b>
Beatrice	November 15, 2012
Bertha	September 27, 2012
Corinne	July 12, 2012
Elisabet	October 25, 2012
Gabriel (Focus Group)	May 10, 2012
Jack	July 19, 2012
Jean-Luc	July 12, 2012
Lee (Focus Group)	May 10, 2012
Marc-André	September 13, 2012
Melyssa	October 4, 2012
Parker	September 13, 2012
Payton	October 4, 2012
Samuel	July 19, 2012
Sora (Focus Group)	May 10, 2012
Steph	September 27, 2012
Skye	October 4, 2012
Theresa	September 27, 2012
Tommy	November 8, 2012
Tristan (Focus Group/Individual)	May 10, 2012 & July 26, 2012
Willow	July 12, 2012

### **3.3. THE RESEARCHED & THE RESEARCHER**

Working with queer and trans\* youth poses several ethical constraints both because they are under age, but also because of the stigma that continues to be associated with these identities. As such, I begin this section by considering the risks participants faced by contributing to my research. On the other hand, because I am interested in promoting research that does not only emphasize their vulnerabilities, I present the benefits that participating in the research process may have brought to some of the youth. I encountered a number of obstacles in my research, which I have already begun to describe in this chapter,

but I present more of these in this section. I conclude this chapter with careful reflections on my own location within this research project in an effort to consider the limits of my project, but also to present the dynamic aspect of the exchange involved social research.

### 3.3.1. RISKS

Research with queer and trans\* youth presents multiple ethical issues. For one, in many contexts, young queer and trans\* people may be put at risk by participating in a study about sexuality and gender due to homophobia and the prevalent practice of policing gender and sexuality amongst teenagers (Skelton, 2008; Valentine et al., 2001). For example, participation in a study such as mine might put some youth at risk for social stigmatization if their identity was somehow discovered or disclosed. Furthermore, there could be concerns about the emotional well-being of the participants, as the research process might have required them to think about experiences of discrimination or marginalized, which could have caused some degree of emotional distress (Skelton, 2008). Because of these risks I was careful to use discretion, follow the lead of staff and volunteers, and listen to the youth. Barnsley and Ellis (1992) note "...it is the people who share the community's concerns who will know best how to be sensitive and respectful" (p.12). My queer identity and familiarity with these organizations meant that I was aware of what might be sensitive issues for the participants, as well as with the appropriate language and practices used in these spaces; however I recognize these were risks involved.

I tried to minimize participants' discomfort in answering any questions by developing the interview guide according to the feedback and ideas of P10's board and staff,

and by seeking the perspectives of youth through the focus group<sup>15</sup>. To further reduce some of the risks I indicated these in the consent form<sup>16</sup> and emphasized that the specificities of their identities would be kept confidential.

Informed consent by interview participants through P10 was obtained both from the individuals who participated in focus groups and interviews, as well as from the staff and board members responsible<sup>17</sup>. I also came to all focus groups, discussions, and interviews equipped with a list of affordable counselling and mental health resources<sup>18</sup> and gave these to each participant when I gave them their copy of the consent form. I also consistently reminded all participants that if they regretted revealing any information that I would omit this from the transcripts and destroy any information they wish to be removed. Finally, because I was interested in promoting the participation of youth at every level of my research and because I wanted to authentically represent participants, I contacted each one individually through email<sup>19</sup> (they provided me with an address in the consent form) to confirm the details, quality, and accuracy of descriptions or quotes shared during the interview before including them in the final version of my thesis.

### 3.3.2. BENEFITS

While there were some risks associated with my research project, participants could also benefit from participating. In fact, I found that very few of the participants shared concerns related to the risks outlined above. Many of them asked that I use their name

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<sup>15</sup> See Appendix A for a Sample Focus Group Discussion Guide and Appendix C for a Sample Interview Guide.

<sup>16</sup> See Appendix D for a Sample English Consent Form and Appendix E for one in French.

<sup>17</sup> See Appendix F for a Sample Consent Form to Facilitate Recruitment.

<sup>18</sup> See Appendix G for the Resource List of Affordable Counselling Services.

<sup>19</sup> See Appendix H for a sample follow-up email.

rather than a pseudonym because they wanted people to know how they felt about P10<sup>20</sup>. Hopkins (2010) points out that there are many reasons why youth might wish to participate in a research project: they might be interested in the topic of research and want to develop their own ideas, and thus see the project as a good opportunity; they may also find that taking part in the research process is therapeutic; it may also be a source of empowerment (p.33). Finally, I found that because my research project was intended to assist the community organization that they were involved in, many participants wanted to help by participating in the interview.

### 3.3.3. THE SCOPE AND FOCUS OF MY RESEARCH

My research with a community organization was not a seamless process. I revisited the scope of my research on several occasions and I changed methodology. I also negotiated some concerns as they emerged through the process. Finally, my role as a researcher shaped my interactions every step of the way; for better or worse.

When I set out to conduct research with community organizations, I had also hoped to work with Jeunesse Lambda, a Francophone organization similar to P10 that holds weekly discussion nights. However, I was not able to access this organization; it was primarily my connections to P10 that allowed me to access their organization so easily and I did not have the same relationship to Jeunesse Lambda. This made my research process less complicated, in that I had fewer people to coordinate with, but it meant that I missed out on hearing from youth in a francophone setting, as they might have had unique, culturally distinct reflections. There were some francophone youth who participated in my interviews, some who had even

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<sup>20</sup>I informed them I could not use their actual name due to the ethics protocol of my university. This does indicate one of the limits of traditional research; the 'subjects' are not credited for their ideas directly, but the researcher is.

attended Jeunesse Lambda at times, but overall I did not explore differences between organizations or study the kind of cultures created in these spaces. Anglophone and francophone youth might feel very differently about the city and where they feel comfortable expressing their sexual and gender identities, as the neighbourhoods in Montréal have distinct characteristics that parallel these linguistic differences. Since I only consulted youth from P10 a focus on the differences between LGBTQ youth organizations is regrettably absent in my analysis.

As I described in the section on research frameworks I had initially conceived of the project as participatory, but found it difficult to employ this methodology. In addition to the issues I previously outlined, I had a few other troubles. When I was still hoping to coordinate a participatory project I asked the participants in the focus group and in the first few interviews if they would be interested in participating in a project that addressed the themes we covered in the interviews, and if so, what form they could see it taking. A participant in the focus group suggested making a video, which received immediate approval from his peers. When I suggested this to other participants during our interviews, the idea was repeatedly met with enthusiastic responses. I, therefore, invited an organization that offers digital literacy workshops to community organizations to work with P10's participants. It was eventually decided that this group would come to the P10's drop-in for four weeks in the fall and train youth on how to make videos. I saw this as a great opportunity to get the teenagers I had interviewed to elaborate on their perceptions of safety and space, inclusion and exclusion, and possibly create a visual geography of their lives as LGBTQ teenagers. However, communications between myself, staff at P10 and the coordinator of the video project was complicated, and through a series of miscommunications, what I initially

understood as a component of my research project became coordinated by P10's staff and presented to participants as an activity of P10's drop-in, separate from my research.

In a way, this was an ultimate form of participation: the community organization interpreted and engaged with the video project in a way that suited their frameworks, and while it was at the expense of my own inclusion as a researcher, it allowed them to engage with the videos in ways that were most meaningful to them. In the end, the youth who participated in the training produced videos based on their own personal concerns, imaginations and ideas; these were not in any way based on my research questions. As time passed, it became apparent that the possibility of initiating a truly participatory research project was too difficult; I adjusted and decided to rely on my observations based on my experiences at P10, as well as data from the focus group and interviews to represent the geographies of these young queer and trans\* people.

Another difficulty I encountered occurred when I wound up interviewing a participant who identified as heterosexual and was a cisgender woman, but had misunderstood the purpose of my interview. At the time I was not sure whether or not she was questioning her sexual or gender identities and did not want to cause her to feel disrespected by suggesting to her that her participation was illegitimate by ending the interview. However, as the interview progressed it was clear that she did not have any doubts. She even explicitly explained that she was attending P10 as an ally to her friend who was a lesbian and who came to drop-in regularly; she wanted to be interviewed because she knew her friend had been. Moreover, she pointed out that another one of her friends, who was not out at their school, but identified herself as pansexual to me, had participated. With the added interest of protecting the identity of her peer, I chose to complete the interview but exclude this data from my analysis. While much of what she shared was thoughtful, I

wanted this research project to make space for voices from the affected communities I was studying.

Finally, I want to explicitly reflect on my position as a researcher in this process. The process of doing research is a dynamic one; it is important to critically identify our role within it. Nagar and Geiger (2007) suggest that, more than simply describing one's position, it is important to focus on "...how [a researcher's] identities intersect with institutional, geopolitical, and material aspects of their positionality" (p. 268). I have already pointed the ways my own identity inspired, facilitated and shaped my project, but who I am, how I was perceived and how I interacted with others, had an impact on who decided to participate in my interviews in the first place, and how they expressed themselves in the interview (Rose, 1997). I am a young ciswoman. I am a bilingual Anglophone. I am white, queer, and present as feminine. I have some small, but visible tattoos and piercings, and had an asymmetrically styled hair cut at the time of our interview. I tried to be approachable and maintain the relaxed and casual atmosphere of drop-in during our interviews; mirroring language and dressing casually, though I cannot know how I was perceived socially. However, the way the youth understood my race and gender, my age, my sexuality, my speech, my behaviour, and my attire influenced who would, and how they would relate to me. Moreover, these interactions are inextricably linked with power, and the least I can do as someone with more of it in some ways, is think about it and be conscious of it. Finally, how I perceived each participant shaped the way I spoke with them, the words I used, as well as my body language; this was a dynamic interpersonal process of locating each other.

### 3.4. DATA ANALYSIS & DISSEMINATION

As I completed the interviews I transcribed each of them and thoroughly studied each to identify the key concerns and re-emerging themes expressed by the participants. I identified these themes as meaningful according both to the frequency with which they emerged throughout each interview, but I also paid attention to the emphasis participants put on certain ideas when I listened to the transcripts. I coupled findings from the interviews and focus group with notes I made on my observations and interactions with participants during P10's drop-ins. This ethnographic approach provided me with multiple sources of information on what matters most to the youth attending this community space. These themes were then systematically organized in ways that articulated their geographies of experience; the structure of my thesis mirrors the spaces identified as significant by the youth: the body, everyday- and community- spaces. While the 'micro-geographies' (Elwood & Martin, 2000, p. 649) that I produced are not useful in terms of making generalizations about all LGBTQ urban teenagers in Montréal, they might "...provide a contextual map of issues underlying broad events of cultural, economic, social, and political significance" (Hunter 2009, p. 139), for young queer and trans\* people. I present my results and analysis hand-in-hand because, as MacKian (2010) explains, analysis "...is something that saturates our entire practice from the first spark of an idea to the final consumption of outputs by our audiences" (p. 358-359).

In addition to, hopefully, contributing to queer and youth geographies by writing an academic thesis, my findings will also be developed in the form of a youth-friendly report that identifies the main ideas expressed by participants. The report will be made available to interviewees and youth attending drop-in, as well as to P10 staff, volunteers and board

members. Beyond this, I will encourage youth to disseminate the findings in ways that make sense to them.

However, my main goal will be to circulate the report to relevant community organizations. The report will highlight the importance of providing youth with safe spaces, and present suggestions for doing so. It will be done in collaboration with voluntary participants from P10. After I finished collecting my interviews and attending P10 drop-in I wanted, and was encouraged by staff and board members, to stay involved. So, I remained part of P10's community in different ways. For one, I joined the board of the Montréal Youth Coalition Against Homophobia [MYCAH], of which P10 is a member. MYCAH connects community organizations that work with LGBT youth to "...help create safe environments that support all youth, no matter what their sexual orientation may be, in an inclusive society that is open to differences and to the diversity of sexual orientations" (MYCAH, 2013). This year members of MYCAH were working on opening a safe space for LGBTQ youth. My engagement with this project was a tangible way for me to extend on findings in my research. I also stayed in close contact with staff members to check in about my research, but also to help out with some projects. For example, I worked on the evaluation component of a peer-support project P10 organized. Finally, I also got involved in a volunteer planning committee for P10 summer events. This participation was a way for me to remain connected to participants and give back to the communities that I had worked with.

### **3.5. CONCLUSION**

Throughout this chapter I framed my methodology both within my specific research and within existing research. I highlighted my shifting methodological approach and

described my experience working with P10. I then situated P10 as a space of belonging; as a site for critical geographic inquiry in the lives of young queer and trans\* people. I then presented some of the challenges I faced throughout my research and considered my role as an individual within the project. I concluded with thoughts on how to make use of this research accountably. It is my hope that this chapter can supply meaningful insights on how to engage in community-based work with youth in addition to simply outlining the context for the following chapters.

## CHAPTER IV: WHERE IS IDENTITY LOCATED?

### THE BODY AS A SITE OF YOUTH IDENTITY CONSTRUCTION

The body is a meaningful location from which to consider the intersections between identities and the spatialized experiences that they constitute. Longhurst (2001) explains the importance of considering individual's embodied experiences, by pointing out that, "...we all have [a body], or at least we all are one. We are all born, we all die. Although these things appear to be universal our embodied experiences are unique" (p. 11). Moreover, the significance of bodies shift in space and time, according to the particular context they occupy, making their particularities especially critical to consider. Kenworthy Teacher (1999) explains that: "...bodies occupy space but they are also spaces in their own right" (p. 7).

Reflections on embodied experiences can be taken up in a number of ways due to the multiple ways the body can be explored from a spatial perspective; as individual with differences, as bodies existing in space and time and as spaces in their own right. As such, the body offers a critical site to explore differences, tease out identities and understand individual self-representations. This may be particularly relevant when focusing on adolescence, as this is a time of physical, emotional and social development, defined by fluid, changing articulations of identity; studying the 'body' as a space that hosts these changes may offer meaningful insights (Harper, Brodsky & Bruce, 2012).

I begin this chapter on the body as a location by introducing each of the participants' sexual and gender identities, focusing on the ways that these are, in many cases, shifting, fluid and in transition. I follow this with a discussion of the differences between participants in terms of socio-economic, cultural and racial diversity within the group, paying attention to the tensions and disparities that these imply. Talburt (2006) explains, "...queer youth live daily lives, experience pleasure, engage in a variety of relations, take up multiple positions,

subvert and conform” (p.93). As such, I present the varied personal identities, interests and histories that shape each of the participants as individuals. Many of the youth I interviewed rejected the entire notion of labeling themselves; I include this perspective throughout this chapter, and contrast it with the experiences of those who felt that labeling their identities mattered to them. Overall, this chapter explores the diverse ways in which youth articulate, make sense of and negotiate their embodied experiences. It should also act as reference for the following chapters since I present fairly detailed portraits of each participant of my research.

The sections of the chapter are organized largely according themes that surfaced through my research and the result is a “formulaic construction of social reality” (Les, 1996, p. 29). I present the material within this format with some amount of resignation, because as one of the participants, Elisabet, pointed out:

I feel like a person’s made of different factors, you can’t just pin point at one thing, we’re not that simple: it’s more complex than that. You can’t just say: she’s that, she’s that. We put tags all that time so it’s easier.

While I try to illustrate some of these complexities and contradictions within my descriptions of the youth I interviewed, interpretation calls for a schematized organization of my findings. However, it is this sentiment expressed by Elisabet that describes the density of a person’s being that I try to convey throughout the chapter.

#### **4.1. WHERE DO IDENTITIES INTERSECT?**

Embodied identities exist, interact and are performed spatially in a number of ways. Hopkins (2010) identifies how identities are communicated through particular practices and markers: “...young people’s bodies are the locations where they express their identities through clothing choice, hairstyle and perhaps other bodily markings, such as jewellery,

make-up, tattoos and other accessories” (p. 74). These indicators can, in turn, be interpreted in multiple ways through social interactions according to the context in which people find themselves. Imagine a gender non-conforming youth in a high school setting where strict gender roles are socially reinforced; in that space the youth might appear as an outsider. However, in a space like P10 where participants, staff and volunteers embody a wide array of gender identities this same youth’s embodied identity would be unremarkable. Not only do spaces affect the way that identities are embodied and interpreted, but youth’s identities can also shape the meaning of places. Imagine a group of queer youth who continually hang out in a given park: that space may come to be seen as a site for them, even though it may have initially been conceived of differently by city or neighbourhood planners. In these ways identities and spaces are mutually constituted. For young queer and trans\* people whose experiences are frequently defined by how they differ from the norm, and for those whose embodied expression is a way of communicating diverse identities, the body is a meaningful place to begin thinking about spatialized experiences and the multiple realities these can constitute.

P10 brings together youth who identify within the LGBTQ spectrum and the varied perspectives shared during our interviews and in my observations at drop-in reflect the reality of difference that exists within this broad community. The youth I interviewed not only embodied diverse expressions of gender, sexuality, race and class; they also communicated distinct perspectives on their identities, the significance of these identities and even the very concept of identity itself. To navigate these differences, Table 2 presents how each of the youth described their gender identity, pronoun, sexuality, age and cultural/racial identity.

**Table 2: Demographics of Interview and Focus Group Participants**

<b>Pseudonym</b>	<b>Gender (pronoun)</b>	<b>Sexuality</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Race/Culture</b>
Beatrice	Female (she)	Lesbian	16	White (Italian)
Bertha	Female (she)	Pansexual	17	First Nations Cree
Corinne	Female (she)	Bisexual	17	White
Elisabet	Female (she)	Questioning/“Likes girls”/Queer	18	Born in Europe to South American Parents/Immigrant
Gabriel	Male (he)	Gay	16	Romanian
Jack	Male (he)	Gay/Bisexual	17	White
Jean-Luc	Male (he)	Gay	18	White (Irish, French Canadian)
Lee	Gender Neutral (they)	Questioning/Bisexual	17	White
Marc-André	Male (he)	Gay	18	White
Melyssa	Female (they)	Lesbian/Gay/Pan-Bisexual	16	Chinese (Adopted to White parents)
Parker	Gender Fluid/Androgynous (he)	Straight/ Lesbian	17	White
Payton	Female (she)	Pansexual	16	White
Samuel	Male (Trans) (he)	Straight	16	White, Cree
Sora	Female (she)	Lesbian	18	Black
Steph	Female (she)	Gay	15	Chinese, French Canadian
Skye	Female (she)	Bisexual	16	White
Theresa	Female (she)	Lesbian	16	Chilean
Tommy	Gender queer (ze)	Gay	18	Sri Lankan (Tamil)
Tristan	Male (he)	Gay	17	White (Italian, Eastern European)
Willow	Female/Gender Fluid (she)	Lesbian	18	White

Throughout this chapter, I frame sexuality and gender as constituted through other aspects of youth’s identities and identify intersections between these categories and patterns of race, ability and class. As I suggested in a previous chapter, the concept of

‘intersectionality’<sup>21</sup> (Crenshaw, 1989) offers a useful lens through which to consider these multiple subject positions. As a reminder, Nash (2008) explains how intersectionality is a notion that proposes that: “subjectivity is constituted by mutually reinforcing vectors of race, gender, class and sexuality” (p. 2). Brown (2012) identifies the emergence of this sometimes theoretical, at times colloquially-used term:

Allegedly countering identitarianism and essentialism, it conveyed the connections between- and limitations of- one-dimensional, identity-based structures of inequality and oppression. By solely focusing on one axis of oppression and social inequality, researchers risked erasing or discounting other simultaneous ones that positioned individuals quite differently from one another (p. 542).

While ‘intersectionality’, as a concept, was initially employed with noble intentions, many geographers have since criticized the “add-on model” of intersectional research on marginalized communities. This use is often viewed as essentialist (McCall, 2005; Nash, 2008), and critiqued for the way it positions certain oppressions over others (Probyn, 1996; Yuval-Davis, 2006). Valentine (2007) identifies not only the way intersectionality “implicitly ranks difference” (p. 13), but calls for a more generalized rethinking of intersectionality among geographers. She explains that we should consider: “...race, class, and gender not as naturally given or socially and culturally constructed categories but rather emergent properties that are not reducible to biological essences or role expectations” (Valentine, 2007, p. 13). With these insights in mind, throughout this chapter I ask how do youth’s gender and sexuality intersect with their other identities and backgrounds, and how these shape their spatial experiences?

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<sup>21</sup> See section Victim or Agent? Queer & Trans\* Youth as Research Subjects for background.

## 4.2. GENDER & SEXUALITY

For the group of youth I interviewed, it is difficult to categorize their identities because, for most of these participants, their identities were shifting or in transition. There were some youth who were sure of their gender or sexual identities, but, in some cases, a participant's identity changed within our interview, and in other instances, I received emails months after our interview clarifying a given identity. I found that many youth preferred to describe, rather than define their gender and sexual identities according to existing categories.

Consequently, I introduce participants loosely according to the sexual and gender identities they used, keeping in mind the fluid nature of these concepts. I begin by describing the youth who identified with certainty as lesbian, gay or bisexual. I then described the process of becoming, the limits of adopting a label, and some of the articulations of sexuality that do not fit within any identity exactly. After thoughts on sexuality, I move into a discussion of gender: how it intersects with sexuality, on how it is read by others and on how it can shape an individual's sense of self.

Before I continue with this section I want to make one reflection on terminology. When I set out to establish a geography that mirrored the realities of LGBTQ youth I decided to use the terms 'queer' and 'trans\*' to remain inclusive. After interviewing several individuals I discovered that very few of these youth identified as 'queer' (several were, however, trans\* identified). I hesitated, but decided to continue using 'queer' when I want to convey a general description, and as an umbrella term for the reasons I set out above. However, I use the identities that participants used for themselves when I described them individually, and in fact emphasize the importance of people's choices. There are constant

shortcomings in the terms we have to convey the complexities of the people they are used to describe, the best I can do is acknowledge these and support individual's identities.

#### 4.2.1. L-G-B IDENTITIES

In some cases, the sexual identities of my participants were settled. In our interview, Willow immediately and unquestionably described herself as a lesbian; Sora called herself a 'flamboyant lesbian'; Theresa simply said she was a lesbian without qualifying or questioning it; finally, Beatrice was very confident in her sexuality explaining, "I'm a lesbian, so I'm fully gay, not bisexual or anything else". Gabriel, Marc-André and Tristan identified themselves undoubtedly as gay young men. Jean-Luc began his interview by confidently describing himself: "I'm gay male, I'm a gay man, I'm a gay boy [...] I'm gay, I'm very proud of being gay". Tommy identified as gender-queer and as gay. Corinne and Skye both identified as bisexual, and Bertha and Payton described themselves as pansexual<sup>22</sup>. However, like many of the participants, Skye explained that she preferred not to label her sexuality: "I don't label myself. Even if I'm bisexual, I just say love: it's love. I don't really see why it has to be genderized (sic) by anything".

This 'love is love' approach to sexuality was echoed by a number of the participants. For example, when I asked Bertha what her identity meant to her, she replied:

If I like someone then like, I kinda like, the love really blinds me I guess. I don't care if the person is, like, black or white, or like girl or boy or anything, like that doesn't matter to me because like I think, to me, love is something really precious and it can't be ignored.

Similarly, Payton described that being pansexual meant that she was open to dating anyone regardless of the gender. She explained how this identity spoke to attitude toward life in

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<sup>22</sup> See Glossary for definition.

general: “I don’t mean like it identifies who I am, but technically it does because like it basically means I’m open to anything pretty much”. While their understandings of sexuality were open, Corinne, Skye, Bertha and Payton were sure of this openness.

#### 4.2.2. BEING AND BECOMING QUEER

Other participants expressed irresolute feelings about their sexuality. Melyssa began the interview by saying they<sup>23</sup> identified as a lesbian. However, as the interview went on, they described their coming-out process, which told a more complex story:

I thought I was bisexual, and even now I’ll be like: ‘Oh maybe I’m bisexual’- I’m not sure [...] I’m probably a lesbian [...] I mean I guess if I could I just wouldn’t even put a label on myself. If I like you: I like you. I don’t know if I’m pansexual [...] If I was bisexual or like pansexual or whatever I have a massive preference towards girls. There might be like one guy who could kind of swing it, like, kind of an exception.

In this case, Melyssa who had initially seemed very confident about their sexuality actually had a more nuanced relationship to this identity, hesitating to use a label at all. In another case, Steph did not exactly express any confusion, but like Melyssa, hesitated toward classifying herself in any way: “I don’t really label my sexuality, but if I had to say, I’m gay, I’m female”. Like Steph, Elisabet did not identify as a lesbian outright, and instead directly described her ambivalence toward labels:

I’m female, I can’t put a, like a tag on myself ‘cause I’m so, I don’t know, I’m still discovering myself. Let’s just say that I like girls. I’m not putting a tag, I’m not sure- it’s an age. Yeah, you know, it’s an age where it’s normal. [...] I don’t even refer myself as a lesbian or bi, I don’t. I just say queer ‘cause it sounds good since I’m still you know: ‘Am I bi? Am I one thing? Am I that?’

In Elisabet’s case ‘queer’ offered her the safety of ambiguity; for her this identity communicated a distance from heterosexuality, without specifying who she might be

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<sup>23</sup>Melyssa used ‘they/their’ as pronouns to convey their gender-neutral identity. See Glossary for more information.

attracted to. For Melyssa, Steph and Elisbet, sexual and gender identity were still not entirely settled and the issue of labelling brought up a lot of questions.

Other youth described their sexuality as a process of becoming. Jean-Luc was very certain of his gay identity, however he explained that he first came out as bisexual before identifying as gay. He suggested that many youth come out as bisexual to begin with, rather than definitively as gay, because it gives family and friends ‘hope’; he specified that he thought this allowed people around him to believe that he could still live a heterosexual lifestyle, a lifestyle he saw as widely favoured by those around him. This sentiment was also articulated by Willow who described coming out as bisexual before coming out as a lesbian. She described how she had repressed a lot of her homosexual feelings based on her parent’s initial reaction to her coming out as a child and had dated guys as a young teenager based on the fear that no one else would accept her. Like Jean-Luc, Willow suggested that coming out as bisexual is easier for youth because “...you’re still like half straight in a way, like you still like guys so it’s okay, but when you’re lesbian it’s like, ‘Oh you don’t like guys at all ... weird!’”. For Jean-Luc and Willow, bisexuality acted as a stepping-stone: it was an identity that eased their family and friends into accepting their homosexuality. However, Willow expressed frustration with people’s unwillingness to accept her homosexuality from the beginning: “I came out to my friends and they didn’t believe me [...] they’re like ‘Oh you’re not a lesbian’, ‘That’s so weird, you’re just bisexual’”. While the identity offered some initial safety for Jean-Luc and Willow, for Willow bisexuality was imposed as a more socially acceptable category which had a negative impact on Willow’s feelings of acceptance among her peers.

Moreover, this understanding, that bisexuality is a phase or a step toward homosexuality, can have negative consequences for others trying to make sense of their

sexuality, or who identify as bi- or pan-sexual. For example, Jack began his interview by clearly describing his identity as gay, but as our conversation progressed he expressed confusion over whether he was gay or bisexual. One source of his confusion over the legitimacy of his gay identity was that he felt that he had only begun questioning his heterosexuality a 'late age' and that he feared this meant his gay identity was less authentic. He went on: "I only started identifying as bisexual in my last grade of high school which was, of course, confusing because you think well everyone's supposed to know from an early age, even if they don't accept it". Jack also expressed irritation with other people's reactions to his initial non-heterosexual identity. He explained that he began identifying as bisexual when he started developing feelings for a guy at school while he was in a relationship with a girl, causing him to feel that he was emotionally attracted to both sexes. He described how when he came out as bisexual, he felt that his family and peers judged him and assumed that he was just going through a phase. He settled on identifying as gay through negotiations with his family and peers and as a compromise:

I guess I just started identifying more as gay, partly because all my friends, they all call me gay [...] For a long time it frustrated me a lot, especially when my mom did it, because I care about what she thinks a lot and like she's an important person in my life, but she never questioned me as to what I was, she just looked it up and I think saw it on some websites, 'Oh bisexuals usually turn out to be gay', and then made her own assumptions. I guess most people only see it, as you're gay, you're straight.

In contrast to Willow's experiences, Jack felt that it was more socially acceptable to identify as gay, rather than bisexual. In another case, Lee identified how negative reactions to their<sup>24</sup> bisexual identity caused them to drop out of school. Lee described their experiences when they moved from Newfoundland to Montréal:

I didn't expect any homophobia because in Newfoundland it was nothing [...] I came here and I was out about being bisexual, I was, like, very open about it, and within a

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<sup>24</sup> Lee also used 'they/their' pronouns. See Glossary for further information.

week everyone knew. And I had, like, a hard time at school because people would call me, like, a slut because I was bisexual or things like that- so it was one of the reasons why I left school.

In these cases, however different, the youth's identities were influenced by social interactions, and their understandings of the perceptions of those around them influenced their feelings of belonging. As Lee, Willow and Jack's experiences suggest, the reactions of people around youth can have meaningful impacts not only on individual identities, but on how they feel in their everyday spaces. Although most non-heterosexual youth commonly struggle with the dismissal of their sexuality by adults and peers, according to these youth's experiences bisexual and questioning youth tend to face more scrutiny than their lesbian or gay peers.

#### 4.2.3. GENDER, SEXUALITY & THE PLACES IN-BETWEEN

Some participants' descriptions of their sexuality revealed close connections between their gender and sexual identities. When I asked Tommy who ze<sup>25</sup> was attracted to, ze replied that ze was mostly attracted to girls, but that "...it's not the sex that matters, it's the gender". Willow's observations on gender and sexuality also reveal connections between the two as embodied experiences:

Stereotypically lesbians are supposed to have like the short hair and, you know, the more masculine attire and the whole like guy type thing and I look like a girl and I look, like, feminine and so [others] are like, really you're a lesbian? I never would have thought!

Here Willow reveals some of the ways that gender and sexual identities interact, but remain distinct. Her embodied gender identity was feminine and she identified as a lesbian; disrupting others' conceptions of how a lesbian ought to look or behave.

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<sup>25</sup> Tommy was using male pronouns at the time of the interview, but emailed me a few months later to request that I use ze/zir as gender-neutral pronouns in my research. See Glossary for further information.

Participants brought up their gender identity throughout our interviews in other ways as well. Interestingly, I found that youth who drew connections between their gender and sexuality were individuals who were socialized as female. Some of these youth spoke about how their gender identity was understood by others. Steph explained: “I know people know I’m a girl because I look like a girl [...] But if someone would mistake me for a guy I wouldn’t really care”. Similarly, Beatrice, who felt very sure of her identity as a girl, explained: “...it doesn’t bother me if people think I’m a boy, ‘cause it happens a lot because I have short hair. I’ll correct them but I won’t make big deal out of it: if someone calls me a boy it won’t bother me at all”. While she specified that it sometimes troubled her when the questions around her gender felt like taunts or teasing Beatrice explained that, overall, she was happy to answer her friends’ questions around sexuality and gender because she recognized that there are so few opportunities to do so otherwise. Finally, Willow also described the ways that her gender was experienced socially when she described how her gender identity had shifted over time:

I identify as ‘she’, I also could go by ‘they’ because I used to be more like masculine, but now I’m more feminine, but because I’m kinda like gender fluid so I can go by she or they, there’s no really preference.

In these cases, youth were comfortable when other people perceived them as boys, masculine or gender non-conforming.

For other participants, ambiguity around gender was actively incorporated into their gender identity. Lee explained their sexuality and gender identity: “I am not exactly sure what I am but I’m going by gender-neutral pronouns currently”. Tommy explained that after lots of searching for the right word, ze found the term ‘gender-queer’, which communicated zir androgynous gender identity. However, ze said that ze had yet to come out to anyone as gender-queer because ze felt that the people in zir life would not understand. Instead, ze

found ways of expressing zir gender through embodied practice. For example, in our interview ze laid out zir intentions to shave zir hair, which at the time, reached zir lower back. This was a decision zir parents did not support because "...you know, girls aren't supposed to do that". More than this, Tommy explained that zir parents' were concerned that this would have further impacts on zir life. Tommy described their warnings: "[They say that I'm] gonna screw up my life, I'm gonna to screw up my education". However, Tommy felt that shaving zir head was such an important part of zir gender identity that ze needed to do it. As ze put it, "[I need to do it] for myself and to start just being able to express myself, be who I am and, like, the past year it was a huge struggle for me [...] mainly because I wasn't able to express myself". The opportunity for Tommy to express zir gender affected zir sense of self and had an impact on zir mental health<sup>26</sup>.

Unlike Willow, Beatrice and Steph (who generally expressed feeling comfortable with other people's uncertainty surrounding their gender and sexuality), or Tommy and Lee (who integrated their gendered ambiguity into their identity), Parker oscillated between different identities and did not feel settled in any of the states. When I asked Parker to describe how he identified he hesitated, explaining that it felt like a very complicated question. He said: "...in public I'd rather go by Parker and be seen as a straight male, but at other times I mostly consider myself a lesbian"<sup>27</sup>. He elaborated on what it was like to negotiate a complex identity within a binary framework. As he put it: "...especially the situation I'm in it's kind of hard to explain sometimes, so I'd rather- like why can't people just go with the flow?".

Samuel's experiences also reveal connections between gender and sexuality, but in distinct ways from those articulated by other interviewees. Unlike Parker, Samuel, who

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<sup>26</sup>Needless to say, Tommy came to drop-in the following week with a shaved head.

<sup>27</sup>In email correspondences following our interview Parker wrote: "These days I consider myself more gender fluid and androgynous than anything else"; he may actually have settled into gender ambiguity more firmly.

identified as a straight trans male, was sure about his gender identity. However, like Parker he still found it difficult to negotiate his gender, as he had to contend with others' understandings of his gender. Samuel identified how this occurred:

There are uninformed people about what transgenderism is, they assume that I'm a female identifying as a male, but still technically female. So when some people say 'you act like a guy': you're still technically a female, therefore you're a lesbian and although I have no problem with any of the groups in the LGBT community [...] I don't like to be seen as lesbian because it just reminds me of- it causes, a trigger, like a dysphoria to me.

Samuel's gender identity and how others understood it was closely linked to his sense of well-being. He explained further the importance of people respecting his gender identity:

Growing up I was raised as the gender I was born into which was female, and coming out as transgendered and learning about it has helped me become who I really am and I finally feel happy with myself compared to what I spent the first seventeen years of my life doing.

Overall, there were diverse ways youth articulated their gender and sexuality. For some their identities were well-defined, others embraced and some reckoned with ambiguity. For most participants, whether they were settled on their identities or not, sexuality and gender were framed as fluid, dynamic and socially constituted.

#### **4.3. "BEING LGBTQ IS NOT ALL OF ME!"**

Skeggs (1997) has suggested that bodies are the "...physical sites where the relations of class, gender, race, sexuality and age come together and are embodied and practiced" (p. 82); it is no surprise that the youth I interviewed described multiple identities beyond gender and sexuality, or that many of them expressed a desire to be seen as more than these identities. Some of the youth identified with their distance from the norm while others wanted to blend in with other people their age. Participants came from a variety of cultural, linguistic and ethnic backgrounds. For some these identities framed their general worldview,

for others the way their race was perceived by others defined most of their social interactions, and others had seemingly never thought about it at all. Their socio-economic identities were also varied. While some were upper middle-class, others identified as poor. Some had survived traumatic events and violence in their lives and some dealt with anxiety and depression; others described their adolescence as relatively carefree. Indeed, participants had a variety of intersecting identities, ways of identifying and senses of well-being.

These other aspects of the participants' identities were the source of important differences in their experiences. In this section, I point to some of the many other facets beyond their gender and sexuality that constituted their realities. I begin by identifying why and how some youth resist the use of labels to define their identities. Here, I draw attention to how queer and trans\* youth can be both similar and different from their straight peers. I then focus on the ways youth do engage with their identities in terms of socio-economic class and in terms of race, ethnicity and culture. This section emphasizes how the multiple identities that shape each youth's life individually are important, but can also serve as sources of dis-identification as participants accommodate the shifting, fluid and constitutive identities that they embody.

#### 4.3.1. BEYOND LABELS

Several participants emphasized that even though they came to P10, their gender and sexuality were not the most important parts of who they were, and that they did not want to feel limited by these identities. Marc-André explained that putting a name to his orientation was necessary as a function to communicate to others. Marc-André found that labelling gender and sexuality led people to make assumptions based on stereotypes associated with a given identity, and that he would prefer a culture where these identities were not already

assumed. As Parker put it, labelling "...helps you get around the society we live in, but it's not something that really matters when you really think about it". Moreover, Jack explained that he felt that too much importance was placed on gender and sexual identities, obscuring other, more meaningful aspects of identity:

I've recently become fed up with my gay identity becoming such a big idea in my life and in other people's lives. I think it should obviously have a part in how you live of course, but it shouldn't be too much of a focus, there's other things in life.

He said that he wanted to be understood as a youth with many different identities, and that he resented being tokenized as the 'gay friend' in a group. Elisabet expressed a comparable feeling regarding the importance of her sexuality:

Yeah, it's a part of me, of course, but it doesn't define who I am. I find that some people follow the typical stereotype which is yeah, yeah you can be exuberant, flair your sexuality [...] it's part of me, but I don't put all my identity into it [...] Yeah it's I'd say average important you know? It's still important; if I wouldn't care, I wouldn't come [to P10].

Similarly, Tristan repeatedly described himself as just a 'normal teenager': "I don't see myself as being gay as anything special". Like Marc-André, Jack and Elisabet, for Tristan it was important that his sexuality not dominate his identity.

This desire to be socially recognized beyond their LGBTQ identities was often raised in discussions about disclosure of sexual identity. For example, Melyssa explained that they tried to avoid bringing their sexuality up in conversations, and instead preferred to only discuss it if someone asked them about it, elaborating that they did not feel that it necessitated an announcement. They said that this approach made them feel like their sexuality was not something that set them apart. Or, as Beatrice put it: "I'm not one of those people that automatically you have to know that about me, like if you ask then of course I won't be shy to tell you, but [...] it's not the first thing I tell people about myself". As these youth's experiences suggest, for some queer youth their sexuality may be important to them

as individuals, but the extent to which their sexuality is publically important in their lives is limited.

Many of the youth voiced concerns over labelling specific identities and some hesitated to label themselves at all. When I asked Melyssa which of their identities mattered most to them they just replied: “I don’t know I’m just Melyssa”. Similarly, Elisabet insisted that “...just one box; it’s too tight for me”. When I asked Theresa what she would respond if someone were to ask who she really was she quipped: “I am who I am”. When I asked Skye if she had to say which identity made her ‘the most herself’, she paused, and replied: “I don’t like to label things, I guess that would be something I would say. So, I would just say I’m a person who doesn’t judge or label anything”.

#### 4.3.2. BEING UNIQUE, THE SAME & DIFFERENT

Participants described wide-ranging interests and other significant identities that made up their being. For example, Jack was passionate about philosophy; Tristan loved languages and was teaching himself Portuguese and German through an online pen-pal program; and Marc-André identified as “a country bumpkin stuck in the city”. Several of the youth who participated in my interviews said that having creative outlets was very important for in improving their well-being. Parker, Beatrice and Payton shared a common passion for writing. Tommy said that ze spent a lot of zir time drawing and making art. Other youth valued music. Bertha moved from a remote Cree community in Northern Québec to take vocal, guitar and drum lessons in order to pursue her dream of becoming a professional musician. Beatrice played the drums. These youth identified their creativity as a source of comfort and security.

The diverse interests and multiplicity of identities revealed in the interests shared by participants affirms what Driver (2008) argues: "...queer youth and their cultural practices are not classifiable as either mainstream or marginal, they are neither inside nor outside dominant cultural institutions; rather they criss-cross commercial mass media, grassroots subcultural, and activist realms" (p.1). For example, I found that during drop-in, youth were often talking about music and often wanted to share their favourite songs with volunteers. I never saw Tommy without headphones around zir neck. When I asked zir why ze wore the headphones all the time and what kind of music ze was listening to ze replied:

Right now it's kind of a sad kind of music- more spiritual in a way. 'Cause it's just that's the kind of state I'm at right now- it's kind of a recovery state. So it's just to kind of boost my confidence and give me some sort of hope.

This music was not only part of Tommy's identity, but of zir well-being.

Where some youth asserted their sameness to their straight peers as individuals with 'normal' interests, other youth identified with the outsider status appointed to them by default as queer or trans\* youth. When asked to describe herself, Skye, who at the time of the interview had half her hair dyed bright purple, the other half dyed a vibrant turquoise, listed her many passions: "I draw, and I do makeup, and I dye my hair a lot, and I think up outfits, and I blog on the Internet, and I do makeup tutorials, and I talk to people [...] I don't wanna blend in completely you know? I wanna be original, so it's nice to be original".

Payton described the importance of her reputation as a 'rebel girl':

It's sort of like that teenager rebellious attitude that's pushing me forward [...] I have that reputation at school [...] People are always like, 'You're a rebel!' [...] And I feel bad and like most of the time I apologize [to teachers], but only when people aren't there 'cause, like, I have a rep' to keep up.

Payton's identification with her rebellious status, or her position as an outsider, echoes what McNamee, Valentine and Skelton (2003) point out, that many queer youth "...pinpoint the

emergence of their sexuality not in terms of an attraction to, or a relationship with, someone of the same sex, but rather in terms of feeling different from peers without necessarily realizing why this was so” (p. 122). While these feelings of difference from the norm result in many youth feeling alienated or isolated, Payton and Skye embraced their outsider status and integrated it into their identities.

#### 4.3.3. CLASS MATTERS

Participants’ identities were shaped by their gender and sexuality, by their dis-identification, and, in some cases, with their desire to be ‘normal’. Beyond this, participants also identified the ways that structural differences defined their experiences. Most of the youth I interviewed identified as middle-class, however, there were some who described themselves as lower, working-class or poor. I found that generally the youth who explicitly spoke about the ways that their class affected their spatial experiences belonged to lower-class brackets.

When I asked Theresa if she could go where she wanted as a teenager, she explained that the greatest barrier to her mobility was that “I don’t have like things that other people would have, like money”. Willow described herself as “lower class on the economic scale”. She brought up how her class had an impact on her feelings of inclusion in nearly all the spaces she entered. For example, she described how attending the college she was currently enrolled in, which was located in an upper-middle class suburb of Montréal, presented her with daily challenges:

Richer areas intimidate me ‘cause I feel like I’m not good enough to be in that area because like I’m poor and the stereotype for poor is like lazy, like, stupid, like, unworthy. So I kind of feel like I’m extremely intimidated by the West Island and I’m going to school [there] so yeah I don’t feel comfortable.

Payton, who also identified as working class said that this imposed limits on her mobility because she had to devote most of her time outside school working at the Flea Market her family owned<sup>28</sup>. In contrast, participants from middle-class backgrounds were more mobile and had fewer responsibilities. For example, Melyssa, who actually attended the same high school as Payton, described their family's economic class this way:

Not wealthy, but we're well off, like we have two cars and money and I'm, like, really comfortable. Like not rich, but really, like, right, if there were rich (gestures with her hand, places hand at eye level) and this were moderate (puts her second hand at chin level), we'd be right under rich (puts her hand at her nose).

Melyssa said that they felt they had a lot of freedom; they had few chores and their parents drove them most places. In fact, unlike many other participants who came to P10 via public transportation, their dad drove them from the suburbs to drop-in each week.

Like Melyssa, most of the participants identified as middle-class. Of course, even though middle-class was generally used as a kind of neutral descriptor of class status, this shapes individual's experiences, habits and spatial articulations. Kato's (2009) study on the spaces where middle-class youth hang out reveals the relationship between class and access to spaces. For example, she found that middle-class living in suburbs tend to identify spending time in cars as a regular leisure activity. She suggests that this may "...reflect the unique middle-class suburban social and spatial characteristics, where young people are more likely to have access to cars and parking lots are abundant" (p 62). In other words, throughout my interviews, the spaces identified by middle-class youth as safe or unsafe may have been influenced not only by their social positions as queer or trans\* youth, but also by their access to these spaces due to their class backgrounds.

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<sup>28</sup> Payton was one of the few participants I interviewed who not only had a job, but considered it a significant part of her everyday life.

#### 4.3.4. LANGUAGE, CULTURE, RACE & ETHNICITY

Many participants spoke about their linguistic, racial and cultural backgrounds. These identities were important to them in terms of the values they adopted and the communities to which they felt that they belonged. First, several youth spoke about the role that language played in their identities. Steph, who grew up in Montréal and was “half Chinese and half French”, felt that her French Canadian heritage was very important because of how she felt close to her mom’s side of the family:

My French Canadian side, to me, it’s really important [...] because I know like throughout the years the culture’s been, like, losing, like there’s a lot less French people- and yeah, and also my family’s been around [...]. It’s just really important.

In contrast, when I asked Tristan (who happened to be from a similar part of the city as Steph) to describe himself he first replied: “I am an English Canadian living in the French part of Canada”. He explained that this played a significant role in shaping his mindset as well as who he felt comfortable around:

I don’t really identify with Québécois and their French laws, I identify with some of their socialist views because I do feel that I’m socialist, but I fit in more with my friends from Ottawa or people from Toronto, sooner than I do people from Montréal.

These youth saw strong connections between language and culture, but the significance of these varied according to their individual experiences; for Steph her closeness to her family influenced her relationship to this part of her identity whereas Tristan’s sense of belonging was shaped by language.

Other youth mentioned the differences between Anglophone and Francophone cultures that exist in Montréal. For example, Jean-Luc and I spoke mostly in English throughout the interview, but switched to French on a few occasions. He explained that he grew up speaking both, had no preference for either, appreciated the different parts of each

culture, and had both Anglophone and Francophone friends. I had similar exchanges with Marc-André and Elisabet. I found this trend emerged in my interactions with youth during drop-in; conversations were often bilingual and the topic of difference between Francophone and Anglophone culture came up regularly. These linguistic identities played an important role in most of the participants' lives.

Many other youth emphasized their cultural heritage as being significant to their identity. For example, Elisabet, who was born in Europe to South American parents and immigrated to Canada when she was eleven, explained why her background was important to her: "I actually love learning about cultures. I'm really close to my own cultures the way we eat, the way we act, the history". Elisabet spoke Italian, Spanish, English and French fluently, and on several occasions she expressed how meaningful it was for her to be exposed to multiple cultures and connect with many different people. However, when I asked her how she identified in terms of race she replied: "...basically I'm an immigrant. That's what I'm saying [...] Yeah. I'm not born here. I learned the culture". Not only was her specific cultural history meaningful in shaping her identity, but so was her status as an outsider.

Other youth identified their cultural background as a factor in shaping not only their sense of self, but also in influencing their relationship to gender and sexuality. For example, Beatrice strongly identified with her Italian ancestry because as she put it: "...my family's a really big part of my life". However, she explained that although her Italian background was important, the strong Catholic influence on this culture had made it difficult for her to make sense of her sexuality when she first began to realize that she was a lesbian. Moreover, she said that she probably would never come out to her extended family as they were almost entirely Italian and Catholic and she believed they would not accept her homosexuality.

Tommy, who identified culturally as Sri Lankan and nationally as a Canadian, identified the importance of zir culture: “I find it builds, it gives you some sort of morals and values and kind of gives you that base”. Ze described certain aspects of Hinduism (the religion zir family, who were Tamil, practiced) which were meaningful to zir: “...the core of the religion, of kind of meditating, of finding peace, of finding peace within yourself [...] Not judging other people, having an open mind [...] being respectful of other people and considerate”. However, like Beatrice, Tommy spoke about how the same culture that was so important to zir was also a source for zir feelings of exclusion. Ze explained that zir parents’ and friends’ traditional attitudes sometimes made zir feel unable to express zir gender or sexuality without feeling judged. Bertha also explained that her spirituality was a significant part of her sense of self and that it had shaped her attitudes and values. When I asked her to describe this she explained why her native spirituality mattered to her:

You’re more in contact with your spirit and all that and how you feel. It’s all about being true to yourself and being true to Mother Nature and all that, and showing respect to Mother Nature and yourself mostly, like, it has a lot to do with self-respect and all that. So I think self-respect is probably one of the most important things.

For both Tommy and Bertha their spirituality, which was rooted in their respective cultures, guided their values and shaped their general perceptions. Furthermore, both youth identified similar sentiments of respect and integrity as particular principles to follow and these values strongly parallel their attitudes toward gender and sexuality, which were open and fluid. At the same time Beatrice, Tommy and Bertha’s perspectives point to the contradictory relationships individuals can have to their families, backgrounds, and their identities. The intersection between culture, spirituality, sexuality and gender can indeed be complex; where aspects of these can be alienating, they can provide guidance and understanding.

While language, culture and spirituality were identified by some youth as shaping their identities, other racialized youth spoke about their racial identities in terms of who they were in general, as well as how this had an impact on their sexual and gendered experiences<sup>29</sup>. Melyssa was ethnically Chinese but had been adopted by a white family. They saw themselves as Chinese even though they were not raised within Chinese culture. In many circumstances their ethnic identity was a source of pride; for example, they described wanting to correct people when they mistook them for another ethnicity. They also described several circumstances in which they experienced harassment on the basis of their racial identity, for example:

I've heard 'Konnichiwa, go back to Japan', stuff like that, like on the streets. One time I was with my cousin and he got so mad 'cause I guess he didn't know 'cause he's white and stuff, I'm adopted so all my family's white, and we're walking down the street and we're going to [the store] and someone drove by in a car, slowed down, put down their window was like, 'Oh Konnichiwa, go back to China you chi-'. I hate saying that word so I'm just gonna spell it: 'You c-h-i-n-k', and then [my cousin] was like, 'What?!' My cousin was freaking out [...] It's racism, I'm used to it now.

Melyssa explained that they "got used to the racism", but that they felt they faced 'double discrimination'. They also pointed out "...I can't really throw out any word against white people, like you know black people have the 'n-word', and like Asians have the 'c-word' [...] It sucks that they have that extra card". Melyssa identified systemic power imbalances, the injustices that these imply, and the consequences they have on their everyday experience as an out Chinese teenager in a society that privileges white people.

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<sup>29</sup> It is worth noting that, overall, youth who shared reflections on the role that their race, culture or spirituality had related to their gender or sexuality, were for the most part, racialized youth. Even though many white youth identified instances of homophobia they did not make a connection between their culture and these experiences; since whiteness is hegemonic many of these youth may not have considered this to be an identity.

In another case, during the focus group Sora explained that her race and gender presentation were the reasons for why she was often stared at and made to feel different in public. She explained:

The way I carry myself, I mean look at me: I'm black [...] I'm super burly, I'm a chick and my hair is shaved on the side, I have piercings in my face and all of the people between the [metro] lines that I travel on they're all like the older people, so they're walking and then they see me and they're like 'Ahhh! Whoa! Oh ... It's just a person- a black person, but is that a girl? Is that a bar going through her face?' And they freak out.

In addition to identifying the process of othering that occurs in her day-to-day, Sora saw the intersection of her gender, sexual and racialized identities as central to her experience of public life and public space. Her experiences illustrate the ways that these are connected to each other and shape how she interacts with the people around her in public.

#### **4.4. CONCLUSION**

Throughout this chapter I explored how queer and trans\* youth identify themselves and how the various aspects of their identities mutually constitute each other. Rather than describing their identities as fixed and bounded, I hope to have provided a "...perspective that views social identity as multi-faceted phenomenon that may vary through time and place" (Back, 1996, p. 50). To do so, I presented participants as individuals, some of whom had clear, settled understandings of their gender or sexuality, and others who were questioning these identities. I presented how, overall, these youth often had fluid notions of sexuality and gender; many understood these to be temporally or spatially changeable. As examples throughout the chapter indicate, queer and trans\* youth have diverse interests and many identities beyond their sexuality or gender that influence how they perceive the world around them. Moreover, I described how the individual socio-economic, cultural and racial

positions that each youth occupies influences their embodied experiences and that these identities and personal commitments also shape how the people they interact with perceive them.

As the voices that dominated this chapter might suggest, generally girls and trans\* youth, as well as working-class and racialized teenagers were most likely to observe and discuss the intersections between these aspects of identity and their gender and sexual identities. This supports what queer geographers have articulated regarding homonormativity: that gay, white masculinity is largely understood and imagined as neutral and unremarkable. Thus, while participants disrupted the heteronormativity of adolescence by sharing their experiences in this research project, their individual locations as subjects with unique relationships to power, means they have different experiences.

Not only was the purpose of this chapter to describe the multiple identities young queer and trans\* people embody, but it should also provide a framework by which to understand how their individual identities dictate the spatial experiences I identify in the following chapters. In the next chapters, I will turn from the identities of youth to the spaces in which queer and trans\* youth negotiated their identities, and then toward how they undo, make and create spaces for themselves.

## CHAPTER V

### EXPERIENCE OF EVERYDAY SPACES

As noted in Chapter II, queer geography has long explored queer and trans\* people's experiences in everyday spaces, particularly in urban settings (Gorman-Murray, 2008; Kentlyn, 2008; Valentine et al., 2001). Children and youth's geographies have commonly been concerned with how young people navigate city neighbourhoods and have also focused on the home and school (Blunt & Varley, 2004; Cahill, 2000; MacDonald, Shildrick, Webster & Simpson, 2005; Malone, 2002; Matthews, Limb & Percy-Smith, 1998). In both of these sub-disciplines everyday spaces are generally considered as sites of both belonging and exclusion; as complex spaces navigated according to power relations and the multiple aspects of individual identity. In this chapter, I examine the experiences of queer and trans\* youth within three such spaces. I begin by describing the home as a site where youth negotiate their sexual and gendered identities. I then explore school as another everyday space where queer and trans\* youth navigate these identities through complex social relations. Here, I examine the role that institutional practices can play in maintaining or disrupting ideas about gender and sexuality, and also how schools function as social spaces in which identities are developed, shaped and performed. Finally, I examine how participants perceived various neighbourhoods in and around Montréal; both as areas of danger and of safety.

#### 5.1. THE HOME

The home<sup>30</sup> is an everyday space that embodies multiple meanings, which most of us must navigate daily. Blunt and Varley (2004) describe this as a place of:

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<sup>30</sup> I refer to 'the home' throughout this section with the understanding that in fact many youth live in more than one home. This is a general term meant to encompass a diverse range of people's experiences.

Belonging and alienation, intimacy and violence, desire and fear, the home is invested with meanings, emotions, experiences and relationships that lie at the heart of human life. Geographies of home are both material and symbolic and are located on thresholds between memory and nostalgia for the past, everyday life in the present, and future dreams and fears (p. 3).

Queer and trans\* youth frequently experience the home as a site where their sexuality and gender are made invisible, where they feel excluded, and for some, where they experience violence, face pressure to follow rules and expectations set out by their family (Mallon, 2000; Valentine et al., 2001). As McNamee and her colleagues (2003) point out: “For lesbian and gay youth, the overwhelming and taken for granted heterosexuality of the family home can be experienced as oppressive and alienating. In particular, young people can feel guilt and discomfort at concealing their sexuality from family members” (p.125). These feelings can be exacerbated or assuaged depending on different other factors; the home is a dynamic space with meanings that vary according to cultural and economic contexts, interpersonal dynamics, family history and numerous other elements. Hopkins (2010) points out that:

Young people’s experiences of home, and the way in which they articulate and develop their identities at home, often depend up on the intersection of factors, such as the existence of a positional or personalizing family situation, the rigidity of the use of space set down by adults, the extent to which the young person has their own room, as well as the presence of other siblings or family members in determining the use, allocation and management of space (p. 100).

Despite the temptation to simplify things as I have begun to do, Gorman-Murray (2008) cautions against framing young queer people’s experience in the home as necessarily difficult, and moreover, suggests that, “...familial heterosexuality cannot be essentialized as heteronormativity in such cases: heterosexual identity does not necessarily pre-determine heterosexist reactions and attitudes” (p. 32). Moreover, not all queer and trans\* youth are necessarily brought up by or live with heterosexual parents. Indeed, the home is a site with

diverse meanings for all youth, and young queer and trans\* people's experiences mirror this understanding: some participants described the home as a space they avoided; others identified their home as the only place they truly felt at ease; some described hostility between family members; one youth had actually been homeless; and for some the home was uncontested and insignificant.

In this section, I consider the home as a site of negotiations related to gender and sexuality between families and teenagers, shaped by wide-ranging factors. However, I focus especially on the experience of being 'out', or not, in the home. I begin by exploring what 'coming out' can mean for youth. I then present the experiences of youth who described finding support in their family, including those with LGBTQ family members. I then look at the experiences of youth who described home life as a period of waiting for acceptance. I then examine the lives of youth who face struggles within the home. I also describe the experience of participants who had not yet come out and conclude with thoughts on how different all homes are.

#### 5.1.1. COMING OUT

Biegel (2010) argues that, "...at its most basic level, 'being out' can be characterized as a condition or state of genuine openness" (p. xiii). This is a basic, but fundamental interpretation of what coming out means. Beyond this, coming out can involve personally adopting a non-heterosexual sexuality or a transition in gender, disclosure to friends, family, and sometimes the public. Platzer (2006) points out that: "...coming out is not a linear and finite process but an ongoing, lifelong process mediated by changing social circumstances and interactions" (p.14). Moreover, being out is not necessarily an end-result in and of itself, or a permanent state of being, nor is it a one-time disclosure, and certainly not an event

restrained to adolescence. Rust (1993) suggests that "...identity is the result of the interpretation of personal experience in terms of available social constructs [...] and 'coming out' is the process of describing oneself in terms of social constructs rather than a process of discovering one's essence" (p. 68). The actions, and discourses that may constitute the process of coming out are products of whatever particular social context a person is in. Coming out is a complex, individual process, and an on-going (inter)personal negotiation.

For teenagers, this process is navigated in many spaces, though often occurs in the home as this is a common everyday environment. Almost all of the youth I interviewed still lived at home, though, unsurprisingly, they had varied family structures, and wide-ranging experiences regarding their sexuality and gender. Participants were all 'out' to themselves, given that they were attending P10 drop-in, (though, as outlined in the previous chapter, not always set on one identity), however, as I highlight in the following sections, they were not always out to the people in their everyday lives, and when some were this was not always an easy or straightforward negotiation.

#### 5.1.2. "THEY'RE, LIKE, REAL ACCEPTING": SUPPORT IN DIFFERENT FORMS AT HOME

There were many participants who found acceptance for their gender or sexual identities in the home. In fact, several of the youth had parents and family members who were out. Beatrice's grandfather was gay; Payton's cousin, who was a close friend and lived in the same apartment building as her, was also gay. These participants both explained that this presence made it easier for them to imagine possibilities beyond heterosexuality. For Marc-André, having gay family members (his mother, aunt and three of his cousins) facilitated his ability to come out, as he knew that people close to him were already accepting. When he told his grandmother she immediately supported him without question:

“[her] exact words were, ‘Alright, you came out of the closet! It might have been a glass closet, everyone could see, but it was a closet nonetheless’”. In Marc-André’s experience, his homosexuality was seen as ‘normal’ due to the fact that so many family members were already out.

Corinne and her brother both came out to their mother around the same time as each other. Their mother was initially upset and worried; however, a year after her children came out to her she started dating a woman. Similarly, when Skye told her mother that she had feelings for a girl her mother disclosed that she was also bisexual. In these two examples, these youth’s experience of coming out actually encouraged people close to them to do likewise.

While not all of the youth I spoke with had openly gay family members, many described finding acceptance within the home. Despite the fact that Jean-Luc’s family was Catholic his mother supported his sexuality from the start. He described her reaction: “...my mom looked me right in the eyes and she said that she’ll always love me. I’m her baby-boy”. Samuel was out as trans to nearly everyone in his life, including many aunts and uncles and cousins, as well as his siblings and both of his parents. He said that his family was accepting, and that while some of them did not quite understand his gender identity, overall they were “totally cool with it”. Similarly, Jack said that his family was “...perfectly accepting, all my siblings and my parents”. Melyssa explained that their parents did not make an issue out of her sexuality: “...they’re, like, real accepting”. They said that their reaction made them feel like their sexuality was normal. While Melyssa had yet to come out as gay to their younger sister or extended family, they also did not express any anxiety over it:

They're gonna find out soon 'cause I'm in sec five<sup>31</sup>. I'm gonna go to prom and I'm gonna go to prom with a girl probably, so they're gonna find out, but I'm not gonna directly be like, 'Guys I'm going to prom with a girl', but they'll be like, 'Oh is that your date?' and I'll be like, 'Yep'.

Finally, Gabriel's mother's also accepted his identity at face value and did not change the way she treated him. He said that this acceptance made him feel more comfortable in his sexuality. He said that he thought that she probably already knew that he was gay before he came out to her. As he joked: "...everybody knows before you know". These youth had found acceptance in some form in their homes.

### 5.1.3. WAITING FOR ACCEPTANCE

Several youth had found neither support, nor outright rejection in the home. Interestingly, many of these youth described feelings of understanding toward their family's indefinite reactions to their gender and sexual identities. Parker first came out as a lesbian, but since the age of 17 began asking his close friends and his parents to call him 'Parker' (pseudonym) and use masculine pronouns to suit his shifting gender identity. He described where he did and did not find support when this change in gender occurred:

My mom felt like she had done something wrong and that, this disappointed me in a way because it has nothing to do with you, like, it's my person, it's how I was born. My dad was alright with it, he's kind of a 'go with the flow' kind of guy, like I am, but of course it's going to be harder for them, first daughter changing. I have my neighbour that accepted me pretty well, she was like, 'Oh whatever makes you happy, like I'm always going to love you', and I'm 'always going to be that special person that I know', so that made me feel better.

While Parker clearly wanted both of his parents to 'go with the flow', he was also accepting of the questions his parents had; though he was probably able to feel this way because of the

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<sup>31</sup> In Québec 'sec 5' is short form for fifth year of secondary school, the equivalent of grade 11, graduating, or senior year.

support he found in his neighbour. Payton described a similar sympathy when she spoke about her mother's feelings regarding her sexuality:

My mom sort of knows I'm bisexual but she doesn't really wanna hear it right now and I don't really talk to my dad [...] I told most of my family, like they mostly know, but I don't know, it's like my mom's not really ready for it right now, and I understand, you know, I understand how it might be painful for her not knowing if she might have a grandkid or like there's a 50-50 chance of everything.

When Beatrice came out to her parents she explained that her father, who had recently passed away, was immediately accepting. On the other hand, her mother initially voiced concern that Beatrice would be treated badly for her sexuality and urged her to wait until she was older to come out. When I asked her how she felt about her parents' reactions she explained:

I was proud that my dad thought I was fine, my dad told my family, well some of my family, and he was super open about it. He was very proud of me. My mom was very, not closed off, but she wanted to protect me and in a way she was scared that people would think different of me, but then eventually she got used to the idea of knowing that I'm gay.

Like Payton, Beatrice was understanding, but clearly appreciated that her mother's attitude changed.

Sora also described a situation in which she had to wait for her parents to accept her sexuality. Her mother, who was very religious, repeatedly told her that her sexuality would 'pass', and that her lesbian identity was an adolescent phase. After bringing one of her girlfriend's home only to be met with silence, Sora decided to write her mother a letter in which she asked her for acceptance, and she eventually found. Her father's change in attitude was slightly more immediate, though also challenging:

I told my dad and he freaked out and I was like you know, 'Screw you! You don't like it, I don't have to talk to you anymore'- 'cause I don't need someone who's gonna criticize me my entire life in my life I'd rather you know, just delete them from the equation. He was like, 'Okay well Jeeze'.

Despite these reactions Sora saw herself as having an accepting family: “I realize I’m one of those people that’s privileged to have a family that takes it so well”. Indeed, a person’s perception of their reality is relative; depending on the social context in which they find themselves in they may understand their family’s reaction as accepting or not.

#### 5.1.4. TEENAGERS IN TROUBLE: STRUGGLES TO FIND SUPPORT WITHIN THE HOME

While many of participants found acceptance within their homes, several others were not able to find obvious sources of support. For example, Theresa, who was out to her family because her sister caught her kissing a girl and told their parents, explained that her parent had mixed, but not necessarily positive, reactions to this news. Her father had expressed some relief that she was gay: “He’s really like over protective, like he doesn’t want me to get beat up by a guy [...] and he says that you won’t get beat up by a girl”. Theresa saw the flaws in her father’s logic, (a reasoning based on heterosexist understandings of violence), but was glad that he was not bothered by her sexuality. On the other hand, her mother cried upon hearing the news: “My mom doesn’t really accept it [...] She’s a Spanish religious mom, like she doesn’t mind other people being gay, but she doesn’t want me”. In the end, however, because her parents did not share the same attitude as each other, and neither supported her outright, she said that she kept quiet about her sexuality at home.

As I pointed out, Marc-André’s family was overall very supportive, particularly because he had gay family members, including his mother. However, while he had a close relationship to his mother’s side of the family, his relationship with his father was strained: “...my father still believes it’s just a phase [...] He doesn’t believe in homosexuality whatsoever, he accepts me as I am for now, but he still thinks I’ll out grow it, find a wife and have kids”. Unlike Theresa, Marc-André had already moved away from both of his homes in

a small town, and so no longer had to navigate conflicting reactions from different parents. He was living in Montréal to attend Cégep<sup>32</sup>, so had already left the kind of judgment he felt from his father, and saw his current home as his own, and was a space for him to articulate his identity freely.

In another instance where a participant found support in one parent, but not the other, Lee described how their mother was “really cool with it”. However, Lee specified that their dad did not fully accept their identity and lifestyle: “...he still wants me to like marry his neighbour boy, and he doesn’t want me to come out to my little sisters yet ‘cause he’s like, ‘They’re not ready to know about you being a homosexual’”. While Lee said that this did not really bother them, when I asked the focus group if they felt safe in their homes, Lee specified that the fact that they felt they needed to hide their identity from their sister made them feel uncomfortable in their dad’s house.

Even though Skye’s mother had responded to her daughter’s bisexual identity by disclosing a shared sexuality<sup>33</sup>, Skye explained that in general she just did not really communicate about anything with anyone in her family. As she put it: “...even my parents I don’t really talk to them [...] I just stay in my room so I don’t really connect with anyone”. Despite the fact that Skye had come out to one of her parents and found a presumed ally, she still felt marginal within the home.

Similarly, while Jean-Luc described his mother’s reaction as supportive<sup>34</sup>, his dad ignored him and refused to speak with him for weeks. Jean-Luc disclosed some of the difficulties he endured as a result of his father’s negative reaction: “He didn’t talk to me for a

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<sup>32</sup> Cégep is an acronym for Collège d’enseignement général et professionnel, which is a General and Vocational College. Youth in Québec generally attend Cégep after high school for technical programs or for general education before entering University. They are open to students of all ages.

<sup>33</sup> See section 5.1.2. “They’re, like, real accepting”: Support in Different Forms at Home.

<sup>34</sup> See section 5.1.2 “They’re, like, real accepting”: Support in Different Forms at Home.

month, that's when I started burning myself with cigarettes and cutting myself and smoking weed; anything to numb pretty much. I was either drunk or high or in pain". Their relationship did eventually somewhat improve after Jean-Luc confronted his father about it. He described his home life now: "I'd rather be near my friends than my mom and my dad, though my relationship between me and my dad got better there's still fighting in the house". Jean-Luc's actions following his father's rejection reveal some of the stakes involved in the acceptance of a youth's sexuality. In his case, his father's disapproval led him to engage in risky behaviour, and contributed to difficulties he had relating to his family and his ability to feel safe at home, let alone in his own skin.

Indeed, the ways in which queer and trans\* youth can face exclusion for their gender or sexuality within the home can vary from subtle silences, over rejection to explicit violence. Gabriel's story provides an example of the later. He lived with his mother and brother in Montréal. His mother reacted to his gay identity nonchalantly<sup>35</sup>. However, Gabriel described a visit with his father in Eastern Europe, where his father lives. On this stay, his father figured out Gabriel's sexual identity and so tried to 'cure' him by setting him up with a female sex worker, which he resisted. This culminated in a violent situation:

My dad got really mad at me used a ... not belt, no those power cables, power cable extensions and then that was the day I decided to take my brother and I to the airport and we just called my mother and the Canadian embassy and we got back to Canada.

Gabriel dealt with physical and emotional abuse and had to relocate as a result of his sexuality. His experience of homophobic violence is an example of dangers that queer and trans\* adolescents can face in a hostile home.

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<sup>35</sup> See section 5.1.2 "They're, like, real accepting": Support in Different Forms at Home.

#### 5.1.5. NON-DISCLOSURE IN THE HOME

Some youth decided not to disclose their sexuality or gender identity at all in their homes. For some, this resulted in a similar kind of marginalization as the youth who faced difficulties for coming out. For example, Steph had decided to conceal her sexuality after she tried to come to her mother whose initial reaction to her sexuality was, as she put it, to ‘pull a fit’. She explained that after that instance she would probably never tell her father either. This dynamic meant that Steph did not talk to her family about coming to P10, attending pride parades or any activities related to her sexuality. She described how her silence at home had an impact on her ability to find support from her family when she described an example of when on one occasion a teacher had treated her badly at school on the basis of her sexuality:

At one point I started slacking off in his class and he blamed it on, like, how he saw me kiss a girl [...] I think it was just that he just didn’t like the fact that I kissed a girl in public. He pulled me out of one class and brought me in the auditorium [...] He brought me onto the stage and placed, like, a chair, like two chairs and, like, intimidated me from there alone, there was- like, no one was there.

When she told her mother, Steph described how she did not find a helpful response: “I can’t say she didn’t care but she didn’t really do anything about it”. Steph’s home life and relationship with her family was characterized by an omission of her sexuality, in a way that weakened her trust and feelings of support from those around her. During my interview with Theresa, she shared observations that aptly describe Steph’s experiences. Theresa pointed out that some youth might not come out to their families because “...they’re scared to tell their friends or their parents. They know that they won’t accept them”.

Indeed, fear of rejection was an important part of Bertha’s experience. Bertha was living with a guardian in Montréal; her parents lived in Northern Québec. However, her

parents' acceptance of her sexuality was important to her. She explained that she felt scared to tell her family that she was not straight for a number of reasons:

I really wanted to talk to my parents about it but, I remembered what happened when my mom's aunt found out that her daughter was gay [...] The whole family cried, and I think I was the only one who was really- I didn't feel like I had to accept her because I love her- who she is [...] I didn't end up telling them because I was afraid to hurt them, and my dad- him he's really- he doesn't hate gay people or something, but he wouldn't like it. I know he wouldn't like it if one of his sons or his daughter was a lesbian, or they were gay. He would learn to accept it, but it would take a long time [...] This past summer was probably the only time I got to really spend time with them and I think if I told him that he probably would have wanted me to like leave for a bit.

Bertha feared disappointing her family, she was worried about rejection, and about not getting to spend time with the family she was not living with<sup>36</sup>.

In just one case a youth I spoke with explained that he did not feel the need to tell his family. Tristan described his relationship to his parents regarding his sexuality:

Never officially told them, but my mom, my mom knows. She doesn't tell me that she knows, she hints at it, but she doesn't want to say it up front and I have no idea about my dad, like he's given me clues, but I can't really tell whether or not he knows, but it's possible.

He explained that it just did not feel that it is important to tell them, because even if he told his parents he was gay, according to his perspective it would not change anything about their relationship, as he put it: "I don't find anything important, anything special to be gay, I just am gay". For Tristan his sexuality did not merit disclosure; this contrasted with the experience of many youth who did not come out for fear of rejection.

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<sup>36</sup> She later told me about a video she had watched about a girl who came out to her parents who reacted very positively, which was not what she had expected. Seeing this caused Bertha to re-evaluate what her parents' reactions might be and she said that she was sure she would tell them eventually.

#### 5.1.6. EVERY HOME IS DIFFERENT

These youth's experiences make clear that the home contains inconsistencies and contradictions that youth navigate and which come to constitute each of their personal realities. Overall, acceptance and support from family members was seen as important to the youth; most of those who did not receive positive reactions to their gender and sexual identities expressed feelings of frustration, disappointment or hurt. Even though some of the youth sympathized with the worries their parents' expressed, overall they conveyed the expectation that their parents would eventually accept their identities. Some were unsettled regarding whether or when they would come out to their parents at all; for the most part out of fear. The variations in the youth's needs for support and acceptance reveal some of the complexities of familial dynamics. Moreover, these varied responses affirm that the home can be a site of either, and at times both, exclusion and inclusion.

#### 5.2. NAVIGATING SCHOOL SPACES

I turn now to another everyday space. Schools are sites where youth not only learn in a pedagogical sense, but they are also where they learn and negotiate social norms (Savage & Schanding, 2013). Indeed, schools are made up of many worlds at once: they are spaces defined by institutional adult control, as well as formal and official structures that guide young people's everyday lives, but they are also spaces where youth find community, spend time with friends and negotiate social interactions in general (Valentine, 2003). This social space is not neutral. Hyams (2000) describes how schools are "...constitutive of and constituted by social relations of power" (p. 635); schools are places where norms and practices surrounding identities (especially performances and articulations of gender or sexuality) can be both reinforced and challenged.

In this section, I focus on participants' experiences at various educational institutions and explore how sexuality and gender are addressed, made sense of and negotiated in these spaces. I look at how these identities are navigated institutionally by first considering the absences that students noted in the curriculum and then by looking at whether workshops or guest speakers were invited into the schools. I then present participants' reflections on the roles that teachers were seen to play in either supporting their queer and trans\* students or not. Considering sexuality and gender from this perspective should shed light on how institutional practices prioritize these youth, and how young queer or trans\* students see themselves fitting into the school. I then explore how participants experienced their sexual and gender identities socially. Some youth found acceptance and tolerance at school; others faced bullying and exclusions. I conclude with thoughts on how students challenge the status quo themselves, and how institutional practices were seen as more supportive.

Participants were either attending or had attended public, alternative or semi-private schools (high schools, adult education facilities, trade schools and Cégeps) across the Island of Montréal; I did not interview anyone who attended a private school. Several went to school together; Theresa, Steph and Bertha were friends who all attended a public school in Montréal's north end of the city, and Skye, Melyssa, Payton and Beatrice attended the same public high school in a small community on the north shore of the island. Others had attended the same high schools as each other, without being friends, or knowing each other; Corinne had attended a semi-private arts school that, where Willow has also studied before switching to an alternative school in Montréal's west end that Samuel would later attend. Some youth had already graduated from high school and were enrolled in post-secondary education; Jack and Elisabet were in Cégep and Willow and Tommy each attended trade schools. Several youth I spoke with had switched schools throughout their adolescence, and

others struggled: Jean-Luck was attending an adult education centre, and Lee and Parker had dropped out entirely.

### 5.2.1. SEXUALITY & GENDER IN THE CLASSROOM

There were a few ways in which participants described the ways that sexuality and gender were addressed institutionally. For one, they would talk about whether their schools integrated education on sexuality and gender into the curriculum or school activities, and if so, how this occurred. There were several youth who described a complete absence of any content related to these identities at their school. Corinne, Sora, Gabriel, Tommy, and Parker, who all went to different schools from each other, said that they had never had a unit in class or workshops or events oriented toward gender and sexuality. In fact, there were very few participants who said that their school incorporated these issues into the classroom. Moreover, none of the youth I spoke with attended a high school that had a GSA or club for LGBTQ students at the time of our interview.

In one of the few examples of a student receiving some education on sexuality, Tristan pointed out that even though he attended a predominantly Catholic high school ‘homosexuality’ had been brought up as a unit in his ethics course. In another case, Theresa said that her teachers were often “...telling us how it’s ok for two people to like each other no matter what sex you are”.

Overall, however, most of the participants explained that their high school experiences were marked by an absence of information or discussions surrounding gender and sexuality. However, participants repeatedly shared the attitude that schools should be at least minimally responsible for making information about gender and sexuality accessible to

youth and overall, most participants did not feel this was the case in their school experiences.

Skye decried how these topics were hardly acknowledged:

You don't learn anything about it, like you always see school speeches about- like, people come to speak about things like depression and violence and I think that sexuality is just as important as all those things, but you never see anyone talk about it because people are kind of scared, they don't wanna come out.

Similarly, Jack criticized the silence he had faced at his high school and explained why he was frustrated to not have more formal education on these topics at school:

That's one thing I've been thinking lately, maybe we've been thinking the same thing- as they should talk about this. They should have a class where they really talk about- I think sex and sexuality, because it's a bit frustrating how little people know about, like, really what it is, you know? ... about the whole community anyways.

Tommy also described why he thought it was important for students to be better informed and how he imagined schools could assist in this:

I would actually have courses or have teachers teach about homosexuality 'cause I notice how ignorant the kids are. They're extremely ignorant, they use a lot of gay slurs and they don't understand it and it's just the way they interpret words, the way they see things, and I just want them to actually be able to look at things differently and see things from a different point of view, as opposed to how society, how television, media interprets LGBTQ youth.

Because of this lack of information, and the implicit silencing of differences in gender and sexuality, many youth felt excluded from school spaces or felt out of place for questioning making this space less inclusive for youth questioning their identity.

Clearly, sexuality and gender were largely absent from the official curriculum and this was marginalizing for these teenagers. However, some youth had participated in workshops facilitated by outside community organizations. These were offered and received in a variety of ways. When I asked Marc-André if they ever had workshops that addressed sexuality at his school he replied, "...we had sex-ed, but as far as it went was pretty much don't have sex: you'll get AIDS and die". On the other hand, Theresa spoke about the role that guest

speakers at her high school had played in her access to P10: "...there was these lesbians that came to our school to talk about gays and I talked to her and she told me to come [to P10] if I had problems about [coming out to my] mother, so I came and checked it out". The presence of these guests played a critical role in Theresa's entry to P10, and her general feeling of belonging.

Even though Steph attended the same high school as Theresa, she experienced the workshops differently. She described how she had felt during a workshop on sexuality: "I wasn't really out at that time, so it made me uncomfortable 'cause everyone looks at me so it makes me uncomfortable, but now I wouldn't mind, it'd actually be a good thing". Beatrice shared similar feelings about how activities that address sexuality or gender can leave some youth feeling vulnerable:

It only stresses me out if a teacher will open up the discussion about it because sometimes there's a discussion that, let's say in ethics class, like ethical questions and they'll be about, let's say gay marriage. It'll come up and some people will be so against it and you don't wanna be the kid to stand up in the class and say 'Oh well this is normal and you're wrong', because then you're the kid that's different, you're the kid that's gonna be looked at under a microscope [...] you don't wanna be the person that everyone in the class is talking about.

Observations made by Steph and Beatrice reveal some of the risks posed by offering workshops or activities that address gender and sexuality; these youth feared being made to feel different and facing exclusion in that way.

### 5.2.2. MORE THAN TEACHING: EDUCATORS AS ALLIES

Participants also had varied experiences finding support from teachers or staff at their school. Several youth found allies in staff members. Theresa and Steph, were working with the 'spiritual animator' at their school to develop activities to address homophobia. This staff member was responsible for facilitating activities to support students struggling through

social issues. Theresa explained that after she approached her spiritual animator she was given responsibilities that were meaningful to her, as she put it: “I’m gonna be- I’m responsible for gay rights at school and I’ll be doing posters and saying a speech about my life”. Not only was this staff member supportive, but she had an impact on Theresa’s ability to come out to her peers and was helping her make space for other LGBTQ teens.

Similarly, Willow described finding allies in some of the staff at the alternative high school she attended. When I asked her what made that school more comfortable, or different, from other schools she explained: “It’s more laid back, it’s not like a- the teachers you call them by their first name. It’s not- no formal bull crap you know? It’s very relaxed, it’s very- it’s cool and I’m sure one of the teachers was gay”. Samuel, who had also attended the same alternative school, had also identified the important role that empathetic teachers in this environment had to play in his ability to feel comfortable in his trans\* identity.

Payton said that one of her most important adults in her life was one of her teachers, who was one of the few adults who she felt really listened to her. As these cases indicate, teachers can be positive figures in promoting and maintaining safe environments for queer and trans\* students and when they are not, it is felt by LGBTQ students.

Beatrice who attended the same high school as Payton, described more ambivalence among staff: she felt that some of her teachers tried to foster respectful environments in the classroom, however, others avoided the topic of gender or sexuality. As she explained: “Some teachers will be like, ‘It’s not up for discussion’, like, ‘It’s normal’, like, ‘You have to stop’ or, ‘You’re being rude so get out of my class’. Like some teachers are really okay about it, some teachers are more you know scared to touch on the issue all together”. Similarly, Marc-André mentioned that the guidance counsellor at his school was moderately supportive, but hardly made it known: “...if you went to ask her directly she would give you

hope if you were LGBTQ, but she would not advertise it". Clearly, teachers do not always advocate for their queer and trans\* students.

More than this subtle lack of support, there were some youth who had faced exclusions because of the practices of teachers or staff members. For example, Marc-André explained what happened when students at his small town high school tried to hand out pride bracelets: "We went to the principal to ask him if we could hand them out in the main area where everyone met and the principal said no, you will not do this. We were not allowed". Marc-André managed to find members from an LGBTQ community organization in a nearby town to advocate on his behalf and convinced the principal to change his mind.

Skye felt that the situation at her public high school, the same one that Beatrice and Payton attended, was outright hostile due to certain teacher's attitudes:

I find that even the teachers are really judgmental, like I know it's their job not to be, but I dunno at my school all the teachers they just judge-judge-judge [...] So it really doesn't make you feel comfortable talking to someone. Even the counsellor let's say they're really, really religious, well even though they'll say it's ok, they'll still kind of push you to not be gay.

Beatrice described one struggle to get educators in her school to address sexuality. She described an instance when she asked her school nurse why they did not have sexual education:

I asked why we don't have sex-ed and she's just talking to me and she's like do you need any questions- Like, do you have any questions? Do you have anything to ask? And I'm like, 'Well I'm gay, I don't really know anything about it, like I know what I'm attracted to, but what diseases can I catch? What do I have to be careful of? Is there something I should know?' And she explained everything, she sat down with me and that was really cool, but what if I was too shy to go ask? What if I was petrified? It's better to know.

As Beatrice's comments suggest, there can be multiple social barriers that prevent youth from seeking information, and education was seen as a way of mitigating those barriers. This absence of information reveals how LGBTQ and all youth vulnerable.

In these cases, these students did not find support from staff, which caused them to feel judged, alienated or disempowered. According to these participants, some educators can be allies, others are covert supporters, and some employ overtly homophobic practices. For these reasons some of the participants perceived their teachers as threatening to their feelings of safety because they made them feel targeted for their difference. In fact, Melyssa explained that they did not want to feel different; as such they would not rely on staff. When I asked them if they would ever ask for help from a teacher if they needed they replied:

...no, because then the teachers treat you differently so no [...] I want you to treat me like every other student because then kids are gonna pick up on it and then they're gonna wonder and it's like, I don't need that.

Clearly, teachers and staff have a meaningful role to play in ensuring the comfort, or not, of their queer and trans\* students at school.

### 5.2.3. OUT OF THE CLOSETS, INTO THE CLASSROOM

In addition to describing how sexuality and gender were integrated into their learning, or in other institutionally sanctioned ways, participants also discussed whether or not they were out at high school, and what the atmosphere felt like in that regard.

Overall, I found that participants tended to describe their schools with an attitude of cynical resignation; many described homophobia at their high schools and they seemed to expect this. Moreover, sometimes they did not even consider these incidents to be consequential. Even though Tommy described bullying based on gender and sexuality at zir school, and said that ze only had one other friend who ze suspected was gay, and none who were out, ze still described zir high school as 'open'. Jack described his high school in measured, but positive terms, even though no students were out:

It was a really good high school as far as that goes [...] It's not one of the schools in the West Island that's known for being like- not bad at all, you know what I mean?

There's no one that did anything really bad and there was not much homophobia there. That being said, most of the people that were gay there weren't out 'til just after high school, myself included.

In these cases, even though a few students were out, neither Jack nor Tommy really connected this to the atmosphere at these schools. This suggests that homophobic behaviour, or the policing of gender, may have been so normalized that youth did not consider it remarkable. Indeed, as I pointed to in chapter II, homophobic behaviour, in the forms of taunts, bullying, but also systemic marginalization at school is well documented<sup>37</sup> (Grossman, Haney, Edwards, Alessi, Ardon & Jarrett Howell, 2009; Holmes & Cahill, 2003). According to one 2008 survey conducted across Canadian high schools queer and trans\* students experience "...higher levels of verbal, physical and other forms of harassment than other students". Their survey report explains one of the greatest consequences of this: "Fear is a continuous theme throughout the survey data – LGBTQ students fearing for their personal safety; students fearing they, too, will be targeted by homophobia if they are known to have LGBTQ friends or family" (Taylor et al., 2009, p. 85).

Unsurprisingly, there were some youth who chose not to come out during high school. For example, Elisabet chose not to. She explained:

In my school I think there was like three lesbians that's it [...] Not to be stereotypical but it's full of people who have a religion who's really against that, so homophobic behaviours- it's not like a surprise over there, so people keep it hush-hush.

Similarly, other participants described experiences of exclusion, loneliness and bullying at their schools when they did come out. Gabriel explained why even though he was out at school he felt alone: "I'm the only person that's out in my school. I know that there are

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<sup>37</sup> See sections 2.3.1. Challenges Facing Queer & Trans\* Youth and 2.3.3. Spaces for Queer & Trans\* Youth for more background.

other persons, but I don't know if they've even admitted it to themselves yet, so I don't talk about it". As the only out student, Gabriel was isolated.

Theresa and Steph were also the only openly gay students at their school. Theresa said that she had been publically made fun of for this difference: "I've been called, get called, like lesbian, and I look like a guy, but yeah, I just have to ignore it". Steph shared a concern that few people would come to the space that she and Theresa were working on opening unless bullying was addressed at her school because "... no one's actually open; most of the people that are gay they're in younger grades and they'd be too scared to go". Even with the support from a staff member, the work to establish a safe space for queer and trans\* students presented several challenges for Theresa and Steph when social norms dominating their school meant that students were hesitant to come out.

Skye was out as bisexual to her friends, but generally perceived as straight by her peers because she had a boyfriend. She observed that even though she knew that there were many other LGBTQ students at her school, there were few out people: "There's no couples that are gay or anything [...] I find it weird, there should be more gay couples, I guess, but it's very closed in and some people are actually really homophobic; I got made fun of for it". Payton said that overall she felt comfortable being out at the same school, but had experienced some trouble: "Sometimes I'm actually annoyed because like at school, like those immature guys they might make comments or something, but I'm never ever- I've never actually been ashamed". Moreover, because of the close-knit community that existed at her school Payton also said she found it difficult to find privacy.

However, she suggested that her experience as an out bisexual girl contrasted with what she described were her cousins' experience at the same high school. As an out gay guy,

she characterized his time at their school as a period of harassment and isolation. Payton explained:

For five years he never went to go change in the gym locker room because when he walked in one day they all called him a fag, hid their clothes, hid themselves in the washroom and waited for him to leave before he came out so like and he did that like a couple times, like they did that so after a while he just brought, like he would wear a blouse with his tee-shirt under and he'd wear joggers to school and he was always like that.

This out gay student faced routine bullying. Beatrice, who was related to Payton, described this same cousin's experience at their high school, confirming the homophobia he faced, which occurred at multiple levels, by his peers, but also faculty:

My cousin was one of the first boys out and he got really bullied, like really badly. And boys would just like harass him, even the principal was like, 'Oh you can go change in the girl's locker room if you want because you're gay'. And it was special treatment and he hated it all and he couldn't stand it and now he's in college and he's like, 'I can breathe I can be me'. [...] I guess, you know, it gets better, and like it's just no one really wants to get out at my high school, everyone's just like, 'I'm here and I'm not gonna be me for the next five years'.

Still other youth faced discrimination from their peers at school. Parker described how when he came out as a lesbian, before he had come out as 'Parker', he was targeted:

I came out in sec two and that time people- my generation wasn't very developed yet so it's kind of like 'Oh lesbian what is this?' and well, 'We don't know what it is so we'll mock it'. I had a hard time, with some intimidation; at first people would throw food at me, but when I just became more sure of myself and I accepted it and showed who I was it got better, like of course people would still stare at me and the younger people would be like 'Oh what is this? We don't know what it is', but with time it's alright, people weren't too bad.

Parker explained that eventually people were accepting at his school, but that this bullying caused him to feel excluded at school.

On the other hand, there were some youth who had faced so much bullying that they actually dropped out of school entirely<sup>38</sup>. For example, Lee had left their high school because

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<sup>38</sup>Two other youth had also not finished high school; Jean-Luc had dropped out when he was 15, had tried to attend an adult education centre, but dropped out of that when he went "through a depression and that lasted

they felt socially ostracized for identifying as bisexual. Indeed, switching schools or dropping out was often related to homophobic bullying. For example, when I asked Willow what her high school experience was like she bluntly stated: “horrible”. She explained that she was bullied because of her lesbian identity at two different schools:

I got spat on, I got pushed into lockers, I got, you know, trash on me, like I got called, like, a dyke and you know, weirdo and stuff like that, and I just couldn't take it anymore so I just switched and then I switched again.

Willow explained that she was seen as a marginal by those in charge because there were more pressing issues to be addressed at her first high school, and then she felt she was seen as a ‘charity case’ at her second school because of her class status and her mental health. Willow’s experiences in the education system reveal how sexuality, class and ability can intersect and shape a youth’s access to a safe space.

#### 5.2.4. CHALLENGING EXCLUSIONS AT SCHOOL

While many faced exclusions and discrimination, participants also challenged social and institutional exclusions: they asserted their identities at school, sought or found support from staff, focused on the positive aspects of their school experiences, and some described how they saw things changing for future students. By acknowledging these practices these youth disrupt the victim narrative I identified in Chapter II<sup>39</sup>.

For one, while most of the youth faced bullying and exclusion at school, some also found and maintained community. Theresa and Steph were both out to everyone at school. Even though they explained that they were some of the few and both had faced

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five months”, and Corinne also said that she left high school after transferring high schools several times. They did not make a link between this and their experience as gay/bisexual students.

<sup>39</sup> See section 2.3.2. Victim or Agent? Queer & Trans\* Youth as Research Subjects for background.

discrimination, Theresa said she felt supported by her friends. This was plain to see as they both frequently had a group of straight friends from school accompany them during P10's drop-in; when I asked those youth why they came to drop-in, they enthusiastically responded that they wanted to show Theresa and Steph that they cared about them.

Corinne said that she was out at her high school and that she was not shy about it: "When I was in school I had a few gay friends and we would just walk in the hallways and just talk about our girlfriends". Jean-Luc had attended a Catholic school before he dropped out. He described himself as the "out gay stoner jock at school", and that he had felt accepted by those around him and was even quite popular. Tristan had also been out at his high school and described his peers' reactions toward his sexuality as varied, but because we so set on feeling 'normal' he refused to let homophobia influence his feelings:

At my school no one made an effort to put it out there that they were homophobic so I was openly gay at my school. I had many friends that didn't really care, they weren't all, 'Oh you're gay; let's be friends'. It's not how people at my schoolwork. If you're gay: okay, that's about it. Homophobic people didn't bother me one bit.

Tristan tried not to be influenced by any outward homophobia, or the feeling that he was being tokenized, and was set on feeling open even though he said that he was the only one was out in his grade. Lasser and Wicker's (2008) research on LGB describe the power in coming out. They describe how students who come out to their peers have "...the potential to affect meaningful social change, as GLB youth are viewed not as passive victims of discriminatory policies and practices, but rather as active agents of change" (Lasser & Wicker, 2008, p. 116).

Other youth actively challenged heteronormativity at school. Beatrice explained that although she was frequently the target of verbal taunts and teasing at her high school because of her ambiguous gender presentation and sexuality, this would not deter her from expressing herself:

When I was into this girl at school I would hold her hand walking through class, walking through the school it wouldn't bother me because I was used to people saying things that for me it would just reflect off. Like they could scream 'fag', and I wouldn't care 'cause it's just, it's ok: I am gay, I am here. What are you gonna do?

Beatrice challenged the heteronormativity of her high school by being herself. In another case, Marc-André explained that his high school had not always been tolerant, but that he had challenged his peers' behaviours and managed to change the atmosphere:

When I was 14 some kid made some comment about how gays are all stereotypical, about how we're nothing but a bunch of penniless bums and everything else. So the next time I had the class with him I went in with blue shoes, green pants, orange belt, pink shirt, hair up, gay pride flag- I put it on his desk and just stared at him. After that nobody ever said anything about me or my family being gay again [...] Before the act I did I was getting sly comments all the time in the hallways and it was just very hard.

By being out, and by making a statement, Marc-André also disrupted heteronormativity at school. He explained that by the time he graduated there were many openly gay students and described the school as a space where there were many same-sex couples holding hands or kissing in the hallways. He actively challenged the views of his peers when came face to face with homophobia and this, presumably, had a positive impact on his peers' ability to come out as well. Similarly, as I mentioned, Theresa and Steph were working their 'spiritual animator' to start series of activities about sexuality. She and Steph were trying to, as Steph put it, "... get a hang out place for gay people". In these ways participants disrupted the heteronormativity of their school spaces.

Rather than trying to change their schools, some participants chose to switch schools in order to find a place where they could belong. Willow found an alternative high school where she felt respected and welcomed after transferring several times; it was the first space where she was not bullied everyday. She described the atmosphere at this high school:

...such a good environment, so welcoming and open [...] It was just more like we don't care what size, shape, sexuality, race, background, rich, poor: you're welcome to come here, and it's just that's what's really was beautiful about the school.

Not only did the absence of bullying make Willow feel included, but she also found belonging in the context of a diverse school environment. Samuel's experience in high school was very similar: after being bullied out of one of the bigger Montréal public schools he wound up finding safety at the same alternative high school as Willow. He said that while this experience was difficult, it gave him particular insights, which he was ultimately grateful to have. As he put it, he learned:

...to not listen to people [...] I became more confident in myself because at the end of the day I was trusting: it was me. I was left with myself so if I was gonna hate myself ... why? Because other people did? No, I learned how to like myself, and I did stuff that made me like myself.

Rather than letting the bullying define him as a victim, Samuel changed the way he understood the situation in a way that left him feeling stronger. Eventually, he was able to find other youth like him, and a feeling of belonging, at the alternative school:

I met a few people who were not, not trans\*, or any part of the LGBT community, but people who had learning disabilities like I did, people who were bullied, and people who had experienced realistic stuff like I had. So being in that environment it really helped me especially with the teachers. And in grade eleven I met my friend, a good friend of mine, who is transgendered and he taught me and he told me his story and knowing him, if I would have never met him I wouldn't have ever known to this day, well maybe I would have, I just wouldn't have been so informed earlier about what transgenderedism was and like I'm really happy I switched and met him and 'cause now I'm happy.

Youth find ways to belong in different ways; by asking their peers to rethink their attitudes, by finding the support of friends or allied adults, or by seeking out specific spaces of welcoming.

## 5.2.5 IT GETS BETTER: COLLEGE AS AN INCLUSIVE EXPERIENCE

Compared to high schools, participants' experiences with how colleges<sup>40</sup> addressed sexuality and gender appeared to be much more inclusive. Mayo (2003) identified the importance of queer spatiality in the form of GSAs: "...without this right to space, communities of sexual difference and the development of sexual ethics have nowhere to start" (p. 29). Mayo suggested that the existence of GSAs in schools interrupts conventional uses of spaces and thus encourages students and staff to reconsider assumptions they may have about gender and sexuality. Despite the clear importance of these spaces, none of participants attended a high school where a GSA existed, they were, however more common in Cégeps. For example, Jack described the environment at the Cégep he attended in the West Island as a lot more accepting than his high school had been. He described the gay club there: "We have our own club room so at school everyone, well most of us will go in that club room on our breaks and it gives us a place to be ourselves without worrying about other people's opinions". Like Jack, in contrast to her experience at high school, Elisabet was out to almost everyone and was part of the LGBTQ club at her Cégep. She described the environment:

... yeah it is really cool, but yeah, nah it's open. Seriously I find that now in Cégep if people's going to judge me anyways, I might as well be open about it [...] High school is so different, it's smaller, it's a tighter community space.

While Marc-André had been out in high school, he still found that the atmosphere at Cégep was much more welcoming. Just as Willow had pointed out that her alternative school was a space of belonging because of the diverse student body, Marc-André attributed his feeling of inclusion to the diversity of the Cégep:

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<sup>40</sup>By 'college' I mean trade schools and Cégeps, which I previously described, see footnote 32.

...everyone's different, everyone's doing their own thing everyone can be what they want, do what they want [...] There's people from different countries, people whose parents come from different countries, different religions, different habits, everyone is so different that adding in homosexuality, LGBTQ is just another factor.

Both Elisabet and Marc-Andre were active members of the LGBTQ student group at their Cégep; they had a small space that offered a safe space for lesbians and gay guys to meet each other and sit and talk and eat together. Students also made sure the space had resources lists and pamphlets with information regarding different services in the city for young queer and trans\* people. Marc-André described some of the activities they were coordinating including a drag show and two different anti-bullying campaigns. He explained the role of the club:

It's supposed to be a safe space where no one is discriminated against, that there's no confrontation whatsoever. We offer mediators if ever there's any conflict within the group [...] We just put out a whole bunch of different activities to be able to help take down the stereotypes.

Not only did the club exist and provide youth with activities, resources and safety, it was also supported by the administration. While it was clearly valuable to Marc-Andre and Elisabet this club space was not perfect. Elisabet described some of the issues regarding where the club was located in the building:

I feel like an animal in the zoo because they have glass panels [...] You can't hide it-it's in a cafeteria where there's clubs all around, and so people can see you in there, so I find it's not really good 'cause not everyone's out. Like there's a girl who's not out and there's been drama because of that so I find that it should be a little more covered up, or not in the cafeteria. There's other places, but it's a place.

Marc-André voiced the same concern about the lack of anonymity afforded to students who may be more hesitant to visit an LGBTQ club under public view, but he elaborated that they had come up with a response:

We're working on having a class room on a different floor away from everyone else for a specific every single Wednesday so if they want to they can come see what it's

about, come back on Wednesdays and from there see if they want to come down to the club room.

While both youth described issues with the club, they mainly voiced an appreciation that they could be open about their sexuality at school, without fear of discrimination.

According to the perspectives shared by these Cégep students it would seem that the atmosphere in these spaces was generally more tolerant than high schools, and that these institutions were generally more accommodating toward students needs. This may be because students at Cégep students are older, and therefore seen not as asexual children, but rather as nearly adult youth with sexual and gender identities. Moreover, students at Cégeps might feel more confident in asserting their needs due to their age and the autonomy they are afforded because of this. In fact, Lee's experience at an adult education centre echoes the experience of Cégep students. They found this educational environment to be much more welcoming than their high school: "...there's a like a community kinda, well they're trying to build a GSA hopefully in the future or at least they've made like a purple day where you wear purple to support being LGBTQ".

On the other hand, unlike most participants, Tommy had attended a Cégep after ze graduated, but had not found acceptance there. However, ze had recently transferred to a trade school. Ze explained that although ze was the only out gay student, the atmosphere at the trade school was much more accepting than zir high school or zir experience at Cégep:

...it's actually pretty nice 'cause the people are a lot more older. So it's not really that immaturity, 'cause I find college was very I don't- they're still trying to find themselves, they weren't sure about what they're doing [...] People are more mature, they're older so they're more accepting of it.

Trade school offered Tommy space to develop zir personal interests in a more accepting atmosphere than high school or Cégep; he saw adolescence as a space and time of intolerance.

Participants' experiences at school were indeed varied. However, Beatrice's thoughts on what being a queer teenager is like offer a critical insight, and fitting conclusion, on this experience of everyday school space. When I asked her what life as a teenager is like she replied:

...stressful. It's a lot harder than people think it is, because I mean we go through a span of five years you're in high school and it seems like it's just five years, but it's really not. It's you evolving into this little kid into this grown person, and it's you finding yourself and it's so hard. Because you see, you look around like the cafeteria and people are like, there's the jocks and there's the popular girls and there's the girls that do drugs and then there's the boys that do drugs and there's the dealers and then you know, you have the losers and then you have the people who play their video games- it's just you look around and you don't know where to go, like you're there and you're like, 'I don't know what I am'. It's hard finding yourself and sometimes when people don't guide you it's even harder because as a gay teen, I mean they don't, there's no, there's no education about it because you're just gay, like you're on your own, like, 'Okay we don't wanna talk about it because we're scared parents are gonna get angry'- and it's all shunned and you have no idea how to how to get out and be who you are because you don't know what you are and it's hard, it's harder than people expect.

All teenagers must navigate school spaces, however queer and trans\* youth experience face particular exclusions. High school was largely defined by a period of struggle to access space, information and belonging, in contrast with college, which offered more openness, inclusivity and tolerance. Some youth are able to find support from institutional policies and practices, others are offered assistance from teachers or faculty; some find friends, others make space for themselves. Some youth, have to wait to find the right space to feel like they belong. Most youth negotiate multiple, contradictory experiences at once since schools are sites of welcome and exclusion; just like most other day-to-day spaces young queer and trans\* people navigate.

### 5.3 THE URBAN & SUBURBAN: NEIGHBOURHOODS, STREETS & PLACES IN-BETWEEN

The 'neighbourhood' or 'the street', has been a common focus of geographers who study young people's spatialized experiences. For one, many geographers contend that public spaces are not simply inert backdrops upon which social interactions occur. Rather, they can be understood as sites for cultural identity formation that can shape how people interact with each other and see themselves; this can be especially relevant for studying youth. As Cahill (2000) put it:

In contemporary US urban society, adolescence is also usually the first time that children negotiate public space on their own on a regular basis (not accompanied by an adult), whether it means walking to school by themselves, doing family chores, or spending time outdoors with friends. How teenagers define their environmental transactions is intimately bound with the way in which they construct their identities. In these interactions, environmental experiences are a means for reflecting upon, reproducing, and transforming the self (p. 251).

Since young people predominantly live through institutions, such as the family or school that constantly regulate their behaviour, public street spaces offer urban youth a space where they can engage in unstructured activities (Matthews, Limb & Taylor, 1999b). Matthews et al. (2000) emphasize the importance of considering the street in particular as an important micro-geography for youth because of the way young people tend to make space for themselves in these locations because they lack power to access other public spaces:

Streets are places of meaning to many young people. They afford spaces where social conventions can be contested and independence asserted ... streets are places where adultist conventions (constraints) and moralities about what it is to be a child, that is, less-than-adult, can be put aside. The result is that for a number of young people streets become spaces between cultures, sites that are temporarily outside of adult society (p. 69).

What counts as 'street' spaces can include: sidewalks, parks, cul-de-sacs, parking lots, public benches, alleys, and all the spaces in-between. These places are where young people often choose to socialize with friends away from family members or other watchful eyes and make the space meaningful for themselves. Malone (2002) identifies some of the aspects of this:

Many of the identities young people adopt within the public domain are contradictory and oppositional to the dominant culture (messy, dirty, loud, smoking, sexual); others have an easy fit (clean, neat, polite, in school uniform). Visible expressions of youth culture could be seen as the means of winning space from the dominant culture, to construct the self within the selfless sea of city streets; they are also an attempt to express and resolve symbolically the contradictions that they experience between cultural and ideological forces; between dominant ideologies, pare ideologies and the ideologies that arise from their own experiences of daily life (p. 163).

Youth's experiences in public spaces are indeed complex.

In this section, I explore everyday street spaces as sites of interaction and possibility. I begin by presenting an overview of where my participants generally said they spent most of their time<sup>41</sup>. I then identify the areas described as 'safe': places where young queer and trans\* people felt they could express themselves or find community. Finally, I focus on the qualities of the sites identified as unsafe for queer and trans\* youth.

### 5.3.1. HOME, HABITATS & GETTING AROUND

Neighbourhoods are delineated by cultural, economic, and geographic boundaries; within and around, harmonies and tensions between groups can emerge. Since neighbourhoods are connected to social structures, "young peoples' experiences of neighbourhood and community are regularly marked by strict territorial divisions associated with identifications with specific places and identities" (Hopkins 2010, p. 132). These factors play important roles in determining how a youth will feel as well as how they will construct and enact their own identities in a given space.

Montréal, a city of several million, nestled in the heart of Québec, is made up of many cultures and has inherited a colonial history made present in the socio-spatial geography of the city. For one, a boundary defined by linguistic differences (which have

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<sup>41</sup> In the interest of protecting the youth's identities, I refrain from naming the exact neighbourhoods in which they reside, but instead describe the areas they identify.

cultural implications) separates the city; the west side can be generally characterized as Anglophone (with the exception of some the boroughs in the south west), and, the east is Francophone. The boundaries are of course fluid and change according to the demographic variations over time (Demczuk & Remiggi, 1998; Probyn, 1996). Within this, a few specific areas were repeatedly brought up in interviews. Participants made reference to the Gay Village located just east of downtown, in a traditionally working-class and francophone neighbourhood, and St-Michel a borough located to the north east of the city's core neighbourhoods with a high immigrant population including Italian, Haitian, Middle Eastern, Asian and Latino communities.

Since participants were between the ages of 15 and 18, they spent most of their structured time, as I highlighted in the first two sections of this chapter, either at school or at home. When I asked the youth where they spent most of their free time most described the neighbourhoods in which they lived. I was surprised to find that none of the participants lived close to P10 and that, in fact, several of them commuted from as far as the North Shore or West Island suburbs (travel time can take over an hour and a half by public transit). With the exception of Samuel, Willow and Lee, who lived in urban neighbourhoods downtown, most of the youth I spoke with lived in suburban areas.

The suburbs are often characterized by weak infrastructure for public transportation and a lack of community spaces, making it difficult for youth to get around or find a place to fit in. In fact, there were few areas participants described as accepting within their neighbourhoods. Kato's (2009) research on middle-class teenagers in the suburbs<sup>42</sup> highlights the consequences this has on youth's use of space. She points out that teenagers living in the

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<sup>42</sup>See section 4.3.3. Class Matters for more background.

suburbs are often made ‘placeless’ because they lack designated spaces and are denied access to many semi-public spaces (e.g., bars, and movie theatres).

Since they face multiple spatial constraints, the ways that teenagers use space varies according to whether they wish to conform to adultist norms or defy them. Many participants identified their experiences as contrasting with adult standards in the neighbourhoods they lived. While some of the youth insisted on their ‘normalcy’, many participants subverted hetero-normative expectations of gender and sexuality through the way they embodied these identities; this greatly shaped their perception of where they felt safe in the city.

### 5.3.2. SEEKING SAFETY IN THE CITY

Although most participants had experienced harassment and discrimination in public spaces, many of them maintained that they felt comfortable displaying their gender and sexuality anywhere. For example, Marc-André named a few spaces where he felt particularly welcomed, but explained: “I’ll go around in drag anywhere in the city [...] I have no fear in the city. I have no fear whatsoever of being who I am”. Marc-André explained that part of why he felt comfortable most places was because he had already survived the worst when he was abducted by strangers<sup>43</sup> while on vacation outside of Montréal. He explained that, in contrast to that experience, Montréal felt very safe: “...after that, nothing much scares me”. Moreover, he also pointed out that he knew he was a common target for harassment, but that he did not want to let this interfere with his access to mobility: “...between a ginger, between being an LG- a homosexual, there’s so many things that happen that you just, you just realize that no matter what happens to you, you’ll always manage to get through”.

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<sup>43</sup>Marc-André had described an incident when he had been kidnapped, robbed and threatened with a switchblade while he was in Cuba for his March break.

Despite the fact that participants lived in many different areas of the city, when I asked the youth where they felt safest there were a few reoccurring types of spaces identified as safer than most. For one, the desire for anonymity was articulated by many youth, who explained that they sought out spaces where they would not feel judged or threatened by the attitudes of strangers. As such, several identified their own neighbourhoods as too intimate and confining due to the presence of family and neighbours. Several participants, therefore, identified parks as areas where they felt comfortable. Jean-Luc described walking along the Lachine Canal to clear his head when he felt stressed. Similarly, Corinne explained that the main reason she felt at ease in parks was that this was one space without adult supervision, so she could be herself. Parker said that he spent most of time in various parks around his neighbourhood in a suburban community just off the Island of Montréal because he liked the solace of the quiet that this small town provided.

On the other hand, while parks were seen to offer space for youth to either spend time alone or to be unsupervised, many of the teenagers identified downtown as an area where they would spend time with their friends. Jean-Luc said that he liked to go downtown to shop with his friends, and Elisabet was attracted to this area of the city because it was busy and offered a lot to explore. In addition to presenting particular activities, downtown spaces are full of people, including adults; the bustle was seen to offer anonymity to youth seeking space to be themselves. For example, Steph's described this when she explained why she liked to hang out on Mont-Royal Street: "I find there's a lot of like accepting people, well there's, like, different kinds of people so everyone's kind of accepted". Similarly, even though Parker had identified parks and remote areas as places he felt comfortable in, he explained that he generally found it easier to be gender-non-conforming in the city:

There are so many more people in the big city that you kind of just become part of the blur so you're not pinpointed as much, you're not noticed as much so it's easier

to just be [...] There are a lot more different types of people in a big town than there are in a small city, there'll be more transgendered people, more gay, lesbian, and in my part of town it's mostly lesbians, straight people- it's just there aren't as many varieties.

This was a frequent contrast I heard many of the youth articulate; the city was seen as more tolerant and the suburbs and small towns were perceived to host more narrow-minded attitudes. Bertha also pointed out the differences she observed between her life in a rural community and her experiences in an urban environment when she described the city:

I think that there's a lot of people who are really like more accepting of who you are [...] There are a lot more open-minded people and like back home like everyone, they stick to one thing, and everyone is kind of like the same, and they view things the same.

Bertha described the city as a site of acceptance and belonging for queer and trans\* youth because of the diversity found in urban spaces.

I also found that youth's individual identities, experiences and inter-personal relations influenced their perceptions of the city. Because of this, an area that felt safe for one youth would be described differently by another. For example, Jean-Luc identified a traditionally working-class neighbourhood in Montréal's South West as an area he tried to avoid unless he was visiting family. He explained: "It's really ghetto and the kids over there are just bad kids and I don't hang around with bad people. I don't. [...] My cousin who is a homophobic jock lives [there]". Jean-Luc associated the neighbourhood with a certain kind of person, which was likely influenced by his negative relationship with his cousin, in addition to a clear class bias he had. On the other hand, Samuel described this same area as one of the places in the city he felt safest: "People would assume, well from rumours, it's kind of a bad area, but I don't know, maybe because I know a lot of trans\* people who live [there], so it's like I feel safer because no one says anything". In other words, youth's

multiple subject positions have everything to do with how they will perceive their safety in a given area.

Many of the youth's feelings of security were connected to the character of a space, largely related to remaining anonymous or standing out, something that being downtown or spending time in parks provided. In some cases, there were specific sites where youth felt comfortable. Jack explained that he really only felt he could express his sexuality when he was in private. He felt that otherwise people would judge him, and while he did not fear harassment outright, this was enough for him to want to keep his sexuality private with people he really trusted. In fact, many youth spoke about the importance of being around their friends with regard to their feelings of safety. For example, Payton wrote this in an email, "I don't really feel ever completely safe about it unless I'm with Samuel or my friends"<sup>44</sup>.

### 5.3.3. THE GAY VILLAGE

As pointed to in Chapter II, Gay Villages have been studied within queer geography both for the ways that they interrupt the heteronormativity of city-scapes, but also for how they produce narrow articulations of homosexuality by promoting gay male spaces based on consumption<sup>45</sup>. Some geographers have criticized Gay Villages for how they exclude youth in particular because of the bar-culture that dominates these areas which prohibits youth participation because of the age restrictions. Interestingly, Montréal's Gay Village was repeatedly named by youth as a specific area they were familiar with. On the one hand, many

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<sup>44</sup> For more examples of specific sites see section 6.1.1. Where are friendships?

<sup>45</sup> See section 2.1.2. Diverse Queer Urbanities for background.

said they felt comfortable expressing their gender or sexuality in this neighbourhood; on the other, several echoed the criticisms I outlined.

For one, several participants identified the Village as an attractive and at times, liberating space. When I asked Jean-Luc why he liked being in the village, he simply replied: "...beautiful boys, beautiful boys, beautiful boys". Jack, who had not actually spent much time in the Village, still described this area positively: "I really like the atmosphere here". Marc-André said that the specific spaces he would express his sexuality and gender identities were: "...P10, at my club at [Cégep], and also in 'The Village'". In other words, he felt most comfortable in places where he was surrounded by other LGBT people. Unsurprisingly, he described Montréal's Gay Village this way:

...the fact that everyone there is, I'd say 90% of them are LGBTQ, therefore they're more open, they're more accepting and it's just everyone there can be themselves: they don't have to fear. They can be whoever they want, they can walk around in ass-less chaps if they want to and nobody will give a second glance.

Therefore, many of the participants said that they spent some of their free time in the Gay Village. Marc-André's went on to explain that he felt more comfortable shopping in the Village because of its accepting atmosphere:

If I want to go ahead and get myself a dress let's say if I'm in the Village nobody'll give me a second glance, if I do that anywhere else in this city, people will be looking at me and I might get comments that I might not appreciate.

Samuel also reported spending a lot of time in the Village; he told me that participants would go down the street from P10 after drop-in and hang out in the Village. He explained why he felt safe in this area:

I love the Village. I mean it's not good in the sense I get to pick up girls because I identify as a guy and maybe a majority of them, the girls here are lesbian, but I mean I dunno, it's just like if anywhere I can be myself there because I'm under that group; I'm under the LGBT group, and just knowing that I'm accepted somewhere- and maybe they don't understand- but they're not gonna discriminate because they know what it's like to be different.

While most of the participants who felt comfortable in the Village identified as gay men, clearly others did identify with this space. Like Samuel, Theresa and Steph also described the Village as the area in Montréal where they chose to spend a lot of their free time. Steph explained why she liked this area: “I feel accepted there”. In the Gay Village, acceptance was easy to find because, as Theresa stated, “...everyone is the same and everyone feels the same way”. Similarly, Beatrice saw the value in having access to a Gay Village: “...you’re not scared because everyone is like you and you’re like so included in everything, it feels good”.

On the other hand, she was not sure if the existence of the Village was necessarily a sign of equality:

I think it’s cool that we have a Gay Village, but I don’t think we should be- I think it should be a normal thing: ‘the Gay Village’, just the fact that you have to put the word gay in it, I dunno that kind of bothers me a little bit ‘cause it should be normal.

For Beatrice the name confirmed her difference from the norm, something she did not want to be entirely defined by.

Although this area was seen as accommodating the LGBTQ community by some of the youth, other interviewees indicated that the Village was not a space they felt a part of. For example, Willow did not feel that she belonged. She described how the one lesbian bar she and her friends spent time in was “...being taken over by the gays”. She went on:

I feel like the Gay Village is more like the Gay *Male* Village [...] I used to go, again it’s more gay males, it’s like, it’s very male-oriented so it’s like I don’t really go, it’s pointless to go down there so it’s like no [...] If you wanna find the lesbians go to a roller derby.

Rather than spend time in this area, Willow sought out lesbian community in spaces that she perceived to be frequented by people like her. Moreover, even though Steph felt acceptance in the Village, she echoed Willow’s comments when I asked her if she felt like the space catered her needs: “...as a girl no, I find it’s really for guys”.

Many of the participants also described feeling excluded in the Village because of how it was seen as a commercial, adult space. Corinne admitted that she just found the village to be “boring” mainly because she said there were not enough activities directed toward youth her age. Elisabet shared: “There’s not a lot of youth, like for under eighteen, because I remember when I was under eighteen well I could go to Tim Horton’s and stuff, but so it’s clubs, so you know? Now it’s more open because the door’s open for me so I can go to any event”. Tristan also pointed out that there was little in the Village that catered to minors; he explained that he felt that there was too much emphasis on bars and drinking. For this reason, he said that he thought the village “...could be safer [...] it’s catered strictly to gay adults, there’s lots of homelessness, lots of drugs, alcohol. I know it’s really- I find the village puts it out there with the clubs and the sex shops and the saunas and the SAQ and people carrying their bottles around”. In addition to the emphasis on drinking and sex, which he found alienating, he indicated that the presence of homelessness made him feel unsafe<sup>46</sup>. Indeed, while the Village was a site of inclusion for some, specifically for the ways that it normalized their sexuality and accommodated diverse articulations of gender, others felt excluded from the area because it was seen to cater mostly to gay men’s adult needs. Once again the individual identities of youth informed their perception of inclusion in this area.

#### 5.3.4. WHO DO THEY PROTECT? THE POLICE & (IN)SECURITY

Since my research was concerned with where queer and trans\* youth feel safe, I asked participants to reflect on the role they saw the police as playing in creating spaces of safety. I received varied responses.

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<sup>46</sup> This was probably due to a class bias Tristan had.

For one, Tristan said that he thought downtown was safest because "...there's a lot of people, there's always security, if not police. It's where I find the most liberal people are most of the time, especially during the day". Tristan saw a strong connection between his feelings of safety and the presence of police in public settings.

On the other hand, many participants expressed fear and distrust of the police in public spaces. For example, as soon as I mentioned the police, Willow described instances where she felt they had been too aggressive toward her and how she had felt profiled for looking poor or being gay. When I asked Jean-Luc what role the police played in ensuring his safety he described an incident in which he did not find the support he needed:

My friend was gay-bashed last summer, like, we went to [a bar in the village] and he was gay bashed, he got mace in the eye and got kicked really badly and two of my friends got two black eyes. What happened is we went and told on them and [the police] didn't do shit, like they're in the Village and they're not even doing their job. The reason why police are there is because of the bums, they're not there for the homophobes or the people who are gonna gay bash us, they're not there for us.

Jean-Luc had a strong distrust of the police because of their response to his friends' gay-bashing; their presence was not seen as improving his safety as they were not allies. Similarly, Samuel described a situation in which the police did not protect his friend: "...my friends [...] got attacked. They went to the cops and the cops said that there was absolutely nothing to do that they could do about it". He further explained that he found most police officers to be:

...close-minded and the only reason why they're [in the Village] is because that's where they're assigned for their jobs now. I don't think that I could go to a cop and be like, I identify as this, because I still feel that they would be like, 'Oh excuse me 'miss' or 'ma'am'.

In addition to having had negative experiences with the police that caused him to question whether he would turn to them, Samuel felt that his gender identity would be questioned and

that the potential of this situation made him feel even less inclined to seek support from police.

Other participants also said they would not seek out the police for support because they felt they would be treated poorly because of their age, sexual orientation or gender. Tommy explained that ze might turn to the police if ze was in danger, but that overall ze saw the role of police as enforcing social norms and expectations, ones ze did not necessarily conform to. Beatrice described the relationship between police and teenagers in public spaces: “They don’t want us being on our own [...] they automatically have an assumption that all teenagers are bad and it’s such an annoying assumption because we’re not all bad, I mean some of us are, but we’re not all”. While some of the youth felt that police increased their feelings of safety in a given area, others did not feel supported by them and some even feel threatened by their role. In these cases, some youth suggested that police did not prioritize their needs, others were concerned that their identities would not be respected, and some feared outing themselves.

### 5.3.5. “AS LONG AS THEY DON’T SEE ME”: SITES OF EXCLUSIONS OR DANGERS

Youth identified spaces where they felt comfortable articulating their identities, but they also described specific spaces where they experienced isolation, harassment, judgment and violence and acute exclusions.

Several participants explained that they felt less comfortable expressing their sexuality or gender identity in certain neighbourhoods, especially their home neighbourhoods, where they might be recognized by people whom they were not out to. These were areas where youth feared being judged by specific people in their lives and that were identified as alienating, stressful and sometimes dangerous. For example, Samuel, who

had said that he felt “really comfortable anywhere”, pointed out that this was not universally the case: “I feel safe anywhere outside my neighbourhood- well practically anywhere, as long as people from work don’t see me”. Samuel was not out as trans to his co-workers<sup>47</sup> because he felt they would not understand; he worried that they would see him and treat him badly on that basis. His neighbourhood did not feel safe because he felt he was more likely to run into his co-workers there. Similarly, Elisabet described feeling very comfortable most places, except, like Samuel, in areas where people she knew might see her. When I asked her if she would hold her girlfriend’s hand anywhere she explained that she avoided kissing or holding hands with her girlfriend in areas she thought people from her high school might be. For Samuel and Elisabet, surveillance by peers whom they were not out to was seen as the most threatening. Similarly, Theresa said that she felt safe, as long as she did not run into her family in public places. She also specified that she might not kiss in public in areas where “there’s a lot of religious people”. For a similar reason Steph explained that she felt most comfortable in areas where “...people just mind their own business [...] keep their opinion to themselves”. She went on, “I’m not saying everyone has to love gay people- it’s just keep it to yourself if you don’t”.

In another vein, participants in the focus group identified the metro, or public transit as a certain space where they often felt judged by others for the way they looked, for being different. For example, Steph relayed an instance in which she was threatened by her peers in an everyday space, on her bus ride to school:

I was in the bus with my ex and like we kiss- actually we didn’t even kiss- we were just kind of like next to each other and these girls randomly popped out and just started asking if I was gay. I said ‘Yes, but it’s none of your business’, and then like a week after we saw them again at that same bus stop and they started like yelling stuff at me and apparently they threw an orange at me.

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<sup>47</sup>Samuel would try to pass as a lesbian at work.

Steph identified this situation as a particular source of anxiety for her because it occurred in an area she regularly had to pass through on her way to and from school. The public city bus is also an area that assembles people from diverse backgrounds closely and is unregulated. With neither consistent adult supervision, nor an obvious escape should a situation arise; it is not so surprising that participants identified this as an area they experienced discrimination. Participants in the focus group elaborated on this. For example, Sora described how she responded to feeling stared at by fellow passengers: “I’m just like okay- I know you’re going to stare at me the second my head is down, so I’m gonna watch all of you”. When I asked the participants how they knew that people were judging them Tristan explained: “You always get the looks and you always have the vibe and people tend to talk and then look at you or talk while looking at you”, Gabriel added: “You feel their looks crawling on your skin”. These youth felt judged by people around them, and the metro was an area they experienced this often.

Those who identified as trans\* especially felt uncomfortable and unsafe in urban public space. Parker, for example, explained that he was constantly thinking about his gender and that there was not one place where this did not occupy his thoughts. He went on:

I feel awkward trying to be ‘Parker’ because I’m- people know who I am and I have feminine traits so people will look at me and will hesitate and use miss or sir. It’s hard, it’s something that’s not always pleasant to have to go through even if you’re used to it but, I try to do the best I can do to be myself.

Parker’s difficulty asserting his gender identity and the social interactions that follow play a significant role in shaping his daily experiences and have brought him undue stress. Similarly, Tommy said there was virtually nowhere he felt at ease. In one of our follow-up emails he wrote:

I don’t feel like there is a safe place in Montréal. I can only feel safe and comfortable in my own head. I have to be comfortable with myself in order not to care about my surrounding. The reason for why I feel that way is because where ever you go, there

are always people who will not agree with your views; therefore, there is no safe place.

In our interview ze explained that ze felt that "...the majority of the people are still very narrow minded and they, if they see something different they they're not afraid to show that you are not who you're supposed to be". Tommy and Parker's interpretations suggest that in most spaces subtle, overt, internalized and direct heteronormativity as well as people's discomfort with gender transgressions can have important consequences.

Moreover, Lee echoed what the other participants said about the anonymity provided by urban space and identified suburban neighbourhoods as areas where queer or trans\* teenagers might encounter threats. Lee also pointed out that discrimination in public interactions depended greatly other aspects of identity:

More like the urbanized areas are more open minded, like they don't really give a shit, but if you go to like some of the smaller areas or like sketchier metros, I guess you could call it, like there's a chance that someone could call you out, it really depends, I guess, on how you look.

Other youth's experiences affirmed this observation. Willow, for example, felt that she was unwelcome in upper class neighbourhoods because of her socio-economic position as a working-class youth<sup>48</sup>.

In another case, participants in the focus group agreed that Sora, who was black and an out lesbian, would generally experience more discrimination in public, than the other three participants who were white. They spoke about how they thought there were certain neighbourhoods where this kind of racism was more likely to happen. Their observations highlight how gender presentation, sexuality and race can intersect with each other and also with racist discourses. In this conversation they were talking about Sora's experience in specific:

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<sup>48</sup>See section 4.3.3. Class Matters.

Sora: So if I showed up at St Michel metro at night I'd be fucked, no?

Tristan: Not like if you walk in you're gonna get shot right away- it's just like sometimes you gotta be careful.

Lee: There's a risk ...

Gabriel: You might get weird looks, but then if you're walking with a girl next to you or like kissing and like holding hands then you might ...

Sora: So there's basically like no PDA [Public Displays of Affection]

Tristan: PDA if you're, like, a straight couple.

They were suggesting that Sora would face more discrimination than the rest of the group because of how she looks, and that in general youth exhibiting homosexual behaviour, like holding hands or kissing with someone of the same gender, could face further judgment.

Despite the fact that these youth acknowledged that an individual's access to safety was closely tied to issues of race, these participants, and others, relied on xenophobic discourses to describe the type of people they saw as threatening. As the above and following discussions demonstrate, participants in the focus group identified St-Michel, a neighbourhood with a significant immigrant population, as less safe. They relied on racist discourses that hold contemporary cultural currency and that frame 'immigrants' as intolerant to sexual or gender diversity. When I asked focus group participants what it was about this neighbourhood that caused them to feel uncomfortable Gabriel and Tristan said it was the "Middle Eastern Mentality", which they saw as unequivocally intolerant. Tristan brought this up again in our individual interview and again in our email correspondences, as he put it in an email to me: "St-Michel isn't a great area, that's one place I'd be unbelievably careful about what affection I show because most people that live there are immigrants who are known to be intolerant". For Tristan, and some of the other participants, their perception of safety was tied up in racist understandings that 'othered' immigrant populations, which were seen as homophobic and intolerant.

While not all the youth articulated such overtly xenophobic perceptions, other youth's comments on where they felt safe in the city revealed the ways in which classism and

racism run deep in discourses on safety. For example, as I mentioned Jean-Luc said that the only neighbourhoods he saw as unsafe were Pointe-St-Charles and St Henri, two historically working-class neighbourhoods in Montréal's South West. When I asked him what it was about these areas that felt made him feel threatened, he replied: "It's really ghetto and the kids over there are just bad kids". These kind of discourses are unsettling in contrast to how queer and trans\* youth identified many complex ways they face exclusions in the city; by their peers or by family, in unregulated spaces, and because of their individual subject positions. Indeed, queer and trans\* youth can be complicit in perpetuating inequities by wielding dominant discourses that frame specific populations as intolerant or dangerous.

#### **5.4. CONCLUSION**

In this chapter I considered young queer and trans\* people's experiences navigating everyday spaces, beginning with an analysis of the institution of home, extending to the public realm of school and then to neighbourhoods, the 'street' and the city. Throughout these sections I pointed to the specific ways in which youth experience acceptance, and find support and belonging. I teased out the complex forms of homophobia, transphobia and heteronormativity and discrimination they can face in these areas. I also tried to highlight how queer and trans\* youth can contribute to social inequities by perpetuating xenophobic discourses. Their experiences of everyday spaces were made up of complex power relations, affected by multiple aspects of their individual identities.

Several findings emerge based on these observations. For one, I found that youth's perception of safety or inclusion was often connected to their relative fear. Participants described a fear of rejection, of standing out or being treated differently as reasons not to come out, or to negotiate their identities carefully within the home, at school and in

neighbourhoods where they might be identified. Moreover, many identified fear of causing controversy as a reason they thought teachers or other adults did not better advocate on their behalf.

I also found that youth were affected by silence and absences at home, at school and in the city; this marginalized them. The effect of not having their sexuality or gender addressed or included was sometimes as severe as facing outright hostility. Overall, fear and silence were central to participants' experiences because they were affected by the practices of others. What other people thought of and did to them mattered to participants; indeed spatial experiences are shaped by social practices.

Finally, I also found that many participants framed their experience of everyday spaces by how their adolescence was an in-between period; many were waiting to find acceptance at home, they were waiting to finish high school so they could find more tolerant environments as young adults, or waiting to turn 18 so they could access certain activities in the city.

## **CHAPTER VI: SPACES WHERE QUEER & TRANS\* YOUTH MAKE COMMUNITY**

In this chapter I turn from the spaces youth negotiate as young, queer or trans\* people, toward the spaces they make for themselves. I begin by exploring how participants conceived of their friendships, focusing on the spatial aspect of these relations. In the following section I look at the ways queer and trans\* teenagers described making use of virtual spaces to access information and establish communities. I then shift gears and pay careful attention to how participants understand and make use of P10 as a community organization. Following this I identify other community organizations participants use, including both LGBTQ and otherwise. The focus of this chapter is on place-making among young queer and trans\* people.

### **6.1. SPACES OF FRIENDSHIPS**

Almost all of the participants spoke about the meaningful role that friendships had in their lives. Friendships and peer relations matter a great deal to youth; they foster spaces for individuals to develop their sense of self, feel a part of something and can be locations of power or powerlessness (Morris-Roberts, 2004, p. 240). For LGBT youth in particular, friendships can provide them with meaningful space to find acceptance, and safety.

Participants frequently brought up the topic of friendships and the function they had in their day-to-day lives, their social development, and also in terms of how they made sense of their individual identities. In this section, I focus on friendships in terms of where they occur spatially, and on the significance of friendships in queer and trans\* youth's lives. I then focus on the meaning of friendships for queer and trans\* youth as relationships that provide peer-to-peer identification, as conduits for identity formation and feelings of safety and accessing support. I consider then the importance of romantic relationships for these youth.

### 6.1.1. WHERE ARE FRIENDSHIPS?

Given that the youth I spoke with were between the ages of fourteen and eighteen, the areas where they felt comfortable and welcome to spend time with their friends, unaccompanied by an adult, were limited. Jack's candidly summarized the places he could hang out: "...shopping malls, friends' houses, just nowhere". When I asked Skye where she spent most of her time she replied: "...school, my house, or at some other friend's house". Similarly Payton described where she spent her time: "...mostly at school, mostly at work, mostly at home, like my friends usually come to my house, flea market [...] I don't know I just go to the mall, hang out". The youth I spoke with exist in narrow worlds: they are at home or in school; otherwise they 'hang out' with friends at each other's houses or in semi-public spaces like the shopping mall.

As pointed to in the Chapter IV, the home is a site with multiple meanings: it can provide some youth with security and be the site of real danger for others. It can also be both at once. However, youth can shape the space of the home through their behaviours and practices, including through the introduction of peers into familial spaces. Jean-Luc explained why he felt the need to bring gay friends into the home: "I'd rather be near my friends than my mom and my dad, like, I'm gay- they're straight, like, I know that it's like a good thing that we're like that, but sometimes I need to have, like, some homosexuality in my life". Similarly, Payton explained that she felt more comfortable at home when her friends, or her gay cousin, were with her. Jean-Luc and Payton's perspectives indicate both the importance of having queer people in queer youth's lives, but further suggests that the introduction of queer friends into a heteronormative home may disrupt the dominance of heterosexuality in this space.

In another direction, friendships in the home can simply provide queer and trans\* youth with space to relax, much like friendships for most teenagers. Jean-Luc described the way that he and Sora spent time at each other's houses:

She's a lesbian, and me and here we're just bros. We just kick it back and we just listen to music and smoke weed, and for us it's awesome and everyday, almost every day, I chill with her.

This kind of presentation of friendship was common among the youth I spoke with; friendships provided them with a space and time to feel at ease with each other. Moreover, they often sought the company of other youth like them; queer and trans\* friends were important to queer and trans\* youth.

When I asked participants where their friendships were located, they also described hanging out in parks or wandering outside. Sometimes this was a vague description, but there were also specific places associated with their friendships. For example, when I asked participants in the focus group where they spent time with their friends Sora and Lee described going to the 'Tamtams', which Lee described as: "...a drum festival, it's like a hippy drum circle"<sup>49</sup>. Lee explained why they liked being there: "...you can be whoever you wanna be at Tams [...] because it's just a bunch of stoners and, like, open-minded people on a mountain, like playing the drums or tight-roping or hulla-hooping". Lee and Sora saw this space as welcoming to queer youth not only because the activities interested them, but also because the other participants at the gathering were perceived to be unprejudiced.

Several youth explained that they spent most of their time with friends wandering the city. For example, Elisabet described how she and her girlfriend spent their time together: "We like to go to events like movies [...] just going out to festivals. We just walk. It's downtown; it's fun, you know there's always something going on, if not you can just walk

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<sup>49</sup>The 'Tamtams' is a gathering that occurs every Sunday from spring until fall by the George Etienne Cartier Monument in Mount Royal Park in Montréal; there is music, dancing, street stalls and many picnickers.

around and talk”. Bertha, Theresa and Steph were friends, and described walking around Montréal’s Gay Village together as a favourite way for them to spend time together in a similar way that Elisabet described wandering with her girlfriend. They each explained that simply ambled back and forth along the street. Bertha described why she chose the company of her friends: “I just like to hang out with them because [...] they’re like really good people and I really, I just really enjoy being with them”. In these ways, participants described making space for themselves with friends by interacting with people they enjoyed being with in particular places; malls, in each other’s homes, in specific areas seen as safe, and on the street. In these cases the spaces, many of which would not otherwise have been necessarily welcoming, became meaningful once friendships were located there.

#### 6.1.2. WHY DO FRIENDSHIPS MATTER?

Friendships are important for all adolescents, but they are particularly significant for queer and trans\* youth for a number of reasons: friendships between queer and trans\* youth can allow some to connect with their communities; they give them the space to see themselves in each other; they can offer space for them to make sense of and establish their identities; and they can offer a refuge from a world dominated by heterosexual norms.

Some of the youth I spoke with had very few queer or trans\* friends, while others seemed to only spend time within these communities. Marc-André said that he nearly only spent time with LGBT youth who he met in high school or through the gay youth group at the Cégep he was attending. Elisabet explained why these friendships were so important:

Your friends are friends, but you can’t always discuss about gay-related stuff ‘cause [...] they can’t really you know, they’ re not on the same page. Yeah they can imagine, you know it’s not some alien thing, but it’s not the same thing, so sometimes it’s nice to be surrounded by people on your same wave-length and discuss about gay related stuff, so not to feel left alone, I mean I don’t feel alone but it’s nice to get in touch basically.

Elisabet's summary suggests that youth seek friendships with people like them so that they are not isolated.

Meanwhile, Jean-Luc and Willow had parallel attitudes to each other towards their friendship groups. Willow identified as “fag-hag”, which meant that as a lesbian the majority of her friends were gay men. Meanwhile, Jean-Luc identified as a “lesbian-hag”, and though he had hesitations about this, he explained:

Honey, I'm a lesbian hag. I need more gay friends, like guy friends. Like I need to kick it back with gay guy friends, but I don't do that that much, I really don't [...] I feel like if I hung around with guys too much I would get attached.

He explained that it was safer for him to have lesbians as friends because they had the ‘bro-code’<sup>50</sup>. These types of friendships offered youth space to feel connected to other LGBTQ teenagers, without the anxiety of negotiating romantic feelings, and provided them with a space to feel normal among other people who were ‘different’.

Tommy was the only youth I spoke with who had virtually no gay friends. This was why ze attended P10. Ze explained:

My friends know I'm gay, they're accepting of me, but I mean at the same time they're kind of not [...] In a way I see them being a bit homophobic in the sort of terms they use.

Ze explained that this had a negative impact on him, causing zir to feel like ze could not always be zirself. When I asked zir if he had any LGBT friends at all ze replied that ze had one friend ze suspected was gay, but who had not come out. This caused Tommy to worry that zir friend would “... end up having a bad life [...] ‘cause he's not going to be self-inspired, he's going to always feel like something's missing”. Tommy's experience as a youth with few queer or trans\* friends, and concern for teenagers who were not out, indicates

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<sup>50</sup>The ‘bro-code’ in this case refers to the understanding between gay teenagers that they share the experience of being homosexual, but their gendered desire do not match up and so they will not try to date each other.

some of the troubles queer and trans\* teenagers can face when they do not find people like them in their lives: isolation, loneliness, confusion, and marginalization.

Beyond the role that friendships play in giving queer and trans\* youth the opportunity to feel connected to people like them, many of the youth I spoke with explained that their friendships played significant role in the formation of their own sexual or gendered identities. Samuel<sup>51</sup> and Parker each described how they first learned about trans\* identities through friends they had. Parker had first come out as a lesbian, but when he met his friends' boyfriend, who was a trans male, he saw himself in him. Parker started asking this friend about his experiences and as such began to articulate his own trans\* identity. Bertha decided to identify as pansexual after talking about her feelings with a friend who named her sexuality: "I kind of told her how I felt and then she was like, 'Oh so you're pansexual', or something and I was like, 'Oh I guess that's what it is that I am'". In another case, Melyssa had not given much thought to their sexuality until they began hearing their peers at school talking about lesbians. As they put it: "I wasn't aware of really what it was, but then once I was in high school everyone talked about it and I was like 'Ohhhh, yep that would sound a lot like me!" Similarly, Beatrice only put a name to her sexuality once she found out her friend came out as gay:

... it got me thinking like maybe I'm different too, and just looking back at everything that happened and just thinking about it I thought like it makes a lot of sense [...] So I kept it to myself for a little bit and then I just started realizing like ok, I'm actually really gay.

In each of these youth's cases, friendships played a critical role in the development of their sexual or gender identities. Queer and trans\* friends provide each other with information,

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<sup>51</sup> See section 4.2.3. Gender, Sexuality & The Places In-Between to review Samuel's story.

insights and likeness; Parker, Samuel, Bertha, Melyssa and Beatrice needed to find the terms and ways of imagining sexuality and gender through friends before they could come out.

Some participants described how they acted as role models for their friends. When I asked Parker how he had found gay friends he explained that he “went to go get them”. He explained that he could often tell if other youth were LGBT, and was good at encouraging them to consider alternate sexual and gender identities:

When I first came out I kinda went to go to find them and drag them out of the closet, if you will. If people- it’s a time thing, it’s having to be comfortable with it, so it takes time for people to be comfortable with it and when they see someone that can be who they are it gives them the motivation to be who they are.

Beatrice also explained that many of her friends came to her with questions about their sexuality and that she liked to provide friends with opportunities to explore their identities:

A lot of people do ask me questions, because I’m so confident in my sexuality, like I’m not gonna lie to someone just because I think it’s weird. It’s who I am and if they think that that’s a cool thing and that they want to know more about it, so I’m not closed off to questions.

She said that she felt that by being open she might inspire others to come out earlier and not hide from their identity. Marc-André described how there were very few out teenagers at his high school, but that after he came out as gay many others followed suit:

I might have been the first person to come out, but afterwards I found out that all my friends were either gay, lesbian or bi [...] They all took their strength from me and came out afterwards [...] By the time I graduated in my graduating class alone we were sixteen openly LGBTQ students.

These participants’ experiences reveal how youth can help each other figure out who they are. Moreover, their experiences suggest just how identities are developed through social interactions.

Melyssa clarified how social interactions can inform youths’ general sense of self. They described the impact that losing a close friend who disapproved of their homosexuality:

I told her that I was gay and she was like ‘Ok well we can’t really be friends anymore’, and I was [...] sad, but then [...] I’m like well you know she was never gonna accept me. She was only going to be happy if I had a boyfriend and not a girlfriend, so it’s just, like, I wanna be able to share that with people and be like, ‘Oh my gosh you know me and Ashley, you know, na na na’, but like couldn’t do that so it was hard.

Negotiating this rejection eventually affirmed Melyssa’s identity, it left them feeling more confident in their sexuality knowing that they would never get, but did not need, approval from everyone.

Some participants also explained the role that friendships in general had in their lives, particularly during difficult times. For example, Beatrice described many struggles in her life, including overcoming an eating disorder, surviving sexual assault, dealing with the death of her father, as well as facing homophobia. She pointed out that her friendships were a powerful tool in carrying her out of dark places: “... I couldn’t stay at home alone; my friends were what I really needed at that point”. Beatrice explained that her friendships restored a sense of normalcy in her life, distracted her from her pain and gave her support. Similarly, Willow spoke about how important her close friendships were:

My closest friends are actually from P10 that I met three years ago. So my best friends are a gay couple that I’m gonna move in with and I guess I’m friends with them because they can stand me for a long period of time! They’ve seen me at my worst, they’ve seen me at my best and it’s hard for me to meet people who take me as both.

Friendships offer youth space to find safety, love and acceptance, whether this is related to sexuality and gender, or not. However, for youth who face particular exclusions based on their gender and sexuality, friendships can clearly be especially important.

While friendships played a particular role in their lives, several youth spoke about their relationships or dating. Overall, dating was seen as a way to have their gender and sexuality affirmed. For one, several youth contended with questions about their sexuality or gender identity only once they first acknowledged romantic desires, largely for their friends.

This was often described as difficult periods of reckoning. Payton recalled her realization that she had a crush on her best friend was confusing because she was not yet out to herself. Similarly, Bertha began to question her sexuality when she realized that she had romantic feelings for a girl friend of hers, this remained a source of confusion, even within our interview. Skye also told me about some of the difficulties she encountered as she came to understand her bisexuality:

At first you're not really sure of how you feel. Let's say, I was just hanging out with a girl and I felt like I liked her more than that, so I got home and I started crying and I don't know why, but I just hated myself for no reason. I was throwing things around and I couldn't tell anyone so I didn't have any help on that for like two years [...] I guess just this world makes you feel uncomfortable with it just because it's something that no one really taught you to be.

On the other hand, several of the participants had partners: Samuel and Melyssa were each dating people they had met online, Elisabet and her girlfriend came drop-in together and Lee and Sora were dating each other. These relationships were generally described positively and were important parts of their LGBTQ identities. Melyssa explained that it was their relationship that prompted them to come out in the first place:

When I first decided to come out officially, like, I told like four or five people. I was like, 'It's important that you know'. [Before that] I was always saying, like- I'd always call my girlfriend Ashley- Adam, because I didn't want people to know. And it would hurt because I'd have to make up this whole string of lies to go around like, 'Adam-this' and 'Adam did that', and I had to keep changing it to 'he', and, like, it was hard and I was like, 'No. It's important to me', but now I'm more out so it doesn't bother me as much I'll just say, 'her'.

Melyssa's desire for people to know who they were dating caused them to be more open about their sexuality; hiding their partner's gender to friends and family was hurtful and hard for them and it caused them to feel inauthentic. Romantic feelings and first dating experiences can offer some youth space to explore their sexual and gender identities, opportunities to negotiate their desires and can give some youth a way to affirm their identity.

Friendships occur spatially and where they take place matters. These friendships can change the meaning of a space; and can make a location of exclusion one that evokes belonging instead. Moreover, friendships make space in and of themselves a sense; they allow questioning youth to find answers in each, they can make room for youth to have their identities affirmed and offer them with somewhere to belong.

## **6.2. VIRTUAL SPACES**

The Internet is an ever-growing space in which social practices, particularly among teenagers, are played out. Varjas, Meyers, Kiperman and Howard (2013) point out that “...adolescents are the most frequent users of technology and electronic forms of communication”(p. 28). Queer and trans\* adolescents may rely on the Internet for particular reasons. For one, since many queer and trans\* youth face difficulties finding other LGBTQ youth in their day-to-day lives, the Internet provides them with an endless number of ways to anonymously connect with youth like them. In addition, accessing information regarding gender and sexuality can be challenging both because of its lack of availability, but also because of the risks that can emerge when seeking it out (being outed as queer or trans\*, facing bullying, feeling judged, or being punished). Hillier, Mitchell, and Ybarra (2012) explain: “...where support is not available offline, the Internet may be a tool for creating and maintaining positive, close relationships for LGB youth” (p 226).

Given its importance in the lives of youth, it was no surprise that the topic of ‘the Internet’ came up repeatedly throughout the interviews and was identified as a space in which youth spent a lot their time. Youth identified this as a space they used in everyday ways, and specifically in which they connected with other LGBTQ youth, found people to date, and sought out information about their gender and sexuality. In this section, I draw

attention to the ways it can facilitate access to information and community for queer and trans\* youth, and also to some of the risks involved in accessing virtual spaces.

#### 6.2.1. EVERYDAY SPACES ONLINE

Participants repeatedly described the Internet as a space they accessed regularly. When I asked Melyssa how they spent most her time they replied: “...on the computer! I’m not even lying”. Likewise, Beatrice described how she spent a lot of her time online: “I’ll just go on Tumblr, talk to my friends, like just regular teenage things, sometimes if I have questions I’ll just Google them”.

Participants used the Internet for many reasons, although social networking was most central. Jean-Luc framed the number friends he had online as an indication of his social achievements: “I’ve made many friends; I have, like, on Facebook, I have over nine hundred friends”. Tristan also said that he saw the Internet as a tool to maintain friendships: “I become friends with someone in person and communicate with them online”. He was also part of an online pen-palling site where he was able to connect with youth from around the world to exchange cultural information. Skye spoke about how she spent her time on blogging sites and sharing make-up tutorials online and connecting with people on that basis. As is the case for most teenagers, the Internet provided youth with opportunities to extend on their social lives, and pursue personal interests in a virtual space. However, for queer and trans\* youth, the Internet also provided them with the opportunity to connect with others like themselves as they inhabit spaces that are primarily defined by heterosexuality and polarized gender norms in their day-to-day lives.

## 6.2.2. CONNECTING WITH QUEER & TRANS\* COMMUNITIES

For LGBTQ youth, the Internet offers particular venues for finding a sense of belonging and offers others with space for them to develop queer friendships. As Hillier and her colleagues (2012) suggest, "...the main reason for LGB youth having online friends, was that it was possible to find like-minded individuals and get support online that was not available from offline friends" (p. 243); the Internet can provide some youth with a sense of belonging. Parker's experiences feeling isolated from other queer and trans\* youth suggests how the Internet can play a role in connecting marginalized youth with each other:

Meeting people can be really hard. I know that for a long time I was the only one that was out in my corner. Finding new people is something that should be worked on, being able to connect with different people, which is why the Internet is starting to be more practical.

Many other participants described seeking online communities for LGBTQ youth to find friendships, or other youth like them. Theresa was part of a Facebook group that connected young LGBTQ people. Her group put people from across Canada in touch, and she explained that she liked finding friends in Québec: even if she might not meet these youth, the connection made her feel closer to people like herself, knowing that there were other LGBTQ youth in the region. Until she came to P10, Skye had never been involved in any LGBTQ youth group, except for online communities. She explained that she felt safer connecting with people this way than in 'real life' because "...everyone seems to be a lot more open [online]. There's a lot of people who judge, but there's also so much more people that have your back". She pointed out that online communities offer individuals with space free from homophobia because, at least in the groups she was a part of, bloggers have the ability to exclude users who use offensive language or convey offensive opinions. Melyssa explained that before they began networking with LGBTQ youth online most of their friends were straight. When I asked them how they met other gay people they replied that

they met most of them through Tumblr, a blogging and social networking website. Melyssa (and Beatrice) explained that Tumblr allowed them to find other queer youth, as there were few in their day-to-day lives. Noticing an absence of online spaces for queer youth under eighteen, Payton had created a virtual iPhone application herself:

I actually made a 'community' for lesbians, gays, pansexuals, bisexuals, and it was an eighteen-under chat room and anyone who said something inappropriate would get kicked because it was just like it was the only place actually on the app that wasn't sexual.

Payton not only saw the importance of making space for queer and trans\* teenagers when few physical spaces were available, but also noted that even within the virtual world there were few places in which LGBTQ youth could connect with each other.

Some participants explained that their virtual friendships would sometimes translate into everyday friendships and communities. Elisabet had been searching for queer resources in Montréal when she read about P10 and decided to come to drop-in. Marc-André explained the benefit of a Facebook group that the LGBTQ youth group at his Cégep he was a part of created:

People can come to [our Facebook page], see what we're doing, even if they're not a member they can see what we've been up to, they can see recent things that we've done, recent feats, and it's just a good way to be able to get everyone together.

Facebook was identified as a way to allow more people to feel connected to the real-life community they were building at Marc-André's Cégep.

Finally, several of the youth I spoke with explained that they had met people to date through online networking sites. For example, Samuel had met his girlfriend through a trans\* youth group on Facebook. Jean-Luc, explained that dating sites are very commonly used by gay men: "I'm a gay boy, so I do go on a few like hook up, dating sites. They are helpful". Melyssa said that they had met most of her queer friends online and they also used it for dating. They said that they were going to visit their girlfriend in the United States, a few

weeks after our interview. They explained that they had met through Tumblr and that they used Skype and Facetime to stay in touch; the Internet was important in terms of connecting Melyssa to their girlfriend, but also in supporting their relationship. The Internet can provide youth them with opportunities to find romantic relationships and dates when it might be difficult finding other young queer or trans\* people in regular spaces.

### 6.2.3. ONLINE IDENTITIES

In addition to providing young queer and trans\* people with opportunities to connect with their communities, virtual spaces were also described as areas in which participants could explore their gender and sexuality. Macintosh and Bryson (2008) point out: “For queer youth, in particular, online networking services [...] may facilitate a new level of social mobility, and the opportunity to develop counter-textual and incomplete identities within the monologic of a heteronormative public” (p. 137). Several youth shared their experiences developing their identities in virtual spaces. Parker described how as soon as he decided to come out as trans he changed his name on his Facebook profile to communicate this shift in gender identity. Similarly, Samuel described the role that Facebook has in terms of his identity: “On Facebook I’m presented as only male and people who have known me from before or now or future only see me as male now. So that’s really a big thing to me”. In these cases, the Internet provided Parker and Samuel with a forum to express their gender identities to the people in their lives and have these identities validated and reified.

Melyssa also identified the role that Facebook played in announcing their sexuality. They explained that when they had first come out they had kept their sexuality secret in online forums that were connected to their real life, and that this had a negative impact on their feelings, as well as on their girlfriends’ feelings:

We wouldn't put it on Facebook, like you know, you write "in a relationship"? Well we didn't put it just because I wasn't out. And it really upset her, she's like, 'I want my friends on Facebook to be able to see it 'cause I'm out'. And we couldn't because I wasn't out so it was really hard for her.

Facebook was an important way to communicate Melyssa's sexuality. Similarly, Skye chose to begin by disclosing her bisexuality online before coming out to her friends. This provided her with a stepping-stone that allowed her to settle into her sexuality before she could feel comfortable sharing this part of her with friends or family. Clearly, the Internet can provide queer and trans\* youth with space to come out and have these identities communicated and affirmed.

#### 6.2.4. ACCESS TO INFORMATION

Many participants also identified the Internet as a primary space where they learned about their sexual and gender identities. Tommy explained that ze relied on the Internet for information on different gender and sexual identities, to explore "different views, more of a just other ways of just trying to understand what's going on in my head, trying to make sense of it". Ze did this online precisely because ze did not have anyone or anywhere else to get information: "There really isn't anywhere else, and what if you ask the wrong person for it, for that information? You might be putting yourself in danger". Marc-André described using online forums when he was first trying to sort out his sexuality because he valued the anonymity these forums provided him with:

When you're there talking with a person you know they know who you are, and their perception of you might influence the advice that they give you whereas if you're just asking people on the Internet they know the facts that you've given them and that's it. Therefore it's a lot more open and it's a lot more direct I just find that the information was a lot more suited to what I needed.

Virtual worlds allowed participants to access information that they could not otherwise find or access in the spaces around them. Like Marc-André, Elisabet described the importance of anonymity:

If you had a question you had to go to somebody- and sometimes you're too shy or you cannot find a person or you're not sure, maybe you're too shy. [The Internet is] a quick way, it's also quicker you know, you find it yourself. So yeah, that's where I found out a lot of information.

Anonymity was important because of anxieties related to accessing tabooed information on gender and sexuality in other venues where they might face discrimination or questioning.

On the other hand, Willow and Steph both explained that in the absence of lesbian spaces in Montréal they had turned to the Internet to find resources, books or movies that resonated with them. Willow explained: "Say I wanna find a lesbian book, I'll look up resources on the internet or stuff like that- I'll look up, like, lesbian songs or, like, lesbian couples in shows and I'll look up shows".

When I asked Jack if he thought there were enough resources available for youth he explained that the Internet played the most significant role in terms of getting information out to LGBTQ youth. He said that more than anything else, he used the Internet to access information about sexuality: "I use it a lot, I mean I subscribe to a lot of gay YouTuber's [...] I've probably learned a lot about different ideas and stuff around it through watching documentaries online". Similarly, Skye said that she used the Internet to explore various possibilities for her sexuality and consulted YouTube for ideas on how she could come out to her family and friends. Bertha also used YouTube to find videos about LGBTQ youth's experiences as a way to make her decision about coming out to her family:

I watched a lot of videos, but I watched this one video about this girl she was- she found out she was a lesbian and she really had a hard time telling her parents, but then she finally told her mother and her mother- she her mother reacted, like, totally different than what she thought she'd react and [...] She said that she thought her mom would, like, freak out and kick her out or something, but her mom was- she

really accepted her right away and told her: ‘I don’t love you any less’, and all that and that kind of made me wanna like tell my mom.

Indeed, the Internet was identified by many youth for its important role in providing them with information that might otherwise be difficult to access.

On the other hand, virtual spaces can contain shortcomings or even present risks or dangers. For one, Jack pointed out that, while the Internet plays a meaningful role in young queer and trans\* people’s lives in terms of accessing information, this also has negative implications. He pointed out that it puts too much of the responsibility on individuals to seek out information, rather than have it taught in school, or normalized in general. Parker pointed out that while there was plenty of helpful information, virtual spheres also host a lot of misleading information. He also pointed out that the Internet creates opportunities for particular kinds of violence directed toward LGBTQ youth. Beatrice brought this up when she described an instance in which she experienced cyber-bullying: after revealing her feelings to a girl she liked she was called names and teased online relentlessly by this person. Cooper and Blumenfeld (2012) explain that cyber-bullying, an every-growing growing form of abuse carries particular risks for LGBTQ youth:

By reporting homophobic-inspired acts of online harassment and bullying, participants risk having to “come out” as non-heterosexual to parents, guardians, other adults, and peers who may not be ready to support their sexual identity or gender expression ... when they report incidents of cyber-bullying, parents, guardians, and other adults may terminate their use of information and communication technologies as a “solution” for ending the cyber-bullying (p. 173).

This risk is a particular problem because as, I have pointed out, the Internet commonly represents one of the few spaces for many young queer and trans\* people to access information or communicate with people who have similar issues and experiences.

Overall, access to virtual worlds are critical for LGBTQ youth who use these spaces to safely find and stay connected to friends, forge relationships, and explore sexual and

gender identities. The Internet represents a space in which youth can find a sense of belonging, safely access information and develop their sense of self.

### **6.3. COMMUNITY SPACES FOR QUEER & TRANS\* YOUTH**

While friendships and online communities offer queer and trans\* youth with necessary support, physical and more official spaces are also important. I outlined the important roles that community organizations can play for queer and trans\* youth in chapter II<sup>52</sup>, however just to reaffirm: in an ideal form they can provide marginalized youth with relevant resources, advocate on their behalf, equip them with tools to promote their own voices, introduce them to community and facilitate their empowerment. In this section I focus on why participants chose to frequent community groups, beginning with a detailed description of why they came to P10, and what motivated them to continue their participation. Following this I present other community organizations identified by participants and consider what these spaces provide them with. These sites include the francophone equivalent to P10, Jeunesse Lambda, as well as college clubs and an anti-violence youth groups.

#### **6.3.1. “I KNOW THIS PLACE AND IT’S REALLY COOL”: FINDING COMMUNITY AT P10**

The youth that I interviewed had been coming to drop-in for varied lengths of time. Some had been faithfully attending for years, and others wanted to be interviewed during their first drop-in. Participants described P10 as distinct from most of the other spaces they

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<sup>52</sup> See section 2.3.3. Spaces for Queer & Trans\* Youth for more background.

inhabited. I described P10 in Chapter III, but Tristan's description of P10 acts a concise and appropriate reminder:

...bilingual youth group helping queer people from the ages 14 to 24. It's a fun place they always have good things to eat, healthy things. It has access to many services if you need. It's fun the people that go here, the volunteers are really helpful, so is the staff; if you have a problem it can be solved, there's a number you can call if you need to talk.

P10 provides participants with a safe space to find each other, to have fun and learn more about sexuality and gender in an inclusive and welcoming environment.

There were many different ways that the youth found their way to P10. Sora and Elisabet each found out about P10 online; Sora had been looking for ways to connect with other LGBTQ youth and had joined an online gay networking site. Someone she met online encouraged her to seek out this organization. Elisabet had initially been looking for counselling, but found P10 instead. Others found P10 through professional recommendation. Willow was referred to P10 by her counsellor. She described her experience of trying to attend drop-in for the first time:

I was sent by a guidance counsellor at [my high school], I was really too scared to go, I was so scared, I went to the border [...] and I looked at everyone and I was so intimidated I just left and then [a friend] was like 'You should go to P10, come I'll go with you, so you're not alone'. So I ended up going and then I ended up meeting new friends and everyone's so sociable and outgoing and [...] it helped me with my social skills, so that was cool. But I came here; I come here just to meet new people, not like lesbians in general, but just like friends.

In this case, her counsellor had referred her and then her friendships were key in facilitating Willow's access to her queer community. A psychologist had referred Melyssa to P10, and they brought friends with them each week; this was an important part of why they continued attending (Payton, Skye and Beatrice all attended because Melyssa introduced them to drop-in). Theresa heard about P10 through a community organization that had facilitated a

workshop on sexuality at her high school. Once she decided to regularly attend drop-in, Theresa encouraged Bertha and Steph to join her.

Many others found P10 through their peer networks. Beatrice explained why she sought out the LGBT community at P10, and how she was able to do through her peer network:

Melyssa told me about it actually, she was saying how ‘I know this place and it’s really cool’, and she met a couple of friends and my friends have been going and I wanted to know what it was, I had no idea what this place was and she was like, ‘Oh it’s for the gay community and we go and we talk and it’s things like that’. And that’s cool because I don’t have gay friends, I have people who are gay [...] my best friend is gay, but it’s different to sit down and talk with other people to see I’m so, I’m not alone.

Corinne, and Jean-Luc had both been coming to drop-in for several years and each heard about it through their respective ex-partners. Lee had heard about P10 through a friend at school. They explained how this not only gave them access to a community organization, and had even formed the basis for an allied friendship at school:

I found out through a friend at my high school actually, who was probably one of the only openly gay black males at my school, and he was in my class and he started talking to me and eventually we figured each other out and he told me about P10.

Samuel also found out about P10 through a friend, and explained why he first came to P10: “I was told that there was a place of other people who are like me”. Later on, when I interviewed Parker, I learned that Samuel had encouraged him to attend P10:

Samuel asked me to come and I was like, ‘What’s Project 10?’ He was like, ‘Just a place where people go to talk and just other people like us’, and I was like, ‘Alright well I’ll go there’. I was just coming out [as trans] so I was trying to find people like myself.

This indicates the important role that friendships, and social networks more broadly, play in providing queer and trans\* youth access to resources such as P10. Their experiences also indicate how this space was seen as particularly welcoming because of the way it allowed

these queer and trans\* youth to not only to find friendships in people they perceived to be similar, but also to feel normal.

### 6.3.2. FOSTERING A SAFE SPACE AT P10

There were many reasons for why youth attended P10. Several youth I interviewed were invested in attending P10 because of the non-judgemental environment they found. Marc-André's explanation captures the perception of many of his peers: "I keep on coming back because it's such an open space, everyone's so accepting and it's just an awesome vibe". Steph said that P10 gave people a chance to "...be who they are, to come here and like hang out with other people who won't judge them". Tommy echoed this sentiment when ze explained that ze saw P10 as a space where "I can be in with other people that are really not part of society's norms and it's just a comfortable space [...] I can just be myself". Parker, who on many occasions in our interview, expressed that he felt misunderstood by most people, explained that while he had yet to find people who were exactly like him, he knew that the youth attending drop-in were not going to judge him. He said that at P10 he had found:

... people that will accept the fact that I'm Parker [...] People that don't necessarily know me, but they'll see me and I'll say my name is Parker and even though I might not look like a male or act like a male, they'll just call me Parker and they'll be alright with it. They won't, I mean some might ask questions and that's alright, but they're not going to be invasive which is something that's nice to find.

Clearly, for many youth P10 offered them with a space to find people like themselves, or people who would not judge them. Samuel described how P10 was somewhere he fit in, he described it as:

... an awesome place: super, super chill, people are awesome here. I've never felt out of place at all, even going through all my identities I've never been seen as different, I've never been played as different, and I love everyone here. It's awesome.

Similarly, Skye described P10: “It’s comfortable. You can come here and just be yourself and not really worry about it ‘cause everybody else is kind of the same so it just kind of makes you feel better about yourself”.

This sense of belonging was often presented in contrast to other spaces. Corinne and Payton pointed out that they knew many teenagers who did not have supportive families, and they said that queer and trans\* youth could find acceptance at P10. For example, when I asked Payton if she thought places like P10 were important she firmly replied: “I really do think it is because, I mean, a lot of people might not be accepted at home, they might not be accepted at school”. P10 offers support, acceptance and a space for LGBT youth to be themselves, especially for those who do not otherwise find this elsewhere.

Some of the youth identified the environment of support as an LGBT community. As Elisabet put it: “It’s a nice place ‘cause it gives you a chance to like have a little community, you actually interact with other people of your same sexuality: it’s cool”. Lee, Sora, Gabriel and Tristan talked at length in the focus group about the importance of finding this ‘community’; until they attended P10’s drop-in, they had all felt relatively isolated. Lee explained that they first began attending drop-in because: “I was curious about coming out, kind of, well I’d already dated one girl and I just wanted to like kind of embrace my community, I guess, and meet new people”. Similarly, Tristan explained that he first began coming to drop in: “...to start meeting people of the community since I knew practically no one and after a little while of coming here it was more just to see friends that I wouldn’t see anywhere else”.

In a similar vein, many participants explained that the friendships they had at P10 made this a desirable space. For example, Melyssa eagerly described why they enjoyed coming to drop-in:

It's a fun place to hang out. Like if you knew you could hang out with your friends, every week you'd be like 'Oh my gosh! I'm hanging out with my friends!' People look forward to the weekend because it's when they see their friends, so it's like I get the weekend and Thursday. Everyone's like, 'Oh yes it's Friday', but me it's like, 'It's Wednesday? I can't wait for Thursday'.

Indeed, participants repeatedly explained that they enjoyed meeting new people and liked having the opportunity to stay connected to friends in the LGBTQ community; P10 met these needs. As Sora, who was also a long-time participant, explained: "You make friends basically, and then you hang out with them, and then you're a part of their something new [...] That's kind of why I come to P10".

Others explained that they came to drop-in to simply have fun, to play cards, to watch movies and to participate in the different activities that were organized each week. Elisabet described the atmosphere: "You're just chilling on sofas and talking and meeting new people, meeting new friends and friends of friends".

Participants also said that they valued some of P10's activities and services. In terms of activities, Samuel explained he appreciated the prom that P10 organized in July: "I wanted a prom, an LGBT prom 'cause I never got a prom, but now we're having a prom! So I get to wear a tux for the first time in my whole entire life". Many of the youth I interviewed had also attended Montréal's Gay Pride Parade with P10's float. Several had attended P10's summer and winter camps where they had campfires, attended workshops and participated in talent shows. Others highlighted the services offered at P10. Gabriel described the workshops on sexual health as valuable and Lee added that "they also have counselling and a lot of resources like if you need to know where a food bank is they're likely to help you out". Other participants mentioned the telephone line for questions and counselling, and fundraising events as some other examples of the services P10 offers. P10, therefore, was important for participants because it provided them with a non-judgemental space, it gave

them a place where they felt they belonged, it offered some with a chance to be part of an LGBTQ community, and gave others a chance to maintain friendships.

Given that the youth I interviewed came to P10 voluntarily it is no surprise that they had largely encouraging things to say. P10 provided them with support, friendships, opportunities to develop their identities and chances to have these affirmed. Despite this overwhelmingly positive feedback, there were some areas that participants wished the organization could change.

Participants had mixed reactions to the location of P10, especially regarding its proximity to the Gay Village. On the one hand, a main concern I heard was that many of the youth said that they felt unsafe going to and from the building itself. Located on the eastern edge of Montréal's Gay Village, the Gay and Lesbian Community Centre is a 10-15 minute walk from the closest metro station. Tristan explained that "...it'd be better if a more convenient location toward the metro, 'cause most people get here by metro". Tristan's concern regarding the location was mostly about how physically accessible the space was by public transport, however, as I mentioned he also brought up in the previous chapter how the presence of homeless people in the surrounding area made him feel uncomfortable. Tristan remarked that attendees of the drop-in would benefit from a space that belonged to P10 itself so that "...they can organize the space the way they see fit rather than have to take a space to make it work for them". Marc-André said that he thought P10's location in the Gay Village could be a barrier for some youth in who might not feel comfortable being seen, getting a lift or disclosing that they were in a neighbourhood so closely linked to homosexuality. He explained:

I've been talking to some of the older members and they say that before it was here in the Village it used to be in the NDG area and that it was better then because most of the time kids that are fourteen that are uncertain of their sexuality would like to

come to get information would like to come to get help but the whole reason for P10 is for a safe space away from The Village.

This view of Village was, however, not shared by those who felt that coming to the Village to attend drop-in gave them a chance to come to an area where they felt accepted in the first place<sup>53</sup>, or as Skye described the area, as a place where; "...everyone seems to have your back".

Many participants specifically identified the physical location of P10 as an aspect they appreciated. Melyssa explained that they would often go with their friends to fast food restaurants nearby where they could continue hanging out after drop-in was over. Skye explained: "It's a nice place. It's surrounded by food areas so after P10 everyone kind of gathers around goes to Subway or Tim Horton's so we get even closer to each other, so it's pretty smart place to be". The contrasting feelings of safety articulated by Marc-André and Skye expose the varied needs of young queer and trans\* people.

While nearly all of the participants liked the laid-back atmosphere of drop-in, some of the youth suggested that they would benefit from a space where they could more formally ask questions and discuss their experiences related to their gender and sexuality. Parker said that he wanted this because, as he put it: "I'm a person that likes to compare how I feel to how other people feel and it helps me figure stuff out". Samuel voiced a similar attitude to Parker when he described his idea of a comfortable discussion:

If we could have like a group of people who sit around in a circle and we talk. Like, 'Hi my name is this, I'm trans', or 'Hi, I'm this, I'm gay': certain things because there's probably people here who are too nervous to come and be like 'What are you?' which it's not a polite question, but maybe that's person's asking, not to be rude, but to be like 'Oh, I kinda see myself, I get a vibe from myself to you so can you explain what this is?' So if someone's gender-queer then maybe they can be like 'so can you explain it in your sense because I think I might be too.

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<sup>53</sup> See section 5.3.3. The Gay Village for more reflections.

Samuel wanted to get to know people better. He thought others might also want to ask questions in a safe environment where they feel respected, and where they will not fear being misunderstood as disrespectful. While P10 offers youth with a chance for the latter, because of the way it is structured, and the limited resources staff and volunteers have access to, drop-in may not accommodate discussion groups.

Overall, despite some small critiques, P10 offered these youth with a space where they could belong; a space where they did not feel judged, where they felt more than accepted, but normal.

### 6.3.3. OTHER COMMUNITY SPACES

Participants were also a part of other community organizations. First, several youth had found community in school spaces. As I described in Chapter V, Elisabet, Marc-André and Jack were each part of the LGBTQ clubs at their Cégeps. These provided them with a physical space, in an institution they frequented daily, to as Jack put it: "... to be ourselves without worrying about other people's opinions"<sup>54</sup>. Second, many went to more than one LGBTQ community youth group. Some frequented Jeunesse Lambda, a community organization that caters mainly to Francophone youth. However, Elisabet described her feelings toward the Jeunesse Lambda drop-in:

It's not like P10, it's more like discussions and seriousness in circles [...] I did go a couple of times, that's because it was in French and my girlfriend wanted to go there 'cause it's French, she prefers the French, but it's really serious. I like this one because it's more laid back, just there to hang out.

Tristan had tried attending the West Island LGBTQ Youth Centre, located in an Anglophone suburb of Montréal, and described why he was less likely to use their services:

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<sup>54</sup> See section 5.2.5 It Gets Better: Colleges as an Inclusive Experience for more reflections on community spaces at school.

“I just checked out once. Because it’s- just because of distance I would never go to it. It’s kind of like the P10 of the West Island. They have a huge TV and a bunch of movies, LGBTQ movies, and books”. These LGBTQ youth organizations offer specific things P10 does not; Jeunesse Lambda caters to the needs of Francophone youth and provides structured discussion and the West Island LGBTQ Youth Centre is a drop-in for youth who cannot commute down town from the suburbs.

Other youth organizations that were not centered on sexuality or gender were also mentioned. Bertha, Steph, Theresa, Willow, Sora had all at one point or another been involved with Leave Out Violence (LOVE), a community organization offering support services to youth. Steph described the group: “Young people, youth, go and like to prevent violence. [...] We express any feelings through pictures, writing and filming and we like, expose it around”. This community space offered youth opportunities to creatively address their experiences with violence; a reality that many young people may face. While LOVE is not specifically for queer or trans\* youth, its mandate supports some of what queer and trans\* youth may experience, as common targets for discrimination or violence. Willow shared her dreams of an ideal community space, which was inspired in part by P10 and in part by LOVE. At one point in our conversation I asked her what her ideal community space would be, she described her desire for a comprehensive gay-friendly community organization for teenagers. She described a resource centre that focused on promoting creative expression, art and writing projects and a brightly decorated space with youth-made murals that addressed their issues. She went on:

... also help for homeless, like if you would need a place to stay for the night it’s free. Food, like, you know if you need a meal and do more like, it’s like, it would be a centre. That would be really interesting because I don’t think a lot of teens, like, there’s a lot of centres for teens, but they’re not gay friendly, there’s not like- I want something that’s like gay friendly that also helps the homeless [...] Have the people that attend give back to the space, you know, if they wanna we could do a newspaper

and or create different art pieces or photography and put it all over the place and do outings ...

Willow's musings suggest several things at once. For one, as someone who has relied on social services, her descriptions indicate the shortcomings of these in terms of catering to queer youth in specific. Furthermore, her thoughts speak to the diverse needs of queer and trans\* teenagers and suggest that these can be supported in appropriate ways. It also uncovers the boundlessness of Willow's imagination in her desire to support youth who might share her experiences.

#### **6.4. CONCLUSION**

Throughout this chapter I highlighted how young queer and trans\* people contest hegemonic discourses on gender and sexuality through friendships, and by seeking virtual and real life communities. I focused on the importance of belonging among youth. The findings in this chapter reinforce that spaces are socially constituted; friendships can make a space meaningful, the vast world of the Internet can promote certain youth's inclusion given the right site and organizations can offer youth with a community if made that way. Finding community was important to participants because, as highlighted in the previous chapter, these young queer and trans\* people faced many diverse exclusions: community offered them a refuge from these and a chance for them to feel normal.

## CHAPTER VII: CONCLUSION

As I conclude this thesis, I want to begin by pointing out how my scope, framework and concerns changed over the course of the research process. First of all, when I set out to do this research I wanted to speak to queer and trans\* youth's exclusions without characterizing them as victims. Participatory action research seemed to be the most appropriate methodology. While I retained this objective, I faced institutional and logistical constraints and my project was reconceived as a critical ethnographic case study. Secondly, I was also initially most concerned with the role that community organizations played for queer and trans\* youth as sites of safety or belonging. I began the project hoping to provide practical insights on what P10 offered to queer and trans\* youth in Montréal. However, as I conducted my research, and studied and organized my findings, this original question became less central, as other spaces related to youth's everyday and embodied experiences surfaced. Indeed, these were the spaces that brought youth to the supportive environment of P10. Therefore, I focused on exploring the broader spatial experiences of P10's participants. Finally, at a certain point I thought that I would include all of P10's participants who range in age from 14 to 25. During the research process, however, it became clear that the youngest participants, the adolescents (from 14 to 18 years old) were most interested in participating and that they experienced specific types of exclusions. In addition to sex and gender exclusions, they were 'underage': this meant that most of them could not access bars, were still 'school age' and were living with their families. In the end, the thesis focuses on how these individuals experience particular types of exclusion due to marginalization based on both their age and their sexual and gender identities.

The primary objective of this thesis, therefore, was to explore the complex spatial experiences of queer and trans\* adolescents who participate in P10. Drawing on data

collected from participant observation, interviews and a focus group, I argued that young queer and trans\* people not only routinely negotiate exclusions in everyday spaces, but they also find and create meaningful places for themselves, as individuals with agency. To do this, I drew on queer geography, youth geography and studies of queer and trans\* youth from other disciplines. By doing so, I provided the context for my research and located my current research in an ongoing effort within geography to consider the role that power, gender, sexuality, class, race, culture, ability, life experience and age (among other factors) play in shaping the spatial experiences of individuals. Throughout this thesis I also critically considered the process of conducting research in a community setting with youth, focusing on my approach to the research, as well as my particular role in the project. I highlighted my efforts to rethink the research process as one that could be more collaborative and empowering than traditional research with youth often accommodates.

The data gathered through interviews, the focus group and the records I kept during participant observations were then organized into three themes that re-surfaced repeatedly throughout my study. Participants' identities were important to them, as such I devoted an entire chapter to examining how they saw themselves, what these identities meant to them and how they resisted and reworked normative identities. Next, I established that there were specific places where they negotiated their presence on a daily basis. The home, schools, and urban public spaces were not simply sites of exclusion, but rather they were areas that participants described as made up of multiple, contradicting and complex social interactions. Finally, I also found that participants accessed and made space for themselves; fitting with my desire to avoid constructing them narrowly as victims, I considered this aspect of their experience alongside the other chapters.

Based on the empirical chapters of this thesis, several conclusions on queer and trans\* youth's complex spatial experiences can be drawn. For one, I found that these youth's experiences of everyday spaces were largely defined by specific exclusions. Like most adolescents, these participants' experiences in everyday spaces were mediated by adult control and access to public spaces that were limited by socially and sometimes institutionally imposed age restrictions. However, these youth also faced additional barriers in accessing space due to heteronormativity and, at times, overt homophobia that was often exacerbated by intersecting layers of racism or classism. For example, many participants navigated this at home where some were rejected for their identities, or made invisible by the practices of their family members. Moreover, most participants contended with this at school, which were generally not inclusive of variations in gender or sexuality, pedagogically, or socially. Many youth were marginalized at school through the silencing of their identities and through bullying and other discrimination; youth feared being made to feel different and were disempowered in these ways. Participants also contended with complex forms of discrimination and alienation in the urban sphere. Youth faced particular anxiety expressing their identities in neighbourhoods where they might be outed to family or peers. Additionally, racialized youth identified acute forms of racism that occurred in public spaces, while working-class youth faced subtle exclusions such as feeling uncomfortable, rather than being actively harassed in certain areas.

However, while participants faced many challenges in their everyday environments, they also engaged with these and contested them. Youth disrupted heteronormativity by coming out to their peers, sometimes encouraging family members to come out, by establishing clubs, and by seeking and supporting spaces that would support them. Therefore, although the youth faced exclusions in everyday spaces, they were active in the

process of contesting these exclusions as they carefully negotiated their presence in these spaces. At school, they found the support in specific allied faculty or peers. At home, they sometimes changed their family's perspectives. Many participants described seeking out particular types of areas or specific sites that offered safety. For example, parks and crowded neighbourhoods downtown were seen to provide participants with the freedom of anonymity. Although they felt somewhat excluded in the Gay Village, overall they still identified it as a site of belonging because of the ways that differences were accepted in this neighbourhood.

Participants described many instances of feeling uncomfortable and excluded in all sorts of everyday spaces, but they also shared stories of an overwhelming number of experiences in which they had challenged these exclusions and fears by continuing to assert their identities in public spaces. They did this by just being themselves and refusing to see themselves as victims. Although they almost all faced discrimination, violence, taunts and other forms of harassment, many participants repeatedly stated that this would not stop them from accessing the spaces they wanted to be in. Willow, for example, said that she refused to accept homophobia in urban public spaces. Refusing to be a victim, when she encounters homophobia, she thinks to herself, "...just because you say something ignorant doesn't make you more straight and me less gay". In fact, many participants insisted that they would go anywhere in the city and be open about their gender or sexuality, because it was important for them to be themselves. In this sense, queer and trans\* youth can be agents of change: by insisting on being themselves they can powerfully disrupt the heteronormativity of everyday spaces.

Throughout this research, I also found that community spaces were critical to queer and trans\* youth. I was surprised, however, to find that this concept of 'community' was

described and identified in many forms. On the one hand, I found that participants made community for themselves informally through friendships and in virtual spaces. Relationships offered youth with opportunities to develop and affirm their identities, but also with support and a space to belong. Additionally, the Internet was an important area for young queer and trans\* people to access information anonymously and assert their identities, but also to find online communities and feel included. On the other hand, formal spaces like community organizations played meaningful roles in providing physical and social space for queer and trans\* youth. Community organizations, like P10, offer tangible space for queer and trans\* teenagers to connect with other youth like them, to access information, to feel 'normal', get support, maintain friendships, and to participate in and feel part of a community.

Despite the insights into the lives of queer and trans\* youth provided by this thesis, the findings of the research have some limitations. First, there are limitations in terms of the size of the sample. Although I concluded my interviews once I stopped encountering participants interested in being interviewed, the sample is small and specific to P10. Secondly, the research was conducted within a relatively short timeframe and there were practical limits regarding what I could accomplish. Thirdly, the research only considers the experience of urban youth, reinforcing the bias in existing literature that centres the experiences of urban LGBTQ communities. Finally, my project was focused on the experiences of a largely Anglophone population. Therefore, it may not speak to the experiences of Francophone or Allophone youth as these cultures produce linguistically distinct communities that would likely conceive of identities and experiences differently.

Due to these constraints, there were also a number of areas of inquiry that I did not develop, but would have liked to in this thesis. First, many youth discussed their experiences

of Pride Parades which was a contentious topic. Many participants saw these events as liberating and generally positive, while others saw them as affirming their exclusion from mainstream society. This is an area of potentially rich inquiry since Pride events are meaningful and historic parts of LGBT community organizing, and youth's perspectives have largely been absent on the topic. Secondly, future studies could try to work with a larger population and consider the experiences of LGBTQ youth who do not participate in community organizations. Clearly, there are many youth with similar experiences who do not find their way to community organizations and their experiences may differ from those studied here. Finally, my research project was initially conceived of as participatory, but, of course, that is not exactly how it ended. During my research, I tried to embed myself in the community and include the youth in the project by staying in contact, participating in volunteer opportunities, and working on a community project to open a new LGBTQ youth space. However, this did not enable the youth to actually direct the research. Future studies on queer and trans\* youth could take up the project of initiating a truly collaborative, empowering and creative research project with queer and trans\* adolescents. Otherwise, studies could also focus on the structural aspects of community organizations, and rather than working with them, researchers could do work to provide them with critical feedback.

Because this thesis stems from my experience as a community member, I would like to conclude by considering how positive spaces for queer and trans\* youth can be fostered and made most meaningful to them. As I pointed to throughout this thesis, many queer and trans\* youth struggle with their identity. The thesis demonstrates the importance of finding space where they can avoid feeling judged by those around them while developing their identity. It also demonstrates that they struggle to access information about their gender and sexuality. Their observations highlight the importance of making information accessible to

queer and trans\* youth as they attempt to define themselves. In addition, since so much of teenagers time is regulated, it is no surprise that many participants identified the unstructured nature of P10 drop-in as particularly welcoming; other spaces for youth could consider this as a means of providing appropriate support for these communities. The thesis also demonstrates the importance of fostering non-judgmental and open environments so that young people can ask questions and make sense of their identities safely. Finally, it is clear that in all these cases the youth would benefit from environments where social practices that respond to their experiences were promoted.

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**APPENDIX A:  
SAMPLE DISCUSSION GROUP GUIDE & AGENDA**

**Discussion group to occur with 3-5 voluntary participants from P10, with the goals of:**

- Focusing on the spatial experiences of LGBTQ youth
- Identifying key areas of research on the topic of spaces for LGBTQ youth
- Allowing the ideas and reflections of participants to guide and focus the questions to be answered through my research

**Discussion group will be:**

- Held at P10 for approximately 1 hour on an agreed-upon date
- Audio recorded
- Transcribed at a later date

**Note:** Questions are meant to act as guides for the discussion and may not all be asked

**Intro:**

- I present myself, my research and affiliations
- I walk them through the consent form (see attached)
- Establish some ground rules (beyond the ones set out in the consent form. ie. Respect, no judging each other, confidentiality among participants).

**Go-around:** Youth begin by introducing themselves to the group (Just basic information, name, preferred pronouns etc).

**Discussion**

**Topic one: about P10**

- Can you all tell me about P10?
- What different services does it provide?
- Why do you choose to come here/use their services?
- What kinds of activities are you involved in?
- What other, if any, activities/support would you like to see?

**Topic two: about other LGBTQ involvement/experiences**

- Do any of you belong to any other LGBTQ organizations/events? (Describe.)
- What's different about those spaces/organizations from P10?
- Why do you participate in these organizations/events/spaces?

**Topic three: about other public/private spaces**

- Where do you each spend most of your time? (Prompt: What other kinds of spaces do you actively go to/use? Are you involved in other kinds of youth organizations? Recreational activities/clubs/sports teams?)
- If you attend high school, are there LGBTQ club/organizations in your high schools?
- Do you feel that LGBTQ issues are included in your school curriculum?

- What kinds of resources are available to you in regards to needs you might have related to your sexual identity?

#### **Topic four: about visibility and safety in the city**

- What do you think about Pride parades?
- What do you think about The Village in Montréal? (Prompt: Do you ever go there? What spaces do you go to?)
- Do you feel like you can display your identity in public?
- Are there certain public spaces where you are more likely to display your identity? Certain neighbourhoods?
- Do you have feel threatened/unsafe in public because of your identity?
- What role do you see the police as playing in your safety/not?

#### **Conclusion**

- Ask group if there are additional questions they think I ought to consider on the topic
- Ask participants about PAR aspect of project
- Have participants complete and sign the consent forms and returns them to me
- Give participants their copies of the consent form & resource list and 20\$/each
- Be sure to get each of their contact information, and ask for a chosen pseudonym
- **Thank participants for their time and thoughts!**

**APPENDIX B: SPÉCIMEN**  
**GUIDE POUR GROUPE DE DISCUSSION & ORDRE DU JOUR**  
**VERSION FRANÇAIS**

**La groupe de discussion va se produire avec 3 à 5 participants volontaires de Projet 10, avec les objectifs suivants:**

- Mettre l'accent sur les expériences spatiales des jeunes LGBTQ
- Identifier les domaines important de la recherche sur le thème des géographies LBGTQ pour les jeunes
- Permettre aux idées et réflexion des participants de guider et orienter les questions auxquelles il faut répondre a travers mes recherchés

**La groupe de discussion sera les suivants:**

- Tenue au Projet 10 pendant environ 1 heure à une date convenue
- Enregistrées
- Transcrites à une date ultérieure

**Remarque :** Ces questions sont destinées à servir de guide pour la discussion et ne seront pas tous être demandé, nécessairement

**Introduction:**

- Je me présente, mes recherches et affiliations
- Je leur marche à travers le formulaire de consentement de (voir ci-joint)
- Tout le monde remplit et signe le formulaire de consentement et les retourne
- Établi des règles de base (au-delà de celles énoncées dans le formulaire de consentement, c.-à-d. respect, pas de jugement et la confidentialité entre les participants.)

**Aller-autour:** Les jeunes commencent par se présenter au groupe (l' information de base : nom, pronoms préféré etc.)

**Discussion**

**Sujet un: à propos de Projet 10**

- Pouvez-vous me parler de Projet 10?
- Quels sont les services différents qu'il fourni?
- Pourquoi avez-vous choisi de venir ici / utiliser leurs services?
- Quels types d'activités sont-vous impliqués?
- Quels sont les autres, le cas échéant, activités / services que souhaitez-vous voir?

**Sujet deux: sur la participation avec organismes LGBTQ**

- Est-ce que vous appartient à d'autres organisations LGBT ? (Précisez.)
- Ce qui est différent au sujet de ces espaces ou les organisations de Projet 10?
- Pourquoi pensez-vous participer à ces organisations ou des événements et de ses espaces?

### **Sujet trois: à propos des espaces publics et privés**

- Où est-ce que vous passez le plus de votre temps? (Quels autres types d'espaces-vous activement aller / utilisation? Êtes-vous impliqué dans d'autres types d'organisations de jeunesse? c.à.d. Activités de loisirs et les clubs et les équipes sportives?)
- Si vous assistez à l'école secondaire, y'a t-il un club LGBTQ / organisations dans vos écoles?
- Pensez-vous que les questions LGBTQ sont incluses dans votre cursus scolaire?
- Quels sont les types de ressources qui sont disponibles pour vous en ce qui concerne les besoins que vous pourriez avoir concernant votre identité sexuelle ou de genre?

### **Sujet quatre: sur la visibilité et la sécurité dans la ville**

- Que pensez-vous au sujet des défilés de la Fierté?
- Que pensez-vous à propos du 'Village Gai' à Montréal? (Avez-vous déjà allé là-bas? Quels sont les espaces ou vous allez?)
- Vous sentez-vous comme vous pouvez afficher votre identité en public?
- Y'a t-il certains espaces publics où vous êtes plus susceptibles d'afficher votre identité? Certains quartiers?
- Avez-vous déjà sentiez menacés / dangereux en public à cause de votre identité?
- Quel est le rôle de la police en ce qui concernent votre sécurité / non?

### **Conclusion**

- Demandez au groupe s'il ya des questions supplémentaires qu'ils pensent que je devrais considérer sur le sujet
- Demandez aux participants sur les aspects PAR
- Demandez aux participants de remplir et signer les formulaires de consentement et les retourne à moi
- Donner aux participants leurs copies du formulaire de consentement et la liste de ressources et 20 \$ / chacun
- Soyez sûr d'obtenir chacune de leurs coordonnées, et de demander un pseudonyme choisi
- **Remerciez les participants pour leur temps et pensées!**

**APPENDIX C: SAMPLE INTERVIEW GUIDE & AGENDA  
VERSION FOUR**

**Interview to occur with voluntary participants from P10, with the goals of:**

- Focusing on the experiences of LGBTQ-identified youth in various spaces in Montréal
- Identifying the spaces where LGBTQ spend their time in Montréal
- Identifying the qualities of the spaces considered safe/unsafe for LGBTQ youth

**Interview will:**

- Be held at P10 during their weekly drop-in, held Thursdays from 6-9pm
- Last for approximately 40-60 minutes
- Be audio recorded
- Transcribed at a later date

**Additional Notes:**

- Be sure to be validating!
- Affirm what they say!
- Encourage participant to share!
- Remember that questions are meant to act as guides for the discussion and may not all be asked

**Intro:**

- Be sure to ask if it's okay if the door is shut
- Present myself, my research and affiliations
- Read through the consent form with participant
- Make sure to ask if they have any questions
- Establish some interview 'ground rules' (other than the ones I set out, in case participant has particular ideas about how they would like to be treated etc).

**Topic one: Identity**

Explain to participant that you're going to start by asking them to describe who they are.

Individual

- Could you start by telling me who you are? (Describe yourself! How do you spend your time, what interests you?)
- Could you describe how you identify/your different identities? (Sexuality, gender, race, religion, socio-economic class, language etc).
- Are your sexual and gender identities important to you? (Why or why not? Explain.)
- What does your sexuality/gender mean to you?
- Which identity matters to you most? (Why? Explain.)
- Do you see any connections between your sexual/gender identity and your experiences as \_\_\_\_\_ (whatever other id they have)\_\_\_\_\_?

Identity & Community

- Who are the most important people in your day-to-day life? Ie. Who do you spend the most time with? Who knows you best?
- Do these people know you're sexual/gender identity? Do they respect your identity? Do they talk to you about it?
- Are you friends with/have many other LGBTQ people in your life? (Explain)
- Are the people around you different/the same? How so?
- Could you talk a little about what being a teenager (LGBTQ teen in specific) is like?
- Who are the main adults you have contact with?
- Do they play a significant role in terms of where you can go/how you can behave/who you can be friends with? (eg. Do you have a curfew? Are you not allowed in certain neighbourhoods?)

### **Topic Two: about P10**

Explain to participant that you're going to start by ask them about Project 10.

- Can you tell me about P10?
- What different services does P10 provide?
- Why do you choose to come here/use their services?
- What do you like about coming to P10?
- What kinds of activities that P10 offers are you involved in?
- What other, if any, activities/support would you like to see?
- What is it like as a space? (ie could you describe the environment?)
- How do you feel about where P10 is located? Do you feel comfortable coming to this neighbourhood?
- Do you consider P10 to be a safe space? (Explain)

### **Topic three: Space/ visibility and safety in the city**

Explain to participant that you want to hear about what they think of the city in general, but specifically their experience as an LGBTQ teen in the city.

General

- Where do you spend most of your time? (Describe)
- Do you work? If so, could you talk about that place?
- Where do you feel safe expressing your gender/sexuality? (Why? Discuss.)
- Do you feel like you can display your identity in public?
- Are there certain public spaces where you are more likely to display your identity? Certain neighbourhoods?
- Have you ever felt threatened/unsafe in public because of your identity?
- Is there anywhere in the city where you feel threatened/unsafe? (Discuss.)
- Have you ever experienced harassment/discrimination because of your other identities? Do you feel that this is connected/changed by your gender/sexual identity?
- Are there particular services related to your gender/sexual identity that you have been unable to find/access in the city? /Are there particular needs of yours that are not being met in the spaces you're usually in?
- Do you see many role models/examples of LGBTQ people in public/popular culture? (Discuss)

- What would your ideal space be?
- Describe a place where you feel really safe.
- Do you think your feeling of safety/inclusion could be improved:
  - in general in the city (in public places throughout the city, eg. Public transit, in parks, in the Village etc)
  - at school
  - in your social life
  - in your home life
  - at P10

### LGBTQ Spaces

- Do you ever go to LGBTQ clubs/bars/events? If so where are they? (Describe)
- What do you think about Pride parades?
  - Do you attend?
  - Why or why not?
  - Describe the experience/ Explain
  - Are Pride parades/community days important? (Explain)
- What do you think about The Village in Montréal?
  - Do you ever go there?
  - What spaces do you go to?
  - What do you like about it/not like about it?
- What role do you see the police as playing in your safety/not?

### **Topic four: about other LGBTQ involvement**

Explain to participant that you're going to ask them about their experience with different LGBTQ organizations.

- Do you belong to any other LGBTQ organizations/events? (Describe.)
- What's different about those spaces/organizations from P10?
- Why do you participate in these organizations/events/spaces?
- What role do you see the Internet in playing in terms of your gender/sexual identity/LGBTQ community?
- Do you use the Internet to connect with the LGBTQ community? (Describe)

### **Topic five: Schools**

Explain to participant that you want them to discuss their experiences at school.

- What kind of school do/did you go to? (Public/private, size, location)
- Could you describe the environment regarding gender and sexuality at your high school? (Talk about)
- Are there/were there LGBTQ club/organizations in your high school? (Describe.)
- Do you feel that LGBTQ issues are/were included in your school curriculum?
- Do/did you have workshops or activities around gender and sexuality?
- What kinds of resources are/were available to you related to needs you might have/had in regards to your gender and sexual identity? (What do you think is/was missing?)
- Do you feel that you are/were given enough support from school administrators/faculty/peers?

- How do you feel about the adequacy of these services/support? (gaps, strengths, weaknesses, best and worst)
- If you could change anything about your high school would you?

### **Topic six: Being a youth**

Explain to participant that you want to hear about what being a teenager is like.

- What kind of activities do you do in your spare time?
- Are you involved in youth organizations? (ie. Recreational activities/clubs/sports teams?)
- Do you think youth are given enough freedom?
- Are there places where you don't think youth are welcome? (Describe.)
- What barriers do you think exist for LGBTQ youth in terms of figuring out their identity
- Do you see any barriers that might prevent youth from finding LGBTQ community?
- Do you think that LGBTQ youth have trouble finding jobs/attending school/day-to-day activities?
- Do you think that it's getting better for LGBTQ youth? (Why or why not? Describe.)
- What do you hope for your future?
- What do you see in the future for LGBTQ teens?

### **Conclusion**

- Participant completes and signs the consent form and returns it to me
- Give participant their copy of the consent form & resource list and 20\$
- Be sure to get their contact information, and ask for a chosen pseudonym
- **Thank participant for their time and thoughts!**

**APPENDIX D: SAMPLE  
CONSENT FORM TO PARTICIPATE IN INTERVIEW**

This is to state that I agree to participate in a Master's research project being conducted by Julia de Montigny of the Department of Geography, Planning and Environment at Concordia University, under the supervision of Dr. Julie Podmore.

**A. Purpose**

I have been informed that the purpose of this research being conducted by Julia de Montigny (julia.demontigny@gmail.com), under the supervision of Dr. Julie Podmore and in collaboration with P10, is to explore LGBTQ youth's (aged 14-18) perceptions of different spaces (e.g. schools, public transit, parks, libraries, homes) in Montréal.

**B. Procedures**

- I understand that my participation in this interview will be used in work produced for Julia de Montigny's graduate thesis to be completed by April, 2013.
- I understand that this research project may also result in an informative guide to better the services P10 offers.
- I understand that the interview will last for approximately one hour.
- I understand that the interview will be audio recorded. I understand that no one will have access to the audio files other than Julia de Montigny.
- I understand that there is no obligation to answer any question that I feel is invasive, offensive or inappropriate.
- I understand that I may ask questions of Julia de Montigny at any point during the research process.
- I understand that there will be a small compensation of 20\$ for my participation.
- I understand that I may obtain a copy of the final essay should I request it.

**C. Conditions for Participation**

- I understand that I am free to withdraw my consent and discontinue my participation at anytime without negative consequences.
- Should I withdraw from the study before April, 2013 all data (audio, digital and written) related to my participation will be destroyed. All other data will be confidentially housed in Julia de Montigny's possession for a period of five years, after which all data will be destroyed.
- I understand that my participation in this study is **confidential**. My individual identity will not be revealed in the research.
- I understand that the names of the organization, P10, will however be used and recognize that my participation in an interview during Drop-in hours may impact the extent to which my participation may be anonymous.

- I understand that Julia de Montigny may contact me (using email) to confirm the details, quality, and accuracy of information, descriptions or quotes shared during the interview.
- I understand that the data from this study may be published or that the work might be presented at future conferences.
- I understand the purpose of this study and that Julia de Montigny does not have hidden motives.

I HAVE CAREFULLY STUDIED THE ABOVE AND UNDERSTAND THIS AGREEMENT.

I FREELY CONSENT AND VOLUNTARILY AGREE TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS STUDY.

NAME (please print)

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SIGNATURE

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DATE

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Email

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*If you have questions about the study itself, please contact Julia de Montigny 514.616.4689 or [julia.demontigny@gmail.com](mailto:julia.demontigny@gmail.com)*

*If at any time you have questions about your rights as a research participant, please contact the Research Ethics and Compliance Advisor of Concordia University, at 514.848.2424.x 7481 or [ethics@alcor.concordia.ca](mailto:ethics@alcor.concordia.ca)*

**APPENDIX E: SPÉCIMEN**  
**FORMULAIRE DE CONSENTEMENT DE PARTICIPER À UNE ENTREVUE**  
**VERSION FRANÇAIS**

Par la présente, je déclare consentir à participer à un programme de recherche mené par Julia de Montigny du département de Géographie et Environnement à l'Université Concordia, sous la supervision de Dr. Julie Podmore.

**A. But de la recherche**

On m'a informée du but de la recherche, menée par Julia de Montigny ([julia.demontigny@gmail.com](mailto:julia.demontigny@gmail.com)), sous la supervision du Dr. Julie Podmore, est d'étudier les perceptions des différents espaces (ex. écoles, transports en commun, les parcs, les bibliothèques, les espaces de famille) à Montréal, selon les perspectives des jeunes qui s'identifie comme LGBTQ (entre 14 et 18) et qui participent dans le Projet 10.

**B. Procédures**

- Je comprends que mon participation dans cette entrevue sera utilisée dans le travail de recherche réalisé pour la thèse de maîtrise de Julia de Montigny qui sera terminée en avril 2013.
- Je comprends que ce projet de recherche peut également se résulter en guide d'information pour améliorer les services que Projet 10 offre.
- Je comprends que ma participation à l'étude durera environ une heure (ou moins).
- Je comprends que les entrevues seront enregistrées en audio. Je comprends que personne n'aura accès aux fichiers audio autres que Julia de Montigny.
- Je comprends qu'il n'y a aucune obligation de répondre à toute question que je me sens est offensant ou inapproprié.
- Je comprends que je peux poser des questions au chercheur, à tout moment pendant le processus de recherche.
- Je comprends que ma participation apportera seulement un risque minimal ou nocif.
- Je comprends qu'il y aura une compensation de 20\$ pour ma participation.
- Je comprends que je peux obtenir une copie (en anglais) de la thèse finale, mais que je dois faire la demande moi-même.
- Je comprends que Julia de Montigny va peut-être traduire mes contributions d'entrevues de français vers l'anglais.

**C. Conditions de participation**

Je comprends que je puis retirer mon consentement et interrompre ma participation à tout moment, sans conséquences négatives, jusqu'à avril 2013

- Dois-je retirer de l'étude, toutes les données (audio, numérique et écrit) liée à ma participation seront détruits. Autrement, toutes les autres données seront logées de manière confidentielle dans la possession de Julia de Montigny pour une période de cinq ans, après laquelle toutes les données seront détruites.
- Je comprends que ma participation à cette étude est **confidentielle**, c'est-à-dire que Julia de Montigny connaît mon identité mais ne la révélera pas.
- Je comprends que le nom de l'organisation, Projet 10, sera toutefois utilisé. En plus je reconnais que ma participation dans une entrevue qui aura lieu au cours des heures de drop-in peuvent influencer la mesure dans laquelle ma participation peut être anonyme.
- Je comprends que Julia de Montigny pourrait me contacter (par courrier électronique) afin de confirmer les détails, la qualité et l'exactitude de l'information, les descriptions ou des citations partagées au cours de l'entrevue.
- Je comprends que les données de cette étude puissent être publiées.
- Je comprends le but de la présente étude; je sais qu'elle ne comprend pas de motifs cachés dont je n'aurais pas été informée.

J'AI LU ATTENTIVEMENT CE QUI PRÉCÈDE ET JE COMPRENDS LA NATURE DE L'ENTENTE.

JE CONSENS LIBREMENT ET VOLONTAIREMENT À PARTICIPER À CETTE ÉTUDE.

NOM (caractères)

---

SIGNATURE

DATE

---

Email

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*Si vous avez des questions concernant le fonctionnement de l'étude, S.V.P. contacter Julia de Montigny, 514.616.4689, [julia.demontigny@gmail.com](mailto:julia.demontigny@gmail.com)*

*Si vous avez des questions concernant vos droits en tant que participants à l'étude, S.V.P. contactez conseillère en éthique de la recherche, Université Concordia, au 514-848-2424 poste 7481 ou par courriel au [ethics@alcor.concordia.ca](mailto:ethics@alcor.concordia.ca)*

**APPENDIX F: SAMPLE  
CONSENT FORM TO FACILITATE RESEARCH RECRUITMENT**

This is to state that Project 10 agrees to allow Julia de Montigny, under the supervision of Dr. Julie Podmore, in the Department of Geography, Planning and Environment of Concordia University, to recruit voluntary youth participants during P10's drop-in for the purpose of fulfilling the requirements of her Master's research to be completed by April, 2013.

**A. Purpose**

I have been informed that the purpose of this research being conducted by Julia de Montigny (julia.demontigny@gmail.com) under the supervision of Dr. Julie Podmore is to study the spatial experiences and perceptions of space according to LGBTQ-identified youth (between 14 and 18) who participate in P10, in Montréal.

**B. Procedures**

- I understand that Julia de Montigny will recruit voluntary youth participants to be interviewed for the purpose of her research.
- If permission is granted, I understand that Julia de Montigny will use our website and online social networking sites to circulate information about her research and request voluntary participants to be interviewed. I understand that she will circulate flyers in our drop-in space requesting participation.
- I understand that Julia de Montigny is taking necessary measures to protect the anonymity and confidentiality of information disclosed by participants.
  
- I understand that the opinions, ideas and experiences voiced by interviewees are those of the participants and not of P10.
- I understand that there will be no payment for our participation.
- I understand that P10 will receive a copy of the dissertation upon completion.

**C. Conditions of Participation**

- I understand that P10 is free to withdraw consent and discontinue acting as a host to Julia de Montigny's recruitment process at anytime and without negative consequences.
- I understand that the data from this study may be published or that the work might be presented at future conferences.

I HAVE CAREFULLY STUDIED THE ABOVE AND UNDERSTAND THIS AGREEMENT.

I FREELY CONSENT AND VOLUNTARILY AGREE TO FACILITATE THIS STUDY.

NAME (please print) \_\_\_\_\_

SIGNATURE \_\_\_\_\_

DATE \_\_\_\_\_

*If you have questions about the study itself, please contact Julia de Montigny 514.616.4689 or [julia.demontigny@gmail.com](mailto:julia.demontigny@gmail.com)*

*If at any time you have questions about your rights as a research participant, please please contact the Research Ethics and Compliance Advisor of Concordia University, at 514.848.2424.x 7481 or [ethics@alcor.concordia.ca](mailto:ethics@alcor.concordia.ca)*

**APPENDIX G:  
RESOURCES FOR PARTICIPANTS  
RESSOURCES POUR PARTICIPANT/ES**

**Mental Health Resources in Montréal // Ressources en santé mentale à Montréal**

- ♥ Ami Québec (Free or Low-cost services // Des services gratuits ou peu coûteux)  
514-486-1448  
[www.amiquebec.org](http://www.amiquebec.org)
- ♥ Argyle Institute (Private counselling, 25-60\$/session // Conseil privé, 25-60\$/session)  
215 Redford  
514-931-5629  
[argyleinstitute.org](http://argyleinstitute.org)
- ♥ Douglas Mental Health (Public, Open 24h // Publique, Over 24h)  
6875 Lasalle  
514-761-6131  
[www.douglas.qc.ca](http://www.douglas.qc.ca)
- ♥ Projet Suivi communautaire (No Fees, 18+, must live in South West Montréal // Gratuit, 18+, doivent vivre dans le Sud-Ouest de Montréal)  
[projetsuivicommunautaire.com](http://projetsuivicommunautaire.com)
- ♥ Queen Elizabeth Health Complex // Complexe de santé Reine Elizabeth (50\$/session)  
514-481-0317  
[www.qehc.org](http://www.qehc.org)

**Community Organizations // Organisations Communautaire**

- ♥ 2110 Centre for Gender Advocacy // Centre 2110  
2110 MacKay  
514-848-2424 ext. 7800
- ♥ Québec Trans Health Action // Action Santé Travesti(e)s et Transsexuel(les) du Québec (ASTT(e)Q)  
1300 Sanguinet  
514-847-0067 x 207  
[www.astteq.org](http://www.astteq.org)
- ♥ Head & Hands // A Deux Mains  
4833 Sherbrooke W.  
514-481-0277  
[headandhands.ca](http://headandhands.ca)
- ♥ LGBTQ Youth Centre  
202 Woodside, Beaconsfield  
514-794-5428  
[www.lgbtqyouthcentre.ca/](http://www.lgbtqyouthcentre.ca/)
- ♥ Jeunesse Lambda  
2075 rue Plessis, 3e étage  
514 528-7535

www.jeunesselambda.org

- ♥ MYCAH // CJMLH  
2075 Plessis, bureau 110  
514-318-5428  
www.coalitionjeunesse.org/en/

### **Phone Lines // Lignes de support (téléphoniques)**

- ♥ Infosante  
514-521-2100 (24/7, English & Français)
- ♥ Phobies-zero  
514-276-3105 (M-F, 9am-9pm // L-V, 9h-21h)
- ♥ Revivre  
514-738-4873 (M-F, 9am-9pm, L-V, 9h-21h)
- ♥ Queer Line  
514-398-6822 (M-S, 8pm-11pm// L-D, 20h-23h)

### **Websites // Sites Web**

- ♥ [www.phobies-zero.qc.ca](http://www.phobies-zero.qc.ca)
- ♥ [www.theicarusproject.net](http://www.theicarusproject.net)
- ♥ [www.radicalmentalhealth.net/?cat=7](http://www.radicalmentalhealth.net/?cat=7)
- ♥ [www.ataq.org](http://www.ataq.org)
- ♥ [www.revivre.org](http://www.revivre.org)
- ♥ <http://www.alterheros.com>
- ♥ <http://politiq.wix.com/politiq>

**APPENDIX H: SAMPLE  
FOLLOW-UP EMAIL WITH PARTICIPANT**

Hello \_\_\_\_\_,

I'm Julia, the graduate student at Concordia University who you might remember from the time I interviewed you in \_\_\_\_\_ 2012 at Project 10 about spaces for LGBTQ youth. As you know, that interview was part of my Master's research and I am happy to tell you that my research is almost done.

Before I finalize everything, I wanted to check in with you about a couple of points (see below). If you could please take the time to carefully read through my questions and respond by \_\_\_\_\_ that would be very helpful!

**Please note:** you are not in any way obliged to respond, but I would very much appreciate your feedback so that I present an accurate representation of you!

Also, I included a lot of quotes from our interview, and reflected on ideas, stories and opinions you shared with me at length in my paper. If you would like to read exactly what I have quoted you as saying before I finalize my research, let me know.

If you have any other questions, or need clarification, please get in touch!

1. Based on what you shared during our focus group, I describe you like this:

- Pseudonym:
- Age:
- Gender:
- Sexuality:
- Race/Ethnicity:
- Languages:
- Class:

1.1. Are these descriptions accurate? If not, please correct me!  
(You can ask me to change the pseudonym I've used, if you don't like it).

1.2. I am missing information on what \_\_\_\_\_.  
Could you please let me know \_\_\_\_\_ about you?

1.3. Are there any other aspects of your identity that you would like me to highlight?

2. My research is focused on spaces that LGBTQ teens consider safe and inclusive. So, I think it would be cool if I included a map of how you perceive the city, your school, neighbourhood, home or whatever you think works (especially in terms of where you feel safe or not). If you like to express yourself through drawing, I would love to incorporate your visions in my thesis! Let me know if this is interesting to you.

3. Another aspect of my research was that I wanted to put together a short informative guide that could be distributed to schools and community organizations. This guide would make

suggestions to improve the safety of young LGBTQ people based on insights I gathered from speaking with yourself and others at P10! If you are interested in contributing drawings, images, or photographs to make this guide informative and beautiful, please let me know!

That's all for now. Again, please get in touch with any question. I really appreciate you taking the time to answer my questions.

I hope you're keeping well!

Kindly,  
Julia

p.s. I have attached a sample consent form like the one you signed in case you need a reminder of what my study was all about.

## GLOSSARY

Sourced and Adapted as cited from:

Wipe Out Transphobia [WOT]. (2012). Trans glossary. Retrieved from: [www.wipeouttransphobia.com](http://www.wipeouttransphobia.com)

Girls Action Foundation [GAF]. (2013). Sex, sexuality, and gender glossary: Reference Sheet. Retrieved from: [girlsactionfoundation.ca](http://girlsactionfoundation.ca)

The Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Community Centre. [LGBTCC]. (2013). Trans basics: Glossary of terms. Retrieved from: [www.gaycenter.org](http://www.gaycenter.org)

UC Davis Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender Resource Centre [UCD]. (2013). LGBTQIA Glossary. Retrieved from: [lgbtrc.ucdavis.edu](http://lgbtrc.ucdavis.edu)

**Asexuality:** a sexual orientation generally characterized by not feeling sexual attraction or a desire for partnered sexuality. Asexuality is distinct from celibacy, which is the deliberate abstention from sexual activity (LGBTCC).

**Bisexual:** Used to describe people who are attracted to both men and women (GAF).

**Cisgender:** Identifying with the gender assigned to you at birth. Some people say non-transgender (GAF).

**Gay:** Used to describe people who are attracted to people of their same gender; commonly used to by male homosexuals (GAF).

**Gender:** The expression, behaviour or identification of a person considered as masculine, feminine, androgynous or any mix thereof. Not necessarily dependent on the sex one is assigned at birth or on sexual characteristics. Different communities and cultures have different ways of thinking of gender and classifying people into different genders (GAF).

**Gender identity:** One's inner feelings of being a woman, man, or something else entirely (GAF).

**Gender Non-conforming:** A term for individuals whose gender expression is different from societal expectations related to gender (GAF).

**Gender-neutral pronouns:** Includes ze/zir, they/their in place of he/him/she/her (GAF).

**Gender-queer:** Used by those who identify as between genders, or as neither man nor woman. May be seen as an identity under the gender non-conforming umbrella. Gender-queer people may or may not pursue any physical changes, such as hormonal or surgical intervention and may or may not identify as trans\* (LGBTCC).

**Intersex:** People who are born with or develop primary and secondary sex characteristics that do not fit neatly into society's definitions of male or female. Many intersex babies/children receive surgical intervention (without their consent and sometimes without

their knowledge) to make their sex characteristics conform to binary expectations. Intersex people do not necessarily identify as trans\*. (GAF).

**Lesbian:** Used to describe people who identify as women who are attracted to other people who identify as women (GAF).

**Pansexuality:** Used to describe people who have romantic, sexual, or affectional desire for people of any gender or sex. Used by many in place of 'bisexual', which implies that only two sexes or genders exist (UCD).

**Queer:** A term that was once (and in some places, still is) derogatory. It has been reclaimed to refer to those of non-normative sexualities. Can be used as an umbrella term to refer to gay men, lesbians, bisexuals, cisgendered people, transgendered people, allies, and others, although some people simply identify as 'queer' and nothing else. Not all people in the above subcategories identify as queer, and many people not in the above groups do (GAF).

**Sex:** The male or female (or intersex) classification that one is assigned at birth and based upon one's anatomy. A person's assigned sex may or may not be the same as their present anatomical sex which may or may not be the same as their sex of identity (GAF).

**Sexuality:** The components of a person that include their biological sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, sexual practices etc. (UCD).

**Sexual Orientation:** an emotional, romantic, sexual, and/or affectional attraction. Terms can include: homosexual, heterosexual, bisexual, pansexual, queer, and asexual. Sexual orientation can be fluid, and people can use a variety of labels to describe their own (UCD).

**Trans\*:** A shorter version of the word transgender, which is often used as an umbrella term for trans\* people. Some people identify just as trans\*. The asterisk is used to convey inclusivity (WOT).

**Transgender:** Used most often as an umbrella term to include the following: those whose gender identity, behaviour, or expression is different from their assigned sex; those whose gender changes at some point in their lives; those who identify as a gender outside the man/woman binary; those who have no gender or multiple genders; those who perform gender or play with it (e.g. in drag contexts); and others (GAF).

**Trans(s)sexual:** A person who identifies as a member of a sex that is different from the sex they were assigned at birth. Many pursue hormones and/or surgical interventions, but not all those who pursue such medical interventions identify as transsexual (GAF).

**Two Spirit:** A term used among many Native American and Canadian First Nations indigenous groups to refer to people whose gender-variant sexualities and/or gender identities are seen as non-normative by colonialist non-native mainstream culture. While this concept might overlap with our concept of queer or genderqueer, this concept can only be fully understood from within Aboriginal culture (GAF).