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(In)tolerance and (in)visibility: LGBTQ+ sense of place in the Stratford area

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Abstract

In this thesis, I draw on a thematic analysis of 23 interviews with white LGBTQ+ participants in the Stratford area to examine factors affecting participants' sense of place. The research questions guiding this work are: How do participants make sense of their place in the Stratford area? How and where do participants experience a sense of belonging and not belonging in the Stratford area? And how does a sense of belonging or not belonging affect participants' experiences within these spaces? My approach to this research is informed by feminist and queer methodologies. When possible, interviews for this research were conducted as walking interview s and I reflect on the significance of walking with participants in this thesis.

My analysis of participants' accounts suggests that their sense of place is affected by the heteronormative nature of the environment in which they live. While the majority of participants express a general sense of comfort in the area, the ways in which they talk about their sense of comfort suggests that it is the result of sustained work, strategies, and negotiations of (in)visibility and (in)tolerance. Thinking about what makes the area liveable or less liveable for participants, I use the concept of comfort zones to illustrate the importance of support networks and to draw attention to the affective work that participants engage in on a regular basis. Finally, I consider how the concept of vulnerable recognition opens up possibilities for thinking about (in)visibility that addresses rather than mitigates ambivalent recognition and misrecognition.

My findings reveal that sense of place is meaningfully affected by gender and sexuality. Notably, trans and non-binary participants express a sense of being less at ease in the area compared to cis participants. Further findings indicate that participants express a desire for more consistent and supported community in the area. Finally, I suggest that dominant coming out discourses inadequately encapsulate participants' experiences, which involve continually negotiating their (in)visibility and (in)tolerance in a heteronormative society, and that vulnerable recognition may offer a more fruitful approach. By focusing on an area surrounding a small, rural adjacent city, this research contributes to efforts to study LGBTQ+ folks outside of major urban centres.

Keywords

Summary for Lay Audience

In this thesis I discuss 23 interviews I conducted with white LGBTQ+ participants in the Stratford area to think about factors that affect their sense of place. The research questions guiding my work are: How do participants make sense of their place in the Stratford area? How does a sense of belonging or not belonging affect participants' experiences? And how and where do participants experience a sense of belonging and not belonging in the Stratford area? When possible, interviews for this research were conducted as walking interviews and I reflect on the significance of walking with participants in this thesis.

I suggest that participant's sense of place is affected by heteronormativity. Heteronormativity refers to a way of thinking and being that presumes that being heterosexual and cis is normal and right and that anything else is abnormal or wrong. While the majority of participants express a general sense of comfort in the area, the ways in which they talk about their sense of comfort suggests that it is achieved through sustained work and negotiations of (in)visibility and (in)tolerance. My overall focus is on what makes the area liveable or less liveable for participants. I use the concept of comfort zones to think about what sustains participant's wellbeing in the area and also how the limits of comfort zones emphasize the potential presence of intolerance. It is important that factors like knowing people and being known are discussed by some participants as integral to their positive sense of place and by others as factors associated with dissatisfaction. Sense of place is subjective and depends on a variety of factors including gender and sexuality.

My findings reveal that sense of place is meaningfully affected by gender and sexuality. Notably, trans and non-binary participants express a sense of being less at ease in the area compared to cis participants. Further findings indicate that participants express a desire for more consistent and supported community in the area. Finally, I suggest that dominant coming out discourses inadequately encapsulate participants' experiences, which involve continually negotiating their (in)visibility and (in)tolerance in a heteronormative society, and that vulnerable recognition may offer a more fruitful approach. By focusing on an area surrounding a small, rural adjacent city, this research contributes to efforts to study LGBTQ+ folks outside of major urban centres.

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Preface

My interest in thinking about LGBTQ+ sense of place, wellbeing and belonging in the Stratford area is motivated by my personal experiences growing up and living in the area. Growing up and through my teenage years, I had a strong sense that lesbians, gay and bisexual people did not belong in St. Marys, Ontario. Beyond not being aware of any local, openly lesbian or gay people, homophobic language and jokes were both common and unremarkable. Once at a house party in high school, my friends were kicked out of the party and then some guys we knew from our high school taped a sign to the door that read "no dykes allowed". The act of posting that sign was not just a way of kicking us out of the party; they were sending a message that they were not going to tolerate lesbians in our community - we were not allowed to exist there, and we certainly were not allowed to belong. While my queerness was a factor in my desire to leave St. Marys as soon as possible, it was not until I moved to the city to start university that I realized how much I believed that someone like me (and my gay & bi identified friends) did not belong in our small town.

The more I started to read and talk more about non-urban queer experiences, the more I became aware of the tendency to imagine larger cities and urban centers as *the* place for queer subjects to live open and fulfilling lives. In a study of where sociological studies of LGBTQ+ life are located, Stone (2018) emphasizes that there is a need to study queers "embedded within the rich context of their lives" outside of major city centers in the United States (p. 7). It is important to seriously consider the effects of an overwhelming focus on major cities and a sense that smaller locales are not spaces where LGBTQ+ people are likely to be tolerated on LGBTQ+ living in those places. My work is motivated by calls to look beyond inner and major cities as the natural places for LGBTQ+ lives to flourish (Gray, 2009; Halberstam, 2005; Stone, 2018; Wienke and Hill, 2016). As I reflect on what makes life in the Stratford area liveable for participants throughout this thesis, I am informed by my own experiences growing up in St. Marys where my core, supportive group of friends (many of whom are LGBTQ+) made the area livable and enjoyable despite the presence of homophobia, lesbophobia and transphobia.

Like my phase two participants, I am someone who left the area. But also like my phase two participants, I remain attached to the Stratford area and invested in the cultivation

of spaces, services, community, and resources for LGBTQ+ folks who still live there or who might move (back) there. At a time when we are experiencing a pandemic and are anticipating or already experiencing a global financial crisis, Canadian news coverage suggests that people are increasingly ready to leave large cities for smaller towns and areas (Ewing, 2020; Goldfinger, 2020; Nanowski, 2020; Sumi, 2020). The coverage of this "exodus" is linked to the pandemic, but also to factors like "rising housing costs, job uncertainty, urban alienation," (Sumi, 2020). In a Global News story on why some Canadians are leaving the city "for good" during the pandemic, one person comments that, "we've kind of fallen in love with this small-town vibe," (Ewing, 2020). Of course, the ability to fall in love with a small town and to have that small town love you back and sustain you depends on who someone is and how they are read: race, sexuality, gender, ethnicity, religion, and their relationship to and history in the area all play a role.

The notion of this exodus raises all kinds of interesting discussions in relation to sense of place. Perhaps more now than ever, it is paramount to think about sense of place, how belonging happens, and what kinds of services and supports are available for LGBTQ+ folks and for other potentially marginalized groups living in or considering moving to the Stratford area, which has historically been known as demographically homogenous. My hope is that this thesis can generate conversation and future research and action to better understand and support the needs and wellbeing of all LGBTQ+ folks in the Stratford area and also how other folks marked as "other" in small towns experience life in these areas.

Chapter 1

1   Introduction

1.1   Research questions and objectives

This thesis is motivated by a desire to better understand and support the wellbeing of LGBTQ+ people living in the Stratford area. Approaching this issue from a framework of sense of place, I am interested in how LGBTQ+ folks living in the Stratford area feel about their place in their communities and everyday spaces, their senses of belonging and not belonging and, more generally, what it means to think about experiences of places and one's sense of place. The research questions guiding my work are: How do participants make sense of their place in the Stratford area? how and where do participants experience a sense of belonging and not belonging in the Stratford area? And how does a sense of belonging or not belonging affect participants' experiences within these spaces? In posing these questions, my aim is to think about how to make the Stratford area a more liveable place for LGBTQ+ folks.

The primary objective of this thesis, as stated above, is to better understand and support the wellbeing of LGBTQ+ people living in the Stratford area. More specifically, my objective is to gain an understanding of the factors affecting LGBTQ+ sense of place, including a sense of belonging and connectedness; to establish the scope of issues affecting local LGBTQ+ people; to identify barriers to organizing and change; to identify the kind of support, resources and/or initiatives participants need and want; and to identify areas for future research. The research process for this thesis involved conducting 23 interviews with 21 participants over a period spanning June 2019 – February 2020. Given my in-depth qualitative approach and relatively small sample size, I am not trying to produce a "representative" sample, or to make claims about a generalizable sense of place in the Stratford area. Rather, I draw on de Wit (2013), who argues that the sense of place among a small group of people, while not representative, is able to substantively impact local issues and direct future research, policy and programming (p. 129).

1.2   Theoretical framework

In the remainder of this chapter, I offer a literature review of the work that makes up my theoretical framework for this thesis. My thesis is situated at the intersection of work on queer space and queer community, rural queer studies, sense of place, and liveability. The first section of my theoretical framework is composed of critiques of coming out discourses, literature on relational subjectivities, and the notion of affective work. Beyond that, I provide an overview of work on queer theory that informs my approach to comfort zones, liveability, queer space, queer community, and the notion of "live and let live". I conclude with a review of the sense of place literature. Prior to my theoretical framework, I establish my understanding of heteronormativity, a central concept in this thesis.

Yep (2002) explains heteronormativity as an assumption that the "heterosexual experience *is synonymous with* the human experience" and that heterosexuality is a "'given'" or a "natural, coherent, fixed and universal" experience (p. 167). According to Goodrich et al. (2017), heteronormativity constructs heterosexuality as the only "normal" way of being and only recognizes relationships between "the opposite sexes" (p. 842). Further, heteronormativity is the "belief that people fall distinctly into two genders, male or female, and that their dress and behaviours reflect their biological sex assigned at birth" (Goodrich et al., 2017, p. 842; Warner, 1991). In this way, I understand heteronormativity to encompass both heterosexism and concepts like cisgenderism and cissexism (Goodrich et al., 2017; Lennon and Mistler, 2014; Serano, 2007). As these definitions suggests, heteronormativity serves to make LGBTQ+ people feel out of place, sustains the conditions for homophobia, queerphobia, transphobia and transmisogyny. As I explore in the next section, heteronormativity sustains the conditions in which anyone who is not heterosexual and not cis is made to constantly make themselves visible against the default or natural status of being, which is heterosexual and cis (Goodrich et al., 2017; Yep, 2002).

Partially to draw attention to the systemic social and cultural conditions that sustain homophobia, heteronormativity and heterosexism are useful concepts (Yep, 2002, 167). According to Yep (2002), homophobia typically refers to the "irrational fear,

abhorrence, and dislike of homosexuality and of those who engage in it" (p. 165). Among the many critiques of homophobia, is the argument that it "ignores the underlying structural and social conditions leading to sexual oppression by focusing on [homophobic] individuals rather than the larger social and cultural system" (Yep, 2002, 166). Heterosexism refers to "the belief and expectation that everyone is or should be heterosexual" while, relatedly, heteronormativity "assumes that heterosexuality is the indisputable and unquestionable bedrock of society", as explored above (Yep, 2002, 167). As Yep (2002) suggests, an attentiveness to heterosexism and heteronormativity is paramount in order to understand how all other (non-heteronormative) forms of being are cast as "pathological, deviant, invisible, unintelligible, or written out of existence" (Yep, 2002, 167).

1.2.1   Critiques of coming out discourses

Queer scholarship that deconstructs and critiques coming out discourses is central to my theoretical framework. In both academic literature and the popular imaginary, coming out is often conceptualized as both a means of freeing oneself or being empowered and as a means of overcoming prejudice (Rasmussen, 2004, p. 145). Rasmussen (2004) draws attention to the way that those who do not come out are "marked as lacking" while those who come out are lauded empowered role models who promote values like tolerance and inclusivity (p. 145). Rasmussen (2004) elaborates on this, stating: "When coming out discourses are privileged, the act of not coming out may be read as an abdication of responsibility, or, the act of somebody who is disempowered or somehow ashamed of their inherent gayness" (p. 146). Klein et al. (2015) support this critique, arguing that traditional understandings of "identity formation as a developmental process … paints the out subject as necessarily psychologically healthy and the closeted (or anywhere in between) subject as, by definition, shameful, fearful, and characterized by a fundamental lack of self-acceptance" (p. 319).

The way that coming out discourses frame a state of being "out" as "morally superior" is one of their participants' foremost issues (Klein et al., 2015, p. 299). Klein et al. (2015) found that their LGBTQ participants "challenged the notion that the opposite of *out* is *closeted*" and recognized that many factors shape their health and wellbeing

(Klein et al., 2015, p. 319). This challenge to the out/closeted binary is fundamental to my theoretical framework as I think about how my participants position themselves in relation to and beyond this binary. The ways participants talk about their (in)visibility suggests that in many cases, they remain invisible as LGBTQ+ not because they are ashamed of who they are, but because of pervasive heteronormativity and the conditions in particular places and moments that make it hostile, unwelcome or simply too much work to make themselves visible. In many of these moments, participants recognize that they are being misread or that their identity is ambiguous, but they elect not to do the work of making themselves visible for any number of reasons. I expand on the "affective work" involved in negotiating (in)visibility later in this chapter.

In *Out in the Country,* Gray (2009) looks at "how strategies of visibility that currently drive mainstream gay and lesbian social movements in the United States work out in the country" and provides an understanding of how rural queer youth conceive of and negotiate their (in)visibility (p. 4). Gray (2009) is specifically interested in how normative coming out discourses valorize visibility and notes that her participants "neither reject outright nor fully take on the expectations of a dominant ideology" which in this case is an expectation to be "out, loud and proud" at all times (p. 166). Gray (2009) argues that despite a "politics of gay visibility that judges allegiance and mental adjustment to one's identity by a willingness to pronounce it" her participants become visible in strategic ways that allow them to express themselves without risking potential consequences and homophobia (p. 166). By strategically negotiating their visibility, Gray's (2009) participants are, "laboring to enact permanent structural change while at the same time valuing the importance of local and everyday struggles of resistance" as they recognize that the need to be recognized as familiar shapes the way they stand out as or appear as queer (Muñoz, 1999, pp. 11-12; cited in Gray, 2009, p. 166). Rather than reading the need to strategically negotiate one's visibility as simply emblematic of rural hostility to queerness, Gray (2009) traces the way that this kind of disidentificatory work allows participants to expand their boundaries while maintaining a level of comfort (p. 166). Gray's (2009) research directs my understanding of the ways that rural LGBTQ+ youth negotiate their identities and (in)visibility, how such negotiations are motivated by

pragmatic decisions about safety and comfort, and that their contingent visibility does not negate their identities.

Another way that critical work on coming out discourses informs my analysis is by providing an understanding of how the injunction to become visible is not only something that is "done" by individuals for their own self-actualization, but also has collective motivations and effects. As Rasmussen (2004) suggests, coming out discourses frame being open about one's identity as an important form of political activism (p. 299). The logic underlying the link between visibility and political activism is premised on research and thinking that advocates personal exposure to LGBTQ+ folks as a strategy for achieving LGBTQ+ acceptance (Klein et al., 2015; Rees-Turyn, 2007; Sears and Williams, 1997). Becoming visible is not only something one does for oneself, but also in the service of becoming the lesbian and gay person who prompts the people they know to become more accepting of gays and lesbians. According to this perspective, people become more accepting of LGBTQ+ people through personal interaction with LGBTQ+ people whom they know, love, respect and ultimately, whom they are willing to see and accept as human. These critiques of coming out discourses are particularly informative as I consider how my participants talk about the work they do to educate others and their awareness that they are role models for other LGBTQ+ people. This work, while serving an important function for participants and for their communities, often puts them in uncomfortable positions or asks them to speak on behalf of "the LGBTQ+ community". The ways in which coming out is constructed both as a means of personal liberation and as a service to one's communities informs my understanding of how participants manage and negotiate expectations to become out/visible while also being aware of the ways in which becoming visible is not always easy or safe.

Another relevant critique of coming out discourses is that they tend to assume a "static and coherent final subject" and ignore the continuous work that is required of LGBTQ+ subjects to out themselves (McQueen, 2015, p. 300; Butler, 1993). McQueen characterizes standard models of coming out as being narrated as a journey from an internal sense that one is "different" or "confused" through periods of gradual understanding, self-discovery and exploration, during which one makes sense of their

feelings and desires, until they cohere by expressing this to someone else, which is known as the act of coming out (2015, p. 170). For McQueen, this process problematically represents a "great unveiling of oneself and an acceptance of who one really is" (2015, p. 171). In this framing, being gay or trans is constructed as a "fundamental truth about oneself" (McQueen, 2015, p. 172) that is discovered internally and relies on the fantasy that we are self-knowing individuals. Even beyond the charge of essentialism, the notion of a self-knowing subject rests on flawed assumptions about individual autonomy, which have been substantially critiqued by queer and feminist theorists over the last thirty years. Thus, McQueen (2015) critiques coming out discourses as relying on notions of authenticity, which frame coming out as a representation or realization of "who one is and was always meant to be" and ultimately reinscribe the centrality of sexuality and the hetero/homo binary (p. 170; Butler, 1993; Sedgwick, 2008).

One of McQueen's (2015) primary contentions with this framing is that it romanticizes the act of coming out as "the end of the struggle", instead of "merely initiating a further set of struggles which may have no easy resolution or identifiable end point" (p. 170; Butler, 1993). The focus on coming out of the closet overlooks "just what it is one is getting into" when they come out (McQueen 2015, p. 173; Butler, 1993). What this means is that participants are not able to "come out" or "be out" in any enduring sense because they are constantly encountering situations where they are forced to come out again, to decide how to, whether to, to what extent to, and/or how much work to put into making themselves visible. Rather than conceptualizing the moment of coming out as the solution, McQueen (2015) posits that "it can often only mean the start of a whole new set of recognition struggles" (p. 173). As Butler (1993) posits, "So we are out of the closet, but into what? … It is the figure of the closet that produces this expectation, and which guarantees its dissatisfaction" (p. 309). As Butler (1993) and McQueen's (2015) arguments emphasize, coming out of the closet is not necessarily the liberatory and cohering act it is often constructed to be.

Critiques of coming out discourses inform my understanding of the way that participants talk about their experiences of feeling "out" only to have closets being

constantly (re)constructed around them. It is imperative to recognize that coming out discourses are informed by and invested in heteronormativity and the repetitious work of (re)naturalizing being cis and heterosexual as the neutral state of being (or, rather, becoming) against which non-heteronormative subjects are expected to make themselves visible (Ahmed, 2006; Butler, 1993). One of the youth participants in Klein et al.'s (2015) study points out that coming out is framed as something "inherent to being queer" when really, it is "inherent to living in a heterosexist society" (p. 316). This observation emphasizes that the injunction to come out as queer serves to reaffirm the natural status of being heterosexual and cis, which is what one is assumed to be (in the process of becoming) until they come out otherwise (Ahmed, 2006; Klein et al., 2015). I return to the limitations of coming out discourses in Chapter 6 as I consider how recent work on vulnerable recognition (Schick, 2020; Beausoleil, 2020) allows for more generative ways of conceptualizing LGBTQ+ folks' experiences of misrecognition than the metaphor of the closet and coming out provide.

1.2.2 Live and let live

Another way that participants talk about their sense of ambiguous (in)tolerance in the Stratford area and in relation to local communities or communities of proximity is in relation to a "live and let live" philosophy. As McKinnon (2006) argues, "live and let live" is the "motto of the tolerant person" (p. 3). McKinnon's (2006) work on tolerance informs my understanding of the way participants talk about being affected or constrained by injunctions to "live and let live" which are premised on a recognition that you are being tolerated. Defining tolerance as "a matter of putting up with that which you oppose" McKinnon's (2006) work emphasizes how a sense of being tolerated –abiding by an agreement to live and let live – means living with a recognition of some level of opposition to your existence in your community, in your family, or in whatever spaces are governed by a live and let live mentality (p. 3). Thinking further about how the injunction to live and let live plays out, McQueen (2015) posits that, "homosexuals are allowed to enter public spaces but only if they allow themselves to be recognized in the way that the dominant culture wants" (p. 145). The example McQueen (2015) provides to illustrate this took place in England at a pub in April 2011:

> A gay couple were asked to leave the pub by the landlady for kissing, behaviour which she described as 'obscene'. By kissing one another, the couple (who were actually on a first date) overtly demonstrated their sexual desires and thus revealed themselves as 'openly gay'. (p. 145)

This example provides an understanding of how violating the injunction to live and let live has consequences. In this case, the couple are asked to leave the pub because they "failed to act as society wishes to recognize them" (McQueen, 2015, p. 145). While the couple was "out" in the sense that they are on a date and, presumably, mutually recognize each other as non-heterosexual, they were not "out" in the sense that their presence together in the bar was able to be "straightened" or at least was not disrupting heteronormativity until they became or "revealed themselves" to be "openly" or visibly gay by kissing (McQueen, 2015, p. 145). McQueen's (2015) analysis emphasizes how gay couples are expected to act and appear in particular ways that "hide their sexuality" and to ensure that their presence is not actively disrupting or challenging heteronormativity. When the gay couple kisses, however, they draw attention to the sexual/romantic nature of their relationship, making their "difference" visible and thus challenging the heteronormative notion that everyone around us is heterosexual or ashamed not to be (McQueen, 2015).

The notion of live and let live is premised on a heteronormativity, which permits only "acceptable" and "neutral" ways of being, which translate to "heterosexual" and "gender normative" ways of being. The live and let live mentality leaves these ways of being intact and unchallenged. In a context where someone's existence is tolerated on the grounds of an agreement to live and let live, their continued peaceful existence is dependent on their willingness and ability to "be recognized in the way the dominant culture wants" (McQueen, 2015, p. 145). Heteronormativity mandates that certain "ways of being" are valued more than others based on their proximity to heteronormative ideals and in a way that does not adhere to a simple hetero/queer divide. For example, and as homonormative analyses emphasize; attractive, wealthy, white gay people may be more palatable than many forms of heterosexual couplings. My point here is that not all LGBTQ+ people are equally positioned in relation to heteronormativity and that some

LGBTQ+ people are much more able to live and let live than others. I return to critiques of coming out discourses to think about this further. The logic of live and let live asks LGBTQ+ people to "pass" as heterosexual or at the very least as asexual queers and as gender normative as much as possible. While Valentine's (1993) study and the research she draws on are dated, the notion that there are expectations that govern the ability of LGBTQ+ folks to exist comfortably in public space – do not hold hands, do not kiss, do not be too flamboyant, do not express yourself too much – is reflected in more recent literature (Ahmed, 2014; Gray, 2009; Klein et al., 2015; McQueen, 2015) and in the accounts of my participants. For example, one of my participants offers an example where she and her girlfriend were in an ice cream shop in Stratford and when people she knows from church entered the shop, they downplayed their relationship, minimizing the potential visibility of their relationship. In order to "live and let live" they have to appear in a way that is at least potentially legible as heterosexual. I return to this example in Chapter 3.

Thinking about how "live and let live" fits with coming out discourses provides an understanding of the way that participants are not able to simply be "out" but have to carefully manage their (in)visibility in ways that allows them to be themselves without contravening the (shifting) expectations and demands, to appear in "ways the dominant culture wants" and deems tolerable (McQueen, 2015, p. 145). As I consider in my discussion of affective work, the way we come to learn these expectations and the experience of navigating these expectations takes work and has consequences (Ahmed, 2014; McDermott et al., 2019; Nadal et al., 2016; Valentine, 1993). The usually unspoken expectation to limit displays of queer intimacy is something my participants talk about (not holding hands, for example) and the literature I review in this chapter informs my understanding of the way that such injunctions have affective and directive consequences for participants. As I provide an analysis of my participants' accounts in the chapters that follow, I aim to be attentive to the way that the injunction to live and let live can be limiting or constraining for some participants. This is not to say that other people are not satisfied with or even thriving in situations governed by an agreement to live and let live but that there are certain negotiations and trade-offs involved in living out such a philosophy that are not equally accessible to all LGBTQ+ folks, not least

because they do not control the conditions under which it is possible to live and let live. To further complicate the issue, the limits and boundaries of what is acceptable and still comfortable/safe are context dependent, impossible to predict, and constantly in flux; meaning the work participants have to do to evaluate and negotiate their (in)visibility requires vigilance.

1.2.3   Relational subjectivities, contingent identities: *Becoming LGBTQ+*

Building on a recognition of how coming out discourses rely on and bolster heteronormativity, I establish how work on relational subjectivities and contingent identities is central to my analysis. Rather than thinking about identity as "a substantive possession that I could somehow seek and claim", Malatino (2019) conceptualizes identity as negotiated, co-constructed, and as "something constantly negotiated within and across different milieus, as something that *feels* extraordinarily intimate but is in fact trans-individual, in some respects radically impersonal" (p. 29). The idea that our identities are never final because we are in a constant state of becoming, which is always partially beyond our control, informs my understanding of the way that participants talk about their (in)visibility as ambiguous and tolerance/acceptance as "temporary and temporal". In this section, my aim is to illustrate how the contingency and relationality of our identities means that we cannot predict or control how we are read and thus that we can never "achieve" visibility or control how we become visible/invisible.

My understanding of the way that participants frame their identity-work and their identities as processes of becoming, is informed by Ahmed's (2006) analysis on orientations and heteronormativity. Ahmed (2006) provides a basis for understanding the kind of repetitive and affective work that goes into being/becoming non-heterosexual. Ahmed (2006) notes that part of what characterizes this process is that it is continuous; one is not simply a lesbian but has to continually work to be(come) a lesbian against the grain of compulsory heterosexuality and in resistance of being called back toward the straight line. This process of becoming oriented is not unique to LGBTQ+ folks and cis, hetero people are not just naturally or statically cis and hetero but are also engaged in processes of becoming (Ahmed, 2006; Gray, 2009). While it is arguably easier to follow

the normalized and incentivized path of becoming heterosexual, a focus on how it is not just non-normative subjects who are constantly becoming serves to further denaturalize heteronormativity (Ahmed, 2006, 2017; Butler, 1993). What follows from Ahmed's (2006) analysis is an understanding of becoming oriented as an unfolding process is that it is not something that happens in a vacuum but is a relational process requiring other people to validate and/or challenge and/or interact with your orientation.

I am also informed by Butler's work on recognition. As Butler (2004b) notes:

Our very sense of personhood is linked to the desire for recognition, and that desire places us outside ourselves, in a realm of social norms that we do not fully choose, but that provides the horizon and the resource for any sense of choice that we have. (p. 33)

Here, Butler (2004b) examines how we are made vulnerable to others in our need for recognition, which necessarily "places us outside ourselves" (p. 33) In doing so, it places us within particular spaces and what those spaces look like matter. Butler (2004b) emphasizes that the mutuality or sociality of recognition means we are never wholly in control of our identities and also suggests that sites of recognition and misrecognition are grounds for enacting ourselves, for evaluating boundaries and exploring unfolding possibilities. Similarly, McQueen (2015) argues that our identities emerge through the process of acting and having one's actions interpreted with a particular context (p. 68). For McQueen (2015), our identities do not precede moments of recognition because, as previously established, we are not authoritative, self-knowing subjects with a full and consistent awareness of who we are and what we want, nor are we wholly dependent on conforming to the recognition offered (p. 68). Following from this, "the struggle for recognition is indeed a struggle over one's identity. However, one's identity is not something which entirely precedes and explains the struggle, and we should not assume that receiving recognition will complete or secure this identity" (pp. 68–69). This does not mean that participants do not or cannot have a stable understanding of their identities but is a call to recognize that we are engaged in a constant process of identity work and that the meaning of our identities can never be permanently or universally apparent.

Further, as I draw on Butler (2004b) to emphasize above, this process of identity work is not unique to LGBTQ+ people. Everyone, including cis/hetero folks, are engaged in ongoing processes of identity work, even if the level of work and the stakes/costs of engaging in such work differ vastly depending on subjectivity and context (Ahmed, 2006; Butler, 2004b; McQueen, 2015). Participants are not necessarily or entirely undone in moments where they are misrecognized or not recognized, just as it is not the case that participants' identities become "complete or secure" in moments of recognition (McQueen, 2015). As Pfeffer (2014) argues, "gender and sexual identities are interactional accomplishments that often reveal more about the workings of normative social privilege than they reveal about the social actors whose gender and sexual identities are being (mis)recognized" (p. 5; Stone et al., 2020). I return to this discussion in Chapter 6 as I consider work on vulnerable recognition (Schick, 2020; Beausoleil, 2020).

1.2.4   Affective work

In this section, I draw on literature on microaggressions toward LGBTQ+ people, emotion work, and Ahmed's (2006, 2010, 2014) writing on queer orientations and queer unhappiness to provide a theoretical basis for thinking about the kind of "affective work" that participants do in the process of living their everyday lives. I establish what I mean by "affective work", which results from the demands coming out discourses make of LGBTQ+ people and includes: being/becoming visible and correcting presumptions of heterosexuality; educating others and advocating for LGBTQ+ acceptance; being a resource for other LGBTQ+ people and contributing to an LGBTQ+ presence in the area. As I began to explore above; as I consider critiques of coming out discourses, there are many reasons why LGBTQ+ people are less, ambiguously or not, visible as LGBTQ+ in particular moments, which are inadequately captured through the closeted/out binary. Rather than being or feeling "closeted", it is more likely that LGBTQ+ people are working to manage and navigate emotional and material contexts that expect them to be, look and act in particular ways.

1.2.4.1   Microaggressions

Nadal et al. (2016) describe microaggressions as "behaviours and statements, often unconscious or unintentional, that communicate hostile or derogatory messages, particularly to members of targeted social groups" (p. 488). While it is becoming less common for people to be "consciously biased" or "overtly hostile" toward LGBTQ+ people, which is typically conceptualized as homophobia (Yep, 2002). Nadal et al. (2016) draw on research that demonstrates that people continue to uphold explicit and implicit biases, which affect how they recognize and interact with others (p. 488).

Part of Nadal et al.'s (2016) point is that whether people are aware or not, they may "unwittingly perpetuate microaggressions, a process with a multitude of potential negative implications" (p. 488). This framing provides an understanding of the way that people – cis, heterosexuals and LGBTQ+ people – can unwittingly reinforce and reinscribe heteronormativity through casual microaggressions. Nadal et al. (2016) clarify that the "prefix *micro-* does not describe the quality and impact of these offences; rather, *micro-* characterizes the subtle manner in which this type of discrimination occurs" (p. 489). This is significant not only because the subtlety of microaggressions makes them difficult to identify but also because the effects of microaggressions can be serious (Nadal et al., 2016, 489). In an example of a microaggression, Nadal et al. (2016) note that, trans and non-binary folks who are misgendered, "might be aggravated that this type of experience continually occurs, while cisgender people who commit such microaggressions might view their behaviours as honest mistakes that are common or even accurate" (p. 490). Nadal et al.'s (2016) analysis on microaggressions provides me with a framework for making sense of my participants' accounts and specifically the kinds of affective work they describe engaging in, often in response to microaggressions. As Nadal et al. (2016) note, privileged groups or people may view microaggressions as unimportant or unremarkable because "the specific incidents are innocuous and minor" (p. 490). This is part of why it is paramount to take the above point about the frequency of the experience of microaggressions into account (Nadal et al., 2016). The frequency of microaggressions and the repetitiveness of their experience for some people is what makes them so impactful. It is not just one isolated incident of being deadnamed, but the

accumulation of similar experiences over the course of a day, of a week, and so on, which is frustrating and tiring (Nadal et al., 2016, p. 490). The way that Nadal et al. (2016) discuss how people who experience microaggressions might not "have the energy, time, or mental energy to engage in such conversations" contributes to my understanding of how affective work can be draining but also how participants' accounts of negotiating (in)visibility exceed the closeted/out binary (p. 490). I am interested not in just the way that experiences of microaggressions are recounted by participants but also in the way that such accounts provide an understanding of the kind of affective work that participants engage in, in response to microaggressions and how microaggressions affect their negotiation of (in)visibility in their everyday lives.

Nadal et al. (2016) note that while researchers are increasingly looking at lesbian, gay and bisexual people's experiences of microaggressions, there is less research on trans and gender non-conforming people's experiences of microaggressions (p. 498). They problematize the practice of conflating gender identity with sexual orientation in research examining LGBTQ communities and suggest that research needs to address how trans experiences differ from cis LGBQ experiences (Nadal et al., 2016, p. 498). This analysis informs my attentiveness to the way that trans and non-binary participants' experiences are not analogous with cis lesbian, gay, bi and queer experiences, which also cannot be conflated. As I provide interpretations of participants' accounts throughout this thesis, I aim to address the way that the specificity of participants' subjectivities matter and shape the way they talk about their sense of place and their sense of being tolerated/accepted in the area. I do this in part by recognizing that participants' accounts are shaped by their whiteness, by their class location, their housing situation, their age, their gender and sexuality, their ability, their family histories, and their history and social connectedness in the area[1].

While the literature on microaggressions tends to emphasize the negative or detrimental effects of microaggressions, Nadal et al. (2016) posit that there is a "certain

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[1] While this is not an exhaustive list, these are some of the primary factors that I identified in my interviews.

prevalence of adaptive responses to discrimination, including themes of identity affirmation, self-esteem and community affiliation" (p. 500). They emphasize that while much of the emphasis is on the potential for LGBTQ+ people to be negatively affected and worn out by microaggressions, there is also the potential for LGBTQ+ people to be adaptive and to respond to such moments in ways that are resilient and empowering. Throughout this thesis I maintain a focus on participants' resilience, their strategies for expanding their comfort zones, and how experiences which are often constructed as purely negative or detrimental, like misrecognition and microaggressions, are also moments in which participants are not "victims", but are agential and resilient (McQueen, 2015; Nadal et al., 2016). In Chapters 4 and 5, I examine several ways in which participants talk about their resilience strategies and the ways that they respond to microaggressions that either mitigate or adapt experiences of microaggressions. While the experiences that participants describe around "being an open book" and being available to educate others – cis and hetero folks in particular – certainly constitute microaggressions in many instances, participants frame these experiences not only as microaggressive or in terms of the work they are being asked to do in becoming visible, educating others, and standing up for themselves, but what that work accomplishes and how it empowers them. The framework that Nadal et al. (2016) provide around microaggressions and the effects of microaggressions is helpful in understanding how microaggressive experiences can be both hurtful or negative and also productive sites of resilience.

1.2.4.2   Emotion work

My understanding of emotion work is informed by Hochschild (1979), who defines emotion work as "the act of trying to change in degree or quality an emotion or feeling" or "'to manage'" an emotion (p. 561). Hochschild's (1979) work draws attention to the way that people evoke, shape and suppress emotions based on their perception of particular contexts or situations. Building on this, McDermott et al.'s (2019) research on emotion work and queer youth mental health emphasizes how emotion work has a "*social* component, that our relationships, expectations, employment, material circumstances might impinge on how we manage our emotions" (p. 4). McDermott et al. (2019)

emphasize how their participants' accounts provide an understanding of the way that "the emotional difficulties of navigating heteronormativity within the family" can affect participants' well-being and mental health (p. 12). What McDermott et al. (2019) describe as "emotional difficulties of navigating heteronormativity" is a substantial part of what I refer to as "affective work" in my analysis (p. 12).

Looking at the context of queer youth's relationships to their families, one example of affective work is the often-everyday experience of "trying to judge what to say, who to tell, who to hide from" (McDermott et al., 2019, p. 12). Such negotiations are not only an example of affective work, but also emphasizes that affective work and the need to manage perceptions of one's identity has potential consequences. For some young queer folks, deciding "who to tell, who to hide from" might be the result of the need to have a place to live, which means maintaining congenial relations with parents and family (McDermott et al., 2019, p. 12). McDermott et al. (2019) highlight the precarity of their young participants' lives, as evidenced by their concerns regarding housing, finance and security (p. 14). Many of McDermott et al.'s (2019) participants "could not afford *not* to do emotion work of some sort" (p. 14). While they need to engage in emotion work (putting on a "brave face" or being "used to feeling terrible") to survive in their current circumstances, that work has its consequences and is "often detrimental to their mental health" (McDermott et al., 2019, p. 14). McDermott et al.'s (2019) analysis on precarity, survival and emotion work provides an important basis for understanding the way that affective work involved in managing one's (in)visibility is a strategy that makes life liveable.

McDermott et al.'s (2019) participants describe the emotion work they do as "managing, coping, reacting, changing and adapting"; having a "stiff upper lip"; "coping with a weight"; "carrying a weight;" or as the need to "gr[o]w a thicker skin"; "just deal with it"; or "grit your teeth and bare [sic] it" (p. 13). McDermott et al.'s (2019) overview of emotional work is not a typology but a demonstration of "the emotionality of the strategizing, thinking, managing, feeling" that is demanded of queer folks in their family lives and in a variety of contexts (McDermott et al., 2019, p. 13). As I examine participants' accounts of negotiating their (in)visibility in the following chapters, I am

attentive to the way that these negotiations are forms of affective work that have potential costs for participants, particularly if they are consistently engaged in such work. However, like Nadal et al. (2016) posit in their work on microaggressions, the process of engaging in the kind of emotional work McDermott et al. (2019) describe is not just potentially draining, but also potentially empowering as queer youth develop resilience strategies and embody their identities. As I consider in relation to my participants' accounts, in practice, the affective work that happens in response to microaggressions and compulsory heteronormativity is note typically framed as *either* draining *or* empowering, but *both* draining *and* empowering.

1.2.4.3   Sara Ahmed: Queer orientations, queer unhappiness

Extending my understanding of affective work further, I am informed by Ahmed's (2006, 2010, 2014) writing, which illuminates how compulsory heterosexuality both creates the demand to come out and structures the demand for the affective labour involved in coming out. Ahmed (2014) describes the experience of resisting compulsory heterosexuality as one that involves repetitive and often exhausting work:

> Queer subjects feel the tiredness of making corrections and departures; the pressure of this insistence, this presumption, this demand that asks for either a 'passing over' (a moment of passing, which is not always available) or for direct or indirect forms of self-revelation ('but actually, he's a she' or 'she's a he', or just saying 'she' instead of 'he' or 'he' instead of 'she' at the 'obvious' moment). (p. 147)

This passage emphasizes how heteronormativity informs the ease with which queer subjects are called back into line in everyday moments. Ahmed's (2014) examination of the way that compulsory heterosexuality creates conditions in which we are all constantly subject to presumptions of heterosexuality and applications of the gender binary contributes to my understanding of the way that outness or visibility is never achievable and how queer subjects are constantly called to engage in the work of managing their (in)visibility. Ahmed argues that "no matter how 'out' you may be, how (un)comfortably queer you may feel, those moments of interpellation get repeated over time, and can be

experienced as a bodily injury" (2014, p. 147). This resonates with Nadal et al.'s (2016) point that the frequency of microaggressions accumulates so that it is not just one moment of being misgendered, but days and weeks and years' worth of similar moments that we carry with us. There is also a future orientation to this frustration; it is not just that someone has spent the last several years contending with these microaggressions but that it is likely they will have to do so repetitiously, perhaps for the rest of their life. Ahmed's (2006, 2010, 2014) analysis informs my understanding of the way that affective work is not just about the present moment but about the past and future moments coalescing to shape the experience of being called to do affective work.

The aim of this section is to provide a framework for making sense of the "affective work" my participants talk about being called to do in their everyday lives. While the demand for this affective work is sustained by coming out discourses and the expectation to be visible, the ways participants respond to it are complicated, and inadequately captured through the closeted/out binary; even if moments, people and places, with whom participants feel affirmed, validated and visible are an important part of their comfort zones. Among the many reasons that LGBTQ+ people are or remain less visible, ambiguously visible, or invisible in particular moments is not that they are "closeted" but rather that they are trying to manage their (in)visibility and wellbeing in a heteronormative culture that expects them to be and look and act in particular ways.

1.2.5   Comfort Zones

My framing of this discussion, as expanding comfort zones and increasing liveability rather than in terms of "inclusion" is deliberate. Inclusion evokes an image of being brought into (hetero)norms or stretching those norms to enfranchise LGBT+ subjects who are willing and able to appear in particular/acceptable ways. While I do not deny the political value of inclusion or frameworks and strategies that pursue inclusivity, framing my discussion in terms of expanding comfort zones and increasing liveability more accurately reflects an understanding that there are degrees of recognition and inclusion as a limited strategy in many participants' accounts precisely because it leaves in place heteronormative cultures. Inclusion too often looks like being asked to "live and let live"; being permitted to be part of things but only if you appear and behave in

specific ways that do not disrupt heteronormative expectations. Again, while these strategies can and do facilitate some level of tolerated existence and provide (constrained) space for LGBTQ+ people to live, inclusivity may not be the most effective strategy for imagining more radical, utopic futures and may not be equally accessible to all people, as I discuss in relation to Muñoz's work in the next section.

Gray's (2009) descriptions of the way her participants use strategies of "circulation rather than congregation" informs my understanding of how comfort zones function for my participants:

> They cannot produce in their rural daily lives the sustained infrastructure of visibility that defines urban LGBT communities. Instead, they travel to each other's houses and caravan roundtrip to a larger city with a gay bar or gay-affirming church several hours away … rural queer and questioning youth make up for their lack of local numbers and gay-owned spaces by using a strategy of circulation rather than congregation. (p. 89)

Thinking about a "strategy of circulation rather than congregation", what I refer to as "comfort zones" operate like a network and include supportive people with whom and spaces wherein participants feel, have felt, and/or expect to continue to feel comfortable, safe, recognized and validated (Gray, 2009, p. 89). For some, their comfort zones may encompass the majority of their town or at least a specific neighbourhood and areas they frequent while others may have comparatively limited comfort zones in the area. Comfort zones take shape as people navigate the demands of injunctions to "live and let live" and as they contend with the affective work involved in managing negotiations of (in)visibility. By identifying people with whom they are visible/known and places where they feel comfortable and safe, the contours of one's comfort zone take shape. Another way that the boundaries of comfort zones become visible, however, is by identifying people who (either intentionally or unintentionally) or places in which they feel uncomfortable and unsafe. As I explore in Chapters 3, 4 and 5, some of the people and places that participants talk about as feeling safe and comfortable are not enduringly or necessarily consistently so. Comfort zones provide a reprieve from the affective work

involved in living in a heteronormative society, but they are not permanent structures. Comfort zones take work to maintain and effort to build; they are relational and will shift as our relationships change and sometimes fall apart, as people move, neighbourhoods change, stores change ownership, bars close, and so on. While this means that it is possible for comfort zones to falter or to break down, it also means that comfort zones can be continually expanded and supported. Though some participants are more aware of the limits of their comfort zone, other participants – notably those who tend to express a relatively high sense of place satisfaction – express a sense of feeling comfortable almost all the time. While comfort zones may not be equally important or top of mind for all participants, their connection to liveability and supporting the wellbeing of LGBTQ+ people makes them an important focus of my analysis.

While discussions about the internet and social media are not the focus of my interviews and thus are not central to my discussions in this thesis, I recognize that online spaces, digital communities and resources, and media are part of many people's comfort zones. I recognize that participants' comfort zones are composed of things that stretch beyond the Stratford area and that some participants talk about how places and people and moments/experiences/memories outside of the area are meaningful for them in a way that I understand as contributing to their comfort zones. However, because my focus is on sense of place and factors that affect participants' sense of liveability in the Stratford area, my focus here remains on discussions pertaining to comfort zones that center around the Stratford area.

1.2.6   Queer Theory

As I explore further in the next chapter on my methodological framework, queer theory and queer methodologies are central to this thesis. Specifically, I draw on Sedgwick's (2003) work on paranoid and reparative positions and Muñoz's (2009) *Cruising Utopia*.

1.2.6.1   Sedgwick

Sedgwick's (2003) work on paranoid and reparative reading practices is central to my process of working with participants' accounts. Sedgwick (2003) provides a framework for understanding that it does not actually matter whether or not bad surprises (rejection,

harassment, etc.) are realized, although the realization of the potential for bad surprises does have effects. Regardless of whether or not it is realized or "warranted", our experiences are affected by the constant, unfolding possibility of bad surprises and a compulsion to anticipate or not be caught off guard by rejection (Sedgwick, 2003). As I explore in Chapter 3, living with a sense that wearing the wrong thing could potentially incite a hate crime against you has effects. For several participants, the need to be aware of their potential visibility and the potential risks in a situation is motivated by a sense of "if I expect and can pre-empt your homophobic or transphobic attitude, it won't affect me as much." In some ways this resonates with Sedgwick's observation that sometimes the most paranoid elements can have reparative effects. The expectation of, or at least an anticipation of, the possibility of intolerance operates like a defense mechanism. To expect to be accepted or to expect to be legibly visible might seem naïve and vulnerable, leaving one open to being hurt or disappointed.

According to Sedgwick, "to read from a reparative position is to surrender the knowing, anxious paranoid determination that no horror … shall ever come to the reader *as new*; to a reparative reader, it can seem realistic and necessary to experience surprise" (2003, p. 145). Reparative readings allow for the realization that "the future may be different from the present," and also allows for the consideration of "such profoundly painful, profoundly relieving, ethically crucial possibilities as that the past, in turn, could have happened differently from the way it actually did" (Sedgwick, 2003, 146). As Hanson (2010) notes:

> Faced with the depressing realization that people are fragile and the world hostile, a reparative reading focuses not on the exposure of political outrages that we already know about but rather on the process of reconstructing a sustainable life in their wake. (p. 105)

Given my focus on finding ways to make the Stratford area more liveable for LGBTQ+ folks, reparative reading practices and the possibility of "reconstructing a sustainable life" are valuable concepts and conversations for my thesis (Hanson, 2010, p. 105). Sedgwick's reparative reading practice is taken up to find ways to "pick up the pieces,

since after all, we shatter much too easily and much too often" (Hanson, 2010, p. 113). Hanson (2012) emphasizes that while grounded in a recognition that "our world is damaged and dangerous", reparative reading seeks to "build or rebuild some more sustaining relation to the objects in our world" (p. 547), even if the "avowed desire" of those objects has not been to sustain queer life (Sedgwick, 2003, pp. 150-151). In an example of a reparative project, Love (2007) considers how "'feeling backward' can offer affective resources for queer survival in the political present where forgetting has become the keynote of a progressivist historical consciousness" (p. 23; cited in Wiegman, 2014, 14). I am particularly interested in how we might find "affective resources for queer survival" by engaging with the past and with the potentiality of the future (Love, 2007; Muñoz, 2009). Turning to the potentiality of the future, I look at Muñoz's work on utopia which offers ways of thinking that take us beyond "the here and now" (2009).

1.2.6.2   Muñoz

> Heteronormative culture makes queers think that both the past and the future do
> not belong to them. All we are allowed to think about is barely surviving the
> present. (Muñoz, 2009, p. 112)

Muñoz's (2009) work in *Cruising Utopia* is central to my approach in this thesis and in particular to my interpretations of the way that participants talk about hopefulness and desires that extend beyond the present moment. For Muñoz (2009), queerness is "essentially about the rejection of a here and now and an insistence on potentiality or concrete possibility for another world" (p. 1). Thinking about the centrality of heteronormativity and injunctions to "live and let live" in participants accounts, it is paramount to consider what it looks like and what it *does* to think beyond the present moment and, indeed, what the demand to focus on the present moment might be doing (Muñoz, 2009). Given my focus on liveability and sense of place in this thesis, Muñoz's reflections on the way that heteronormative culture serves to constrain and direct queer life and queer possibilities in the present are central to my process of making sense of participants' accounts. In a culture in which queers are only "allowed to think about … barely surviving the present", it is more than necessary to think beyond the "here and now", toward "a world not quite here" and/or "as a moment when the here and now is

transcended by a *then* and *there* that could be and indeed should be" (Muñoz, 2009, p. 97). Muñoz's focus on the "not-yet-here" emphasizes how a focus on "what can and perhaps will be" allows for the imagination of "new worlds and realities" that are beyond or outside of heteronormativity (p. 35, 99). Muñoz (2009) emphasizes that when constrained by heteronormativity and the tasks of survival, it can be difficult to imagine life otherwise. Beyond an imagination of a "there and then" Muñoz draws on Bloch, Adorno and Marcuse to argue that "utopia is primarily a critique of the here and now; it is an insistence that there is … 'something missing in the here and the now'" (p. 99). These reflections emphasize the need to be critical of the way that heteronormativity functions in the accounts of participants and how their desires for the future – their imaginations of a "there and then" – may be read as articulations of queer utopia that draw attention to what is "missing in the here and now" (Muñoz, 2009, p. 99).

Muñoz's use of Agamben's work on "potentiality" is of particular interest. Potentiality is a "certain mode of nonbeing that is eminent, a thing that is present but not actually existing in the present tense" (Muñoz, 2009, p. 9.). Muñoz argues that "potentialities are different in that although they are present, they do not exist in present things", which means that potentialities are not in the present but in the horizon (p. 99). This work on potentialities and futurity informs my understanding of how the potential for things to happen differently, or to have happened differently, can function in reparative and generative ways (Muñoz, 2009; Sedgwick, 2003). Muñoz (2009) suggests that:

> The way to deal with the asymmetries and violent frenzies that mark the present is not to forget the future. The here and now is simply not enough. Queerness should and could be about a desire for another way of being in both the world and time, a desire that resists mandates to accept that which is not enough. (p. 96)

Muñoz's emphasis on resisting the mandate to "accept that which is not enough" is central to my approach in this thesis as I locate a desire to resist such a mandate in the accounts of my participants and in my desire to do this work (2009, p. 96).

Muñoz (2009) also emphasizes how the past matters in discussions of potentiality, queer futurity, and utopia, suggesting that "past pleasures stave off the affective perils of the present while they enable a desire that is queer futurity's core" (p. 26). As I continue to think about liveability, heteronormativity, affective work and comfort zones throughout this thesis, I am attentive to the way that this happens. Muñoz's (2009) work on evidence and ephemera is central to my understanding of comfort zones as he notes that "This potentiality is always in the horizon and, like performance, never completely disappears but, instead, lingers and serves as a conduit for knowing and feeling other people" (p. 113). The way that Muñoz (2009) describes potentiality as "in the horizon", and as lingering, offers an understanding of the way that non-material things and feelings can be part of what sustain us (Sedgwick, 2003). Muñoz notes that "queerness has an especially vexed relationship to evidence" and that "the key to queering evidence, and by that, I mean the ways in which we prove queerness and read queerness, is by suturing it to the concept of ephemera" (p. 65). According to Muñoz (2009), "ephemera are the remains that are often embedded in queer acts, in both stories we tell one another and communicative physical gestures such as the cool look of a street cruise, a lingering handshake between recent acquaintances." (p. 65). The way that Muñoz writes about ephemera and about potentiality are both central to my understanding of comfort zones and their substance. Comfort zones are not just made up of physical spaces where one feels or has felt tolerated or comfortable, and people with whom they are or have been seen and accepted (although these things can be very meaningful). Comfort zones also include ephemera, things that bring us joy, that make us happy, that bring us pleasure, that provide us with ideas of what we can become that are not limited to the kinds of heteronormative futures we might feel confined by (Ahmed, 2010; Muñoz, 2009). These things might be movies, books, crushes, performances, specific memories, events, or places that no longer exist. Drawing on Sedgwick's (2003) ideas about reparative reading practices, Muñoz (2009) offers an understanding of how these "part-objects" that make up comfort zones become what sustains and nurtures queer selves in environments that are often hostile to queer survival. In this way, the things that make up our comfort zone (ephemera, physical spaces, archives of feeling) provide a horizon for queer utopia. I

return to a discussion of the way that memories, ephemera and connections to the past and to *queer* history sustain participants in various ways in Chapter 6.

1.2.7   Liveability

> What is most important is to cease legislating for all lives what is liveable for only some, and similarly, to refrain from proscribing for all lives what is unliveable for some. (Butler, 2004b, 8)

Butler's (2004a, 2004b) work on liveability and precarity and is central to much current queer, feminist work on liveability and is central to this thesis. My framework for thinking about LGBTQ+ liveability is also informed by the Liveable Lives project, which "explores how LGBTQ persons negotiate their lives in order to make them more liveable" and "how, when and where lives become un/liveable for LGBTQ people" (Biswas et al., 2016, p. 1). Biswas et al. (2016) found that beyond legal rights and social recognition, "lives were made worthy, liveable, not just bearable, through a host of other things like partners, friends, financial independence, and most importantly to be able to live on one's own terms" (p. 21). These factors that make life liveable are the kinds of factors that, if present, support participants' abilities to develop and sustain what I refer to as their "comfort zones". In this way, I am tying the notion of comfort zones to liveability; comfort zones make the area liveable and factors that make the area liveable are part of comfort zones. Work on liveability informs my understanding of comfort zones and their composition, limits and functions.

Biswas et al.'s (2016) analysis informs my understanding of the way that comfort zones matter and make life possible for many LGBTQ+ people. Relationships with partners, and with friends, family and any other important people who are supportive are central components of comfort zones (Biswas et al., 2016). Research on LGBTQ+ experiences repeatedly emphasize the importance of family acceptance and how being able to be out and feel accepted among family as significantly contributing to one's sense of wellbeing (Higa et al., 2014; Snapp et al., 2015). As Biswas et al. (2016) note, "acceptance from our close ones comes up as a key factor in making one's life better" and that "support from family and friends are a marker of liveability for most

participants" (p. 59). Personal relationships and connections with supportive people are important for liveability (Biswas et al., 2016, p. 106). Biswas et al.'s (2016) participants talk about how their relationships with, and support from friends in particular is important in sustaining them and making their life more liveable (p. 65). For example, having close friends who use your name and pronouns is an important part of trans and non-binary people's comfort zones. Particularly if someone is living with family who deadname and misgender them, having a network of people who they can call or visit that provide a space for them to be properly recognized and validated is vital. Again, against statistics that find disproportionately high rates of suicide, depression, and other mental health issues among LGBTQ+ people and particularly trans folks (Bauer et al., 2013; Dyck, 2012; Gilmour, 2019), the importance of comfort zones and the functions they serve to make life more liveable becomes more apparent. While many LGBTQ+ people might have well established comfort zones and find that their lives are quite liveable, for other LGBTQ+ people, particularly those who are young, not financially independent and who may be living with unsupportive families, there are high stakes in developing and maintaining a comfort zone that can serve to make your life more liveable. Significantly, Biswas et al. (2016) recognize that the way this support happens, and matters, varies between participants (p. 59). Biswas et al. (2016) posit that for their participants, liveability is marked by "balancing societal and family pressure and preserving the self in between" (p. 103). They emphasize that what constitutes a liveable or "good" life is relative and impermanent and that "it can change anytime and dependent on contingencies located both internally and externally" (Biswas et al., 2016, p. 103). As I establish my understanding of liveability and comfort zones, I am informed by work that points to how comfort zones are unique to people's situation and are also subject to change. This framework particularly informs my discussion of participants' accounts of their place (dis)satisfaction in Chapter 4.

Given that comfort zones are not stable or given, but are cultivated and dynamic, I am interested in the way that participants talk about the work that goes into developing and sustaining their comfort zones. Factors are not necessarily *either* a positive part of one's comfort zone *or* a negative factor that ruptures or disrupts their comfort zone. Rather, the very things that contribute to one's comfort zone like a gay straight alliance at

their school also emphasize the limits of this zone as students face resistance in forming a GSA or are targeted for their participation in the GSA (Higa et al., 2014). While the experience of facing resistance or being targeted has effects, it does not negate the positive ways in which a GSA affects their lives. Higa et al.'s (2014) analysis of the way that their participants talk about factors that affect their wellbeing in simultaneously positive and negative ways informs my understanding of the way that comfort zones are complicated, shifting networks.

The way that youth in Higa et al.'s (2014) study talk about the importance of becoming involved with LGBTQ organizations speaks further to the way that such organizations have the potential to contribute significantly to participants' comfort zones. Higa et al. (2014) found that, "LGBTQ youth organizations provided formal and informal programs for youth, a safe place to go and meet other youth, and a place where youth felt like they can be themselves" (p. 679). From this description it becomes apparent how LGBTQ organizations are important not just for their potential to become part of LGBTQ+ folks' comfort zones, but because they act as a nexus around which important networking can happen with great potential to help LGBTQ+ folks develop and sustain comfort zones that work for them. Higa et al.'s (2014) work provides a framework for understanding the way my participants talk about their comfort zones and how a lack of available LGBTQ+ services affect their comfort zones and sense of the area as liveable. Biswas et al. (2016) consider "how becoming part of a group with similar identity markers and collectives that are politically active" provides a sense of wellbeing and allows people to "feel pride in their gender-sexual difference" (p. 39). Becoming part of an LGBTQ+ group or even becoming aware of the existence of such groups contributes to a sense that there are other, similar people nearby and ultimately, can make an area feel more liveable, even if people do not access those groups themselves. In general, relationships and connections to other LGBTQ+ people are important factors in making a place liveable. As one of Biswas et al.'s (2016) participants reflects, "… my queer relationships do have the potential to make me forget momentarily the pain of living a life that discourages my existence on a daily basis" (p. 36). This suggests not only the importance of comfort zones and relationships that can insulate you from the pain and work that can be involved in living in a heteronormative society, but also that having

connections to other queer people can be particularly meaningful. This informs my reading of participants' accounts of the importance of being connected to other LGBTQ+ people and to both informal and formal LGBTQ+ networks in the Stratford area in Chapter 4.

In addition to people and interpersonal connections, Biswas et al. (2016) emphasize that thinking about space and place is also part of understanding liveability, positing that, "spaces can be nurturing and safe or hostile and restrictive" (Biswas et al., 2016, p. 111). Informed by critical work on queer space and queer geography, I am attentive to the way that spaces can also be nurturing and hostile or safe and restrictive. Everyday places may be part of our comfort zones, may be distinctly outside of our comfort zones, or may not be easily or consistently classifiable. This is particularly the case for liminal spaces like cruising grounds, which may be full of queer potential but also potentially dangerous. Again, this depends on many factors including heteronormativity and how willing, able and adept a person is at managing affective work. The way that we relate to our everyday places affects how liveable those places feel. This is inflected not only by our histories with and relationships to a place, how we are known there and how we present ourselves there, but also by who else is with us in a particular moment. Taking the example of a workplace, it is not always as simple as, "my workplace is accepting" or "my workplace is not accepting." Not only do some participants not have consistent work spaces (they may be engaged in temp work or work in a trade where they are constantly entering new spaces) or environments (they may work with a variety of coworkers and customers/clients), but both those places and the people in them are subject to change over time in ways that may affect how tolerant or liveable a space feels for someone.

Another important factor related to this discussion of liveability, comfort zones, and space is the importance of financial independence and economic stability (Biswas et al., 2016). One of the foremost considerations in terms of financial independence is the ability to have a place of one's own (Biswas et al., 2016, p. 43). This informs my analysis of the way that participants' sense of place in the area and the degree to which they talk about the area as somewhere that is liveable for them depends on factors like their

financial independence and whether they own their own house. As one of Biswas et al.'s (2016) participants suggests, if she is able to support herself, live in a supportive environment and maintain economic stability, she can "negotiate through any hurdles in life that might be brought on by her non-normative life" (p. 40). The amount of money one makes, the ability to earn a sustaining amount, and to have a comfortable place to live "becomes a comfort zone that can provide protection against material dearth and social rejection" (Biswas et al., 2016, p. 105). Biswas et al.'s (2016) study is located in India, which is a different time and place than my own. While I find Biswas et al.'s (2016) framing of liveability useful and compelling, I also recognize that such arguments take on a different valence in the Stratford area in 2019 and 2020 where there are legislative protections in place to ensure that LGBTQ+ folks are not legally at risk of being denied housing or being fired if their sexuality or gender variance is disclosed. While I am informed by Biswas et al.'s (2016) work on liveability, I recognize that the concerns and discussions of liveability among my participants take place in a much different context.

Biswas et al.'s (2016) work directs my understanding of the way that participants' subjectivities and access to material resources shape their willingness to engage in collective work and contours their comfort zones. For participants who are financially independent and are in control of their living spaces, they not only likely have a consistent base for their comfort zone but also more time and money to spend developing and expanding that zone, compared to someone who lives with their parents and is unemployed, for example. Biswas et al.'s (2016) analysis also speaks to the way that it is not just factors related to being LGBTQ+ that shape liveability, but a complex interplay of factors that shape participants' experiences of gender and sexuality. Particularly in terms of a discussion of comfort zones and sense of place, the degree of control one has over their living zones and to what degree where they live is part of their comfort zone is paramount. I return to this discussion later in this chapter as I provide a review of the sense of place literature and the concepts of place dependence and place agency.

Beyond spaces like workplaces and homes, this framework on liveability and comfort zones informs the way I make sense of participants' accounts of a variety of

spaces that either are (consistently or periodically) part of their comfort zones or that are decidedly not part of their comfort zones. Again, thinking of comfort zones as a network means they are made up of people, places, things, feelings and memories. I am not presenting a comprehensive overview of everything that might conceivably be part of a comfort zone; rather, in presenting comfort zones as a network, my intention is, in part, to emphasize that they are made up of a mishmash of objects and people and places and so on that looks different for every person. Comfort zones are never static or permanent but are better conceptualized as a shifting amalgamation.

1.2.8   Queer space

Queer geographies are interested in the relationships between gender, sex and sexuality and the way that systems like heteronormativity shape experiences of space and place (Johnston, 2017). Geographers have studied "the spatial expressions and experiences of sexual 'others'" since the late 1970s with an uptick in scholarship during the mid-1990s (Bell et al., 1994; Binnie, 1997; Oswin, 2008; Johnston, 2017; Valentine, 1993). Underlying this scholarship is a recognition that just as people are not inherently heterosexual, "space is not naturally, authentically 'straight' but rather actively produced and heterosexualized" (Binnie, 1997, 223; cited in Oswin, 2008, 90; Johnston, 2017). Recognizing that space has to be actively produced as heterosexual opens up the possibility that there may be spaces which can become or have been queer. As Désert argues:

> Queer space is in large part the function of wishful thinking or desires that become solidified: a seduction of the reading of space where queerness, at a few brief points and for some fleeting moments, dominates the (heterocentric) norm, the dominant social narrative of the landscape. The observer's complicity is key in allowing a public site to be co-opted in part or completely. So compelling is this seduction that a general consensus or collective belief emerges among queers and non-queers alike. (Désert, 1997, p. 21; cited in Detamore, 2013, pp. 76–77)

This conceptualization of queer space emphasizes that "the constitution of space itself is unstable and relies on this instability" (Detamore, 2013, p. 77) and recognizes that it is

not a matter of queerness "reterritorializing" heterosexual space, which might imply that space is somehow naturally or originally heterosexual (Désert, 1997; Oswin, 2008). For Désert (1997), space is not heterosexual or queer but becomes heterosexual, queer or otherwise. When he notes that observers are complicit in "allowing a public site to be co-opted", this draws attention to the way that the production of space as heterosexual or as queer is a relational process and not something that is inherent or natural (Désert, 1997, p. 21; Detamore, 2013). One of the major pitfalls of seeing queer space as a successful (if temporary) "takeover" of heterosexual space is that it risks reifying heterosexual space as natural rather than drawing attention to the way that it, too, is constantly (re)produced (Detamore, 2013; Halberstam, 2005; Oswin, 2008).

Detamore's (2013) notion of "queer safe zones" informs my understanding of queer space and "comfort zones". Detamore (2013) argues that the tone of an experience in a bar depends on the degree to which one is "known" and Detamore (2013) emphasizes that having local connections and local knowledge was important not just for facilitating comfortable, enjoyable conversation and atmosphere in particular places where they knew people, but also in terms of knowing which bars to avoid and which are more likely to "incorporat[e] queer spaces into its borders" (p. 79). It is also contingent on the folks who are in those spaces on any given day or evening, which suggests there is a temporality involve in this as well. As Detamore's (2013) example makes clear, many factors beyond one's gender and sexuality shape experiences of spaces and places. For Detamore (2013), there are "queer zones that exist outside of normative representations of sexual otherness" that exceed and challenge the borders of gay life as imagined in the city (p. 75). While there is no consistent way these queer zones or counterpublics manifest, they exist "in between spaces otherwise thought to be foreclosed to queer life" (Detamore, 2013, p. 75). These queer zones exist in places we might not expect them, and their existence not only points to possibilities for what Detamore (2013) calls "queer place-making" but also exists in defiance of dominant narratives which construct the rural as an abjected space for queers (Baker, 2016; Gray, 2009; Halberstam, 2005; Johnston and Longhurst, 2010; Stone, 2018). While the Stratford area is not necessarily "rural", as I address in the next chapter, it does not have explicit LGBTQ+ spaces or services and this understanding of "queer zones" is thus useful in informing the way I make sense of

my participants' accounts (Detamore, 2013, p. 75). Detamore (2013) emphasizes that it is not just the existence of the "fleeting moments" Désert (1997) mentions but "the opportunities that those fleeting moments open for us in the transformation of public spaces and discourses" that are important (p. 77). Queer space is not about stabilizing or solidifying "geographic formations", but about zones and "fleeting moments" that, while contingent, create possibilities for transformation and connection and, in doing so, foster queerness (Detamore, 2013, p. 77; Désert, 1997). In this way, it is not that space exists as "queer space" but that there is an unfolding potential for space to become queer or to engage in a process of queer-ing space.

In addition to being informed by work on queer space and queer geographies, I am also directed by work on trans, genderqueer and gender variant geographies (Doan, 2010; Johnston, 2016, 2019). Johnston emphasizes a tendency to focus on "normatively gendered" men and women in gender geographies and identifies a greater need for critical geographies that attend to the experience of genderqueer and gender variant folks (2016, p. 668; 2019). Throughout this thesis, I attend to the way that my trans and non-binary participants talk about their sense of place and their experiences in ways that differ from cis participants. In this way, I am responding to Johnston's (2019) work, which highlights "often overlooked exclusionary spaces and cisgender privilege" by drawing attention to the way that being cis affects the experiences of cis participants (p. 161).

1.2.9   Queer community

Research repeatedly suggests that inclusion and a sense of belonging to a community are integral to the wellbeing and resilience of all people and particularly for those who are marginalized (Kitchen et al., 2012; Mahar, Cobigo & Stuart, 2013; McCallum & McLaren, 2011; Shields, 2008; Singh, Hays and Watson, 2011; Stone et al., 2020). As Stone et al. (2020) suggest, and as my emphasis on relationality in this chapter reflects, our interactions with other people are deeply meaningful and important. But does interacting with people regularly, or living in proximity to one another, make a community? Does sustained positive recognition constitute a community? While community and a sense of belonging to a community are framed as important factors in predicting wellbeing, there is no clear consensus or easy response to what defines or

constitutes a community. In this thesis, I am not endeavoring to provide a definition of community; I am interested, rather, in what enactments of community *do* in participants' accounts. While some participants frame community as positive, as something that they connect with a sense of belonging, with support and comfort, others frame it as something elusive, something they are lacking, or as something constraining (Dahl, 2010). I am interested in the way that participants draw on notions of community, the way they express a sense of being part of a community and/or the way they express a sense of lacking community as factors that affect their comfort zones and ultimately, as factors that make the area more or less liveable for them. In this way, I am informed by Gray's (2009) approach to using community in a way that recognizes its importance "as an organizing principle … more than to signal my belief in its existence beyond an aspiration or ideal" (p. 27).

Another important facet of the literature on queer community is the potential for community to function in constraining, exclusionary or regulatory ways. Johnston and Longhurst (2010) argue that in prioritizing a particular facet or identity as a unifying feature of community, people may feel "both inside and outside of the notion of community on the grounds that it privileges an ideal of unity over difference" and thus "encourages people to suppress the other ways in which they may be different from the group, such as their class position, gender, age, or race in order that there be a single rallying factor" (p. 63). As Johnston and Longhurst (2010) note, delineating a community to which certain people belong requires identifying people who do not belong in that community (p. 61; Butler, 1993). In this way, community is about exclusion as much as it is about inclusion and can also serve regulatory functions in the sense that you might need to act and appear in certain ways in order to maintain community membership.

One way of thinking about the regulatory functions of local communities is to trace the way that they are structured by heteronormativity and other pervasive norms that demand subjects appear in particular ways. This understanding conceptualizes community as linked with a sort of abstract set of understandings and norms about what is acceptable in a particular place. While their work does not focus on LGBTQ+ people but on people with mental health problems, Parr et al.'s (2005) analysis on participants'

negotiations of cultural norms in public spaces and their fear that transgression will result in community rejection and loss of community extends this discussion. As Parr et al. (2005) note, their participants express "a need to be continually monitoring their behaviour and their emotional expression so that they might be 'read' as 'normal' and therefore not risking transgression, community rejection, or stigma" (p. 94). Particularly for those who live in smaller areas and/or who rely on a community for support, the consequences of transgression can be devastating (Parr et al., 2005, p. 93). The demands of the work that their participants do to be "read as normal" is part of what I understand as "affective work". Parr et al. (2005) found that having to engage in self-management practices or having to negotiate one's identity or emotional responses in public spaces is not only potentially draining or detrimental for their participants but also allows them to become resilient and develop important skills. Their participants are skillful at managing conversations and knowing what to do – what paths to take, who to avoid – in order to not encounter uncomfortable situations (Parr et al., 2005). Thinking about the way that Parr et al.'s (2005) participants are affected by the perceived norms of their community and their desire or need to enact themselves in ways that do not transgress those norms informs my understanding of how community can function in regulatory ways.

Just as a local community or community of proximity can serve regulatory functions, hegemonic notions of LGBTQ+ community can also work in regulatory ways. As Casey (2007) notes, "just to identify as a gay man does not lead to feelings of inclusion and belonging" and, in fact, some research suggests that when/if normative ideas, images or constructs cohere around 'the LGBTQ+ community' and what it means or looks like to be LGBTQ+, those constructs often serve to alienate or exclude many LGBTQ+ people in practice (p. 130). Scholarship on rural queer experiences emphasizes the consequences of reifying particular ideas about what it means or looks like to be gay. Gray (2009) provides the example of one of her young gay participants living in rural Kentucky who grapples with feeling like "shopping at Wal-Mart is 'just not gay enough'" (p. 110). While shopping at Wal-Mart is what this participant can afford, he expresses "exasperation at navigating the 'gay standard' of high fashion on a Wal-Mart budget" (Gray, 2009, p. 110). This sense of not being able to live up to or to meet the expectations of the "gay standard" is not just something he experiences internally, but also something

that shapes the expectations others have of him (Gray, 2009, p. 110). He notes that straight college friends come to him for advice on their outfits and that he has to emphasize that he is a "badly dressed gay man" and does not align with their expectations of what a gay man is and looks like (Gray, 2009, p. 110). This example demonstrates how in some contexts, normative understandings of what it means to be gay or part of the LGBTQ+ community can contribute to further isolation or alienation in people's everyday lives. As the above discussion suggests, different LGBTQ+ people will relate to the notion of an "LGBTQ+ community" in a multitude of ways. Although references to the "LGBTQ+ community" are ubiquitous in the current moment and recurrent in my interviews, who exactly is being referred to or what is meant by the use of "LGBTQ+ community" is often unclear. Furthermore, not all lesbian, gay, bi, trans, pan, asexual and other people whose sexuality and gender are framed as "non-normative" will feel like part of "an" or "the" LGBTQ+ community (Casey, 2007, pp. 130-131).

Thinking further about the use of acronyms, I draw on Gray (2009) who suggests that talking about "LGBT" is a way of invoking an "imagined community of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people whether L, G, B, and T-identifying people are present or not" (p. 27). As queer scholarship extensively critiques, the groups that make up the LGBTQ+ acronym are not analogous, and bi and trans people in particular are often not the focus of research, programing or outreach compared to cis lesbians and gays. Stone et al. (2020) emphasize that trans and non-binary people may not find the support networks or affirmation they need in LGBTQ+ communities and describe the acceptance of trans and non-binary people within LGBTQ+ communities as conditional (p. 228). Stone et al. (2020) also recognize that race matters in any discussion about acceptance within the LGBTQ+ community (Logie and Rwigema, 2014; Weiss, 2011). Another function of generically using terms like "gay and lesbian community", "queer community" and "LGBTQ+ community" is that they can result in the prioritization of a white, middle-class agenda and/or can work in exclusionary ways for LGBTQ+ people who are not white or middle-class. The goals of the "gay and lesbian" community are not always *queer* and, as queer work on homonormativity and homonationalism demonstrates, the risks and effects of assimilatory lesbian and gay politics include not only the exclusion of many queers (those who are not 'good capitalist citizens') but also the invocation of

"LGBT human rights" as a call to and justification for a variety of racist, imperialist, colonialist actions (Duggan, 2002; Puar, 2007; Young and Boyd, 2007). Homonationalism is a way of understanding "the complexities of how 'acceptance' and 'tolerance' for gay and lesbian subjects have become a barometer by which the right to and capacity for national sovereignty is evaluated" (Puar, 2013, p. 336). For Puar (2013), homonationalism is a way of understanding and historicizing "how and why a nation's status as 'gay-friendly' has become desirable" and what such a status does in terms of normalizing particular homosexual bodies while investing in imperialism and violent actions (Puar, 2013, pp. 336, 338).

While I recognize that community is a complex subject and reiterate that I am not looking to offer one specific definition or conceptualization of community, I draw on research about LGBTQ+ experiences and ways that community is put into conversation with LGBTQ+ experiences to provide a framework for making sense of how "community" functions in participants' accounts. Particularly given the community focus of smaller, more rural areas, LGBTQ+ folks are navigating at least two types of communities between the "straight" local community and potentially multiple variants of queer communities. In their study of trans and non-binary youth and community building, Stone et al. (2020) suggest that "interpersonal connections with other trans and non-binary people" is one way that their participants talk about experiences of community (p. 237). Their work emphasizes how connections with other trans and non-binary people are important for their participants and that there is "just some stuff that a cis person doesn't get" (p. 237). Significantly, Stone et al. (2020) note that the presence of physical pride centers and the availability of discussion or meet up groups is one way that participants develop these connections. Having space and being tapped into networks that allow trans and non-binary participants to connect with other trans and non-binary people and thus to develop these connections is important (Stone et al., 2020). They found that particularly in locations with no "centralized list of trans healthcare providers" their participants rely on interpersonal networks and connections they make with other trans folks for healthcare referrals and information as well as social connection and identity affirmation (p. 237). In places where there is minimal accessible information about trans or LGBTQ+

specific healthcare resources and/or no LGBTQ+ specific spaces or regular social groups, informal connections are arguably both more important and more difficult to forge.

While Stone et al. (2020) suggest that LGBTQ+ centers can be helpful resources and sites for developing and fostering interpersonal networks and comfort zones, they are not a requisite for doing so. Beyond community as tied to physical spaces or gatherings, other conceptualizations of community involve being connected in meaningful ways with people who "get you". In this formulation, community functions like a network made up of constellations of connections between LGBTQ+ people and allies (Stone et al., 2020). While this kind of intangible, shifting community is by no means contained in any local place and includes online and offline connections both within and outside the area in which one lives; my interest is in how such communities can serve an important purpose in the everyday lives of people who inhabit them. Thinking of community in this way informs my understanding of comfort zones as encompassing interpersonal connections and encounters that provide a sense of positive recognition, resources, and/or moments of joy that make life more liveable.

1.2.10   Sense of place

Another major component of my theoretical framework is work on sense of place. Sense of place is an approach to exploring the dynamic relationships between people and places (de Wit, 2013; Gustafson, 2001; Jorgensen and Stedman, 2006; Manzo, 2005; Ngo and Brklacich, 2014; Puren et al., 2017; Scannell and Gifford, 2010; Soini et al., 2012). At the core of most sense of place studies is an interest in why and how people relate to, visit and/or live in particular places (Puren et al., 2017; Scannell & Gifford, 2010; Soini et al., 2012). While sense of place eludes a clear definition, my approach to researching sense of place is premised on the concepts of place attachment, place satisfaction, place dependence, and place agency (Kolodziejski, 2014; Manzo, 2005; Ngo & Brklacich, 2014). In other words, sense of place involves looking at how and why participants are attached to particular places, how and why places are significant to participants, and how and why people are dependent on particular places. Increasingly, sense of place literature recognizes that race, ethnicity and gender matter in sense of place studies and in particular in the study of affective responses to natural environments and outdoor areas

(Agyeman & Spooner, 1997; Manzo, 2005; Soini et al., 2012; Valentine, 1989; Virden & Walker, 1999). Soini et al. (2012) emphasize that relationships with place are dynamic and are affected by a multitude of factors, including the physical space, geographical distance from home, length of residence, gender, environmental attitudes, life course, and place-related activities and identities. My study takes up these factors and also directly considers how sexuality affects sense of place.

Human geographers predominantly approach sense of place using a relational approach, which views sense of place as fluid and as affected by variables and contexts (Castro, 2018; Puren et al., 2017). I understand sense of place to be shaped by multidimensional human experiences of a place as well as its physical characteristics (Billig, 2005; Cross, 2001; de Wit, 2013; Gustafson, 2001; Hummon, 1992; Jackson, 1994; Relph, 1976; Scannell & Gifford, 2010; Soini et al., 2012; Stedman, 2003; Tuan, 1979) Drawing on Puren et al. (2017), I think about sense of place as developing through a continuous, reciprocal process of interaction between and within people, the physical environment and the social context, which means that sense of place develops and shifts over time. Following de Wit (2013), I understand the task of studying sense of place to be one of examining "who people in a given place conceive themselves to be as a consequence of that place" (p. 122) and in that particular moment. By taking a relational approach to sense of place, I am not aiming to uncover a generalizable or universal sense of place in the Stratford area, but to think about what specific people's senses of place might tell us about the range of experiences in the area and to point to issues relating to inclusivity and diversity for future exploration. As previously mentioned, my approach to conceptualizing sense of place involves four overlapping components: place attachment, place satisfaction, place dependence, and place agency (Kolodziejski, 2014; Manzo, 2005; Ngo & Brklacich, 2014; Scannell & Gifford, 2010).

Place attachment is central to work on sense of place and is understood to be an emotional bond that develops between people and places (Altman & Low, 1992; Hummon, 1992; Jorgensen & Stedman, 2006; Manzo, 2005; Ngo & Brklacich, 2014; Scannell & Gifford, 2010). Place attachment is defined within the sense of place literature as a "positive bond that develops between groups or individuals and their

environment" (Jorgensen & Stedman, 2006, p. 234). Given that place attachment involves the relationship between people, social environments and physical settings, it occurs at both the individual and group level and encompasses personal connections and the significance of places on an individual level as well as social dynamics, relational experiences, and the characteristics of the physical setting of the place (Scannell and Gifford, 2010). Within the literature on sense of place, there is a tendency to focus on the social dimension of attachment because people become attached to places where they have close social bonds, are connected to a group identity and have interpersonal connections (Scannell & Gifford, 2010). However, as Scannell and Gifford (2010) note, it is physical features such as density and proximity to other areas that creates the conditions for the development of social bonds and attachments. Beyond structuring the social, the physical characteristics of a place are an important dimension of place attachment and place dependency. One way that I worked to maintain an awareness of this is by doing walking interviews, which facilitate an engagement with the physical environment as I discuss in the next chapter. I do not intend to construct the social and physical environment as oppositional, but instead recognize that the boundaries between each are unclear and they are affected by and through the other. As Jorgensen and Stedman (2006) emphasize, affect is part of place attachment and thus, researching place attachment involves being attentive to the affective connections people have to particular places and affective responses to places (Scannell & Gifford, 2010). Within the literature on sense of place, place attachment, and person-place bonding are frequently framed in emotional terms and often specifically in terms of love, roots, and positive attachment (Manzo, 2005; Scannell & Gifford, 2010). Manzo (2005) posits that the concept of place "attachment" alienates negative experiences because we tend to think about attachment as a positive bond, not a negative one (p. 70). In order to further my focus on affect and sense of place, I look to work on place satisfaction, which responds to the positive bias of place attachment.

Place satisfaction is the "judgement of the perceived quality of a certain setting" or "the utilitarian value of a place to meet basic needs" (Soini et al., 2012, p. 125). Stedman (2003) posits that satisfaction is distinct from attachment in the sense that one may be satisfied and unattached with a setting or may be unsatisfied and attached. In my

sense of place framework, place satisfaction is a way to challenge the overemphasis on positive affect in sense of place studies (Manzo, 2005; Stedman, 2003). By thinking about place satisfaction alongside place attachment, I am seeking to challenge an overvaluation of rootedness and strong place attachments, which are often constructed as central to a strong sense of place (Manzo, 2005; Stedman, 2003). The issue with looking at rootedness and "strong" attachments to places as the primary indicators of sense of place is that such a position frames those who are not rooted or those who do not have such attachments as placeless (Manzo, 2005). Manzo (2005) raises important questions about the kinds of attachments people have to places, suggesting that sites of trauma or abuse, for example, are places to which people have deep attachments, but that such attachments may not be desirable or positive. Informed by Manzo's (2005) work, I endeavour to remain open to experiences of place detachment, not belonging, and experiences of being "trapped" or "stuck" in places (Manzo, 2005). There are many possibilities that emerge from exploring a fuller range of affective responses and attachments to places, including how attachments to some places might be cruelly optimistic (Berlant, 2011). For Berlant (2011), "cruel optimism is the condition of maintaining an attachment to a significantly problematic object" (p. 24). Berlant's concept of cruel optimism informs my approach in this thesis in two interrelated ways. The first is that her analysis on attachments as optimistic contributes to my understanding of sense of place and place attachment in particular. The second way builds on the importance of place attachment and the emotional relationships with and connections to places to my understanding of sense of place. I am interested in the way that a metronormative bias in queer studies and the imagining of cosmopolitan city centers as *the* place for LGBTQ+ populations might inform a reading of LGBTQ+ attachments to non-urban or less urban spaces as cruelly optimistic (Berlant, 2011; Stone, 2018). In thinking about this, I am also directed by work in rural queer studies, which points to metronormativity and the way that rural spaces become "the closet" against which the city is affirmed as the most welcoming and the natural space for LGBTQ+ folks to be (where they come to be out, for example) (Halberstam, 2005; Stone, 2018). One of the things that metronormative discourse does, then, is make it easy to read LGBTQ+ attachments to non-urban space as cruelly optimistic (Berlant, 2011; Halberstam, 2005;

Stone, 2018). Another way that Berlant's (2011) work is helpful is that it emphasizes how attachments to the city, Toronto, for example, are also optimistic attachments, even if they are not as easily read as cruelly optimistic. The concept of place satisfaction and the recognition that negative and ambivalent affect are important dimensions of sense of place studies is central to my theoretical framework.

The third component of my sense of place framework, place dependence, is considered a specific type of place attachment (Scannell and Gifford, 2010, 6). At the core of place dependence is a focus on "what people need and require from their locale" (Kolodziejski, 2014, 43). Kolodziejski's (2014) thesis on sense of place recognizes that the way place dependence is, "somewhat ambiguous in that some define dependence as things that people need while others use it more generally to include things that are desired but not actually needed" (p. 31). Here, Kolodziejski (2014) identifies two conceptualizations of place dependence: the first emphasizes the way that people seek out resources they want – specific features of place that facilitate the kinds of activities they want to do like mountains to climb and water for boating – and the second focuses on the way that people rely on particular characteristics of a place to survive (p. 43). Reflecting the former usage, Scannell & Gifford (2010) define place dependence as a type of attachment whereby "individuals value a place for the specific activities that it supports or facilitates" (p. 6). Similarly, for Jorgensen and Stedman (2006), place dependence assesses how well a setting works for a person's situation and goals in comparison to a range of actual or imagined alternatives. For example, the presence of the Stratford Festival Theatre might be part of some participants' place dependence in Stratford. While they may not rely on the theatre to survive, its presence and the kinds of activities and cultures it offers allows them access to specific, desired activities that are supported and facilitated in the area. Place dependence, understood in this way, is linked not only with place satisfaction but with notions of liveability. In this conceptualization, which includes "things that are desired but not actually needed" place dependence is also very closely connected to place satisfaction (Kolodziejski, 2014, p. 31). This understanding of place dependence as the conditions which facilitate and support the kinds of activities one values informs the way I make sense of my participants accounts. While some participants frame the area as somewhere that facilitates the kind of lifestyle they want,

others express a sense that the area is not for them and that they would find other places more liveable. The way in which urban spaces and city centers like Toronto become understood as *the* place for LGBTQ+ people can be understood through the concept of place dependence. By offering LGBTQ+ specific spaces and services, people who desire those features or consider them necessary for a successful, liveable queer life might be considered place dependent or, in other words, they need to live where they do because it is the only place that offers the features (a gay village, LGBTQ+ specific services) that they require to feel that their lives are liveable. Certainly, this sense or logic is prevalent in studies that valorize urban queer communities. However, drawing on rural queer studies scholarship, I challenge the notion that major city centers are *necessarily* better for LGBTQ+ people and at sustaining the conditions of their wellbeing throughout this thesis.

The second conceptualization of place dependence emphasizes the degree of agency one has in their relationship with a place (Kolodziejski, 2014). According to Kolodziejski (2014), "place dependence could be a characteristic of people who feel trapped by place and who have few options to move elsewhere, whether that was through economic constraints or lack of ambition" (p. 43). In this second conceptualization, being dependent on a place may mean that you live with your parents and cannot afford to move elsewhere to live on your own, for example. People who are place dependent in the first sense – they have sought out some feature of the place (a lake, for example) – tend to be making an active choice to be and stay in that place in a way that informs their enjoyment of and satisfaction with that place. For people who are place dependent in the sense of relying on particular characteristics of place and feeling trapped in a place, there is a lack of agency or a sense of having a lack of viable choices available. While it is not always the case that people who are place dependent in this latter sense express a sense of place dissatisfaction, it is likely that their lack of agency and place dependence affects other parts of their life and ultimately complicates their sense of place. I refer to this latter conceptualization of place dependence as "place agency" to avoid confusion between these two conceptualizations of place dependence. As Kolodziejski (2014) notes, this notion of what I refer to as "place agency" is not typically how place dependence is taken up in the sense of place literature. However, "place agency" is useful in understanding

how the degree of control one has over where they live affects their experience of and relationship with that place.

In general, work on sense of place prompts a consideration of the degree of agency folks have in their relationship to place, which involves considering alternatives to the current place, the degree of agency exercised in a decision to live in a particular place or, conversely, the degree to which one might feel stuck or trapped somewhere. Notably, place attachment is sometimes thought to be determined by length of residence in the sense that the length of time one spends in a place might indicate or predict their level of place attachment (Scannell & Gifford, 2010). However, Crawford (2016) emphasizes that sometimes people stay in a place not because they are attached to it, but because they cannot afford to go live anywhere else, they are too young to go elsewhere, or for any number of reasons. In this way, sense of place and the specific concepts of place attachment, place satisfaction, place dependence and place agency are useful for thinking more complexly about participants' accounts of life in the Stratford area.

Throughout this chapter I have established a theoretical framework which informs my discussion of participants' accounts in Chapters 3, 4 and 5. Keeping this theoretical framework in mind, I move to Chapter 2 where I offer a discussion of the utility of walking interviews and how a queer and feminist framework is central to my approach to this research.

Chapter 2

2 Methods and Methodologies

In this chapter, I provide an overview of my methodological framework, my methods, who my participants are and how they describe the Stratford area. As previously mentioned, my interest in this work is both personally and politically motivated. As someone who grew up and went to high school in St. Marys[2] and who has experience organizing pride events in Stratford, I am invested and enmeshed with/in informal queer communities in Stratford and St. Marys in complicated ways. In this chapter and throughout this thesis, I work to account for my enmeshment in the field and the way my subjectivity and my investment in this work shapes its process and outcome.

2.1 Methodologies

2.1.1 Feminist and queer methodologies

Feminist scholarship on qualitative methodologies is central to my approach to doing research. Following Haraway (1991), I understand knowledge as partial and situated and I am continuously working to maintain an awareness of my subjectivity and influence, the power dynamics in the research process, the situatedness of research, and boundaries and silences (Ackerly and True, 2008). As Mansvelt and Berg (2010) note, feminist writers seek to confront the "universalism, mastery and disembodiment inherent in positivist notions of objectivity, criticizing masculinist and Eurocentric concepts of universal knowledge" (p. 338). In their foundational book *Queer Methods and Methodologies*, Browne and Nash (2010) begin by asking whether social science methodologies and methods can be "'queered' or even made 'queer enough'" (p. 2). In posing such a question, Browne and Nash point to the way that traditional social science research privileges a modern, unified and stable Enlightenment subject and purports to objectively uncover knowable realities and truths (Browne and Nash, 2010, p. 4). Within queer methodologies, it is generally understood that there is no definable or stable "queer

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[2] St. Marys is a small town located approximately 15 minutes from Stratford.

perspective;" however, queer approaches are often grounded in poststructuralist, postmodernist theories that undermine traditional understandings of research that assume ontological stability, universal truths and teleological narratives about human progress (Browne & Nash, 2010; Di Feliciantonio, Gadelha & DasGupta, 2017; Nash, 2010). Like feminist methodologies, one of the enduring tenets of queer methodologies is a desire to resist positivistic frameworks and to critique the notion of researcher objectivity. From concern about the failure of censuses to count LGBTQ+ people, to critiques of the way that taking men as the "universal" subjects of health research have material and sometimes fatal consequences for women, it is imperative to recognize that it matters who is designing and carrying out research and who the subjects of research are, particularly if that research is being used to inform policies and medical knowledge. Extending from this is the idea that research is always bound up in politics. In line with Nash's (2010) suggestion that "what renders queer research distinctive is not only its underlying theoretical, epistemological and ontological starting points but its political commitment to promote radical social and political change that undermines oppression and marginalization" (p. 131), I understand my research to be political. By queering my methodological framework, I hope to allow my research to be (re)directed as it unfolds in ways that are politically responsive, that work for participants, and that recognize how I am bound up in that process. This is not to say that queer(er) research has a political agenda in ways that positivistic research does not, but that queer(er) research is accountable for its political positioning (Detamore, 2010). Research is always political.

Reflexivity is central to my methodological framework and I endeavour to maintain a reflexive practice throughout the process of doing this research. Throughout this thesis, I remain attentive to the ways that my emplacement and subjectivity matters. I am enmeshed in this work as someone who is from St. Marys, has lived and participated in LGBTQ+ organizing in Stratford, who identifies as a non-binary lesbian, and who shares informal social networks with some of my participants. Beyond this recognition of my "dirty participation" (DiFeliciantonio and Gadelha, 2016), I also need to account for the way that I understand myself as a "potential insider" (in the sense that my potential for shared experiences and identities cannot be overdetermined). Building on Bondi's (2005) premise that "gathering or generating data always draws researchers into

relationships" (p. 236), Nash (2010) explains that queering methodologies demands that we "queer" the positions of researcher and researched by recognizing that relations between them are fluid rather than stable (p. 141). Although there seems to be consensus among queer researchers that the research relationship needs to be reconsidered, there is no formulaic or singular response to the question of what it means to queer the research relationship. While the framework of insider/outsider status has been thoroughly critiqued, discussions about what it means to be situated as an insider or an outsider provide an entry point for complicating the relationship between researcher and participants. Within the framework of insider/outsider status, a researcher is considered an "insider" if they share identities or experiences with their participants. Insider status indicates that researchers will likely have increased access to the ideas, attitudes and experiences of their participants or communities of study because of their shared identities (Gorman-Murray, Johnston and Waitt, 2010, p. 100). Part of the feminist and queer critique of the notion is that it presumes essentialized, coherent and timeless identity categories, which enables the sharing of "insider status" between researcher and participant. On this point, Held (2009) argues that we need to account for the way that different aspects of a researcher's subjectivity determine the way they access and interpret spaces while simultaneously limiting the scope of their research through unacknowledged biases and tendencies. Researchers cannot assume that we share meanings or associations with our participants even if there are perceived commonalities (Held, 2009). Instead, we must work to ensure we remain open to listening to participants' meanings and interpretations, and to actively anticipate that their experiences of identities, spaces, and events will be different from our own in significant ways. For example, there were several moments during interviews where participants were describing events that I was involved in organizing during Stratford Pride Week 2018. Despite being familiar with these events, I made a point to ask questions about participants' accounts of these events, their experiences of and responses to these events.

Given the focus on the subjective experience of place in this thesis, it is particularly important that I do not frame myself uncomplicatedly as an 'insider' and that I remain open to listening to and being moved by participants accounts and the way they talk about their experiences. Beyond this, I no longer live in the Stratford area, which

positions me as an outsider in relation to my phase one participants, who continue to live there and are likely familiar with the everyday activities in the area in ways I am not. With that said, I also cannot discount the way that my "insider" status as someone who is LGBTQ+ and someone with deep connections to the Stratford area affected and facilitated this research. The "potential insider" (Nash, 2010) complicates the imagined fixedness of the relationship between researcher and participants. By emphasizing the fluidity of subjectivities, the position of the "potential insider" undermines the identificatory stability on which notions of insider or outside status depend while also recognizing the fluidity of the field and the shifting boundaries of the field (Nash, 2010, p. 130). Later in this chapter, I reflect on how my status as a "potential insider" affected my process of recruiting and interviewing participants. By rejecting the notion that my research is compromised by my subjectivity and my familiarity with my area of focus, I endeavour to weave a more complex understanding of embodied experiences of sense of place in the Stratford area. Ultimately, my approach is to account for the location from which I am producing knowledge and also for the way that my experiences direct and inform this research, rather than asserting that I am able to objectively theorize from a neutral location, a location which I argue can never exist. In this way, I understand qualitative research as a process of meaning-making, of "interpreting and creating, not discovering and finding the 'truth' that is either 'out there' and findable from, or buried deep within, the data" (Braun and Clarke, 2019b, p. 591).

2.1.2   Walking methodologies

Having addressed the way that feminist and queer methodologies inform my approach to research, I also want to look at how work on walking methodologies contributes to my methodological framework. While walking[3] has long been a mode of inquiry and way of knowing and being in relation to place, land, and environment, there has been a growth of interest in walking research in fields ranging from geography, sociology, history, architecture, and anthropology to the arts, among others, over the last

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[3] I am aware of issues with ableism and walking research and I address these issues in this chapter.

decade (O'Neill and Roberts, 2020; Vannini and Vannini, 2017). In this section and throughout this thesis, I endeavour to think about the affective, epistemic, creative and other potential(s) of movement through space. Walking research has the potential to be attentive to the ways that people are "involved subjectively in 'passing' through social and material circumstances (buildings, streets, trees, and gardens, people met and left behind)" (O'Neill and Roberts, 2020, p. 17). I appreciate this framing of walking research because it captures its appeal for this study, which is the potential to produce a more holistic understanding of the social and material circumstances affecting research.

Walking is not simply a way to get from one place to another but is "integral to our perception of an environment" (O'Neill and Roberts, 2020, p. 15). Walking is a way of connecting with or inhabiting place through movement and allows us to become responsive to place in situated and relational ways (Springgay and Truman, 2018, p. 4). As framed in the social science and arts literature on its methodological potential, walking is both mundane and mysterious (O'Neill and Roberts, 2020; Springgay and Truman, 2017, 2018). Walking can be a routine, utilitarian act and it can also be contemplative, philosophical, relaxing or nostalgic (O'Neill and Roberts, 2020, p. 35; Vannini and Vannini, 2017). Edensor's (2010) work suggests a connection between the purpose of a walk and the rhythm of a walk as he suggests that people exist in and move through a shared location, but that the way those locations are experienced will be markedly different. Particular ways of moving, such as the striding of commuters or children walking to school, are understood as both in place and productive (Edensor, 2010; Cresswell, 1996). Other modes of walking like "slow wanderings" or loitering teenagers are not only regarded as unproductive, but as out of place and in some cases, such activity becomes criminalized (Edensor, 2010, p. 69; Cresswell, 1996). Further, while one queer person walking might be unremarkable, two or more queer people moving through space together may increase their visibility.

Edensor (2010) notes that walking is a learned, regulated, stylized social and cultural practice. Walking signals, forms, and negotiates our social identities through our movements, rhythms, and gestures, which "act as markers for gender, racial, ethnic, class, and subcultural allegiances" (Edensor, 2010, p. 74; Desmond, 1994). This recognition of

the way that who we are affects how we walk, and our experiences of walking, is paramount (Warren, 2017). Springgay and Truman (2018) draw on Chandler's (2014) work on walking and crip communities, noting that unlike "the strolling flaneur, Chandler's walking narratives of 'dragging legs, and tripping toes' enacts a different narrative of moving in the city" to emphasize differences in the way that bodies meet the built environment (p. 55). Cadogan's (2016) work on "walking while black" in New York City also emphasizes the dangers and injustices of asserting universalized experiences of place (Springgay and Truman, 2018). Cadogan (2016) explains a list of "'tactics' that he employs as a Black man in New York City: no running, no sudden movements, no objects in hand, no hoodies, and no loitering on street corners" (cited in Springgay and Truman, 2018, p. 55). Cadogan's (2016) reflections draw attention to the way that moving thoughtlessly or leisurely requires a level of embodied privilege that is not shared equally and also speaks to the ways different bodies learn to move differently through space. And it is important to be clear that "learning" to move through space is not a voluntary process, but a survivalist one. How we are perceived to be walking matters. This is apparent in Cadogan's (2016) reflections on how his intentions, his desire to enjoy walking as a way of exploring and connecting with place, are overridden by how he is read in racist ways by a white public and by police officers in particular. It is not just how we walk, but how we are perceived to be walking by others that matters. As O'Neill and Roberts (2020) emphasize, we are conscious not only of the ways and reasons for our own walking, but also with how and why others walk. In particular, there is a propensity to make assumptions about people according to their "gender, age, clothes, gait, voices, demeanor" and so on, about their social position, 'taste' as well as their manners and purpose. We may 'detect' in their movement and posture (body language) a mood, an infirmity, a character" (O'Neill and Roberts, 2020, p. 22). As Edensor (2010) posits, who is walking, why they are walking, where they are walking, and how they are walking matters, but so does who is seeing them walk and how the viewer interprets their walk and their embodiment more generally.

I draw on these discussions to demonstrate the importance of complicating romanticized notions of walking as a meditative practice toward a conceptualization of walking as a particular and potentially privileged, though also potentially fraught, way of

being in touch with place (Springgay and Truman, 2018). The history of walking research, including both the flânerie and the dérive, frames walking as "individualistic, heroic, epic and transgressive" (Heddon and Turner, 2012, p. 224). Heddon and Turner (2012) note that the valorization of walking as such is reliant on "the autonomous male walker who leaves behind everything in order to tap into the wildness of place" (Heddon and Turner, 2012; Springgay and Truman, 2018). As Springgay and Truman (2018) and Cadogan (2016) emphasize, beyond being autonomous and male, the walker is also typically assumed to be white and able-bodied within a western understanding. This reflects Warren's (2017) argument that certain bodies do not share the same relationship with walking and particularly when employing walking as a research method, researchers need to contend with the reality that "the act of walking will exclude certain types of participants" (p. 787). Springgay and Truman (2018) urge researchers to account for "the labour, violence, and structures that enable some bodies to walk more freely" than others (p. 56) and to challenge the assumption that people are able to experience walking as a leisure activity or a novel method. While I am interested in and excited by the potential of walking research, I also endeavour to maintain an awareness of walking as a complicated, subjective process. Following Springgay and Truman (2018), I conceptualize walking "as an entangled, transmaterial, affective practice of experimentation" (p. 142) and resist assuming or asserting that walking research is "automatically radical" (p. 56). This analysis on the way that embodiment affects the way we walk and move around our everyday places, and the notion that it matters how we are perceived to be walking and moving through everyday places, is central to my understanding of participants' accounts. Informed by work on walking methodologies, challenging the notion that "all bodies move through space equally" is central to my theoretical and methodological approach to this project (Springgay and Truman, 2018, p. 6).

While walking research is deeply interconnected with theories of place, I recognize that much of this work continues to insufficiently attend to settler colonial histories and the way that ongoing research practices continue to ignore Indigenous understandings of land, knowledge, and research (Springgay and Truman, 2017, p. 17; Tuck and McKenzie, 2015). Waitt, Gill & Head (2009) argue that walking, "remains informed by the colonial logic of *terra nullius*" and draw attention to the way that

particular walking practices are "invested in settler futurity" (cited in Springgay and Truman, 2017, p. 24; Tuck and Gaztambide-Fernandez, 2013). Springgay and Truman (2017) emphasize that conceptions of place continue to privilege settler views and settler values, in part by investing in the division between nature and culture (p. 24). Throughout the process of doing analysis and writing this thesis, I have worked to become more aware of and to engage with Indigenous knowledges about place, place-based research and conceptualizations of land and the environment and to not only challenge but to account for the effects of the division between humans and nature (Springgay and Truman, 2017; Watts, 2013). Following Springgay and Truman (2018), my understanding of place seeks to "attend to Indigenous theories that center Land, and posthuman understandings of the geologic that insist on a different ethical relationship to geology, where human and nonhuman are imbricated and intertwined" (p. 5).

To conclude this section on my methodological framework, I want to reflect on the process of working to identify and unravel the ways that positivism informs the epistemologies and ontologies of traditional qualitative research while also knowing that we might be critiqued or undermined by researchers who are invested in positivism (Di Feliciantonio and Gadelha, 2016, p. 279). The majority of researchers develop their understandings of research and methodologies within disciplines and institutions, including geography, that value positivistic approaches to research and teach such approaches as *the* way to do social science research (Bondi et al., 2005; Parr et al., 2005;). Jackman (2010) emphasizes that researchers who openly recognize the role of emotions, feelings, or affect in their research risk having the value of their work called into question (p. 120). Many scholars write about the discomfort or weirdness that comes from doing queer, affective, feminist and other critical research that challenges or resists what it means to do "good" research (Bondi, 2005; Brown et al., 2011; Detamore, 2010; Di Feliciantonio and Gadelha, 2016; Jackman, 2010). I contend that the process of queering research within an academy that continues to privilege traditional social science methodologies is likely to produce feelings of discomfort and anxiety. It is interesting to consider how such feelings of discomfort may be productively directive for researchers working within disciplines and institutions that continue to privilege positivistic research as more legitimate research. Instead of discounting or bracketing anxiety and discomfort

as factors that compromise research, what does it do to embrace such affective reactions as a way of guiding an exploration of the messiness of life and embodied experiences? Part of queering research[4], then, is learning to work with becoming uncomfortable, with feeling not only excited and passionate about one's research, but also anxious and guilty and uncertain (Bondi, 2005; Di Feliciantonio and Gadelha, 2016; Heckert, 2010; Jackman, 2010).

2.2   Methods

2.2.1   Recruitment

In this section, I begin by detailing the process of recruiting participants for this study and then proceed to reflect on the process of doing the 17 interviews for phase one and the six interviews for phase two. After defending my thesis proposal, I completed the ethics application for this study. As part of this process, I generated an interview guide (Appendix A), a letter of information and consent (Appendix B), and a recruitment poster (Appendix C). Following the recommendations of Silverman (2017), I have included all recruitment materials as appendices in order to present the details of this recruitment process as transparently as possible. This project received ethics approval on April 22, 2019 and following that, recruitment took place in two distinct stages. The first stage was from May – July 2019 and the second was January 2020. My approach to recruitment was to use purposive sampling with three criteria for participation: to self-identify as LGBTQ, be at least 18 years old, and live in Perth County. Purposive sampling is useful in research that requires participants who fit rather narrow criteria, such as in this project (Robinson, 2014). Particularly when recruiting harder to reach populations and/or marginalized groups, nonprobability sampling techniques, like purposive sampling, are useful (Hussey, 2010). In the context of the Stratford area, nonprobability sampling is a

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[4] Queering research is not necessarily research on queer-identified subjects, but rather is an approach to thinking about research not as objective, but as an intrusion or as something that is active and deliberate in a way that cannot be neutral or innocent, and that disrupts the coherence/stability of both researcher and researched (Di Feliciantonio and Gadelha, 2016; Heckert, 2010; Rooke, 2010).

fitting method because there is an absence of visible or public LGBTQ+ spaces or services, meaning that I needed to connect with folks using less formal social networks.

In early May 2019, I posted the recruitment poster online on my personal Facebook and Instagram accounts and in the private Facebook page for the only explicitly LGBTQ+ focused group I was aware of in the Stratford/Perth County area at the time. In addition to the online postings, I put up posters at public locations around Stratford, St. Marys, and within Perth County. By the end of July 2019, eight people reached out by either e-mail or Facebook Messenger to indicate their interest in participating. Six of those people participated in the project and those interviews were conducted in June and July 2019. Of the two people who did not participate, both met the eligibility criteria. In one case, I emailed them a copy of the letter of information and consent and they did not respond. In any such case where a potential participant contacted me and then did not respond again, I sent one follow up e-mail and then assumed they were no longer interested in participating. In the other case, the person decided not to participate due to concerns about anonymity. I address concerns about anonymity below as I discuss the second stage of recruitment.

The second stage of recruitment took place in January 2020. Due to low recruitment at the time, I consulted with my supervisor and we added a second phase to the study. Phase two includes people who identify as LGBTQ+ and who have lived in the Stratford area in the past but are currently living elsewhere. In addition to the change to eligibility criteria for phase two, these interviews were conducted over the phone or online instead of as walking interviews. This was primarily for the sake of convenience and feasibility as several of the phase two participants live quite far away from the Stratford area, at least in terms of distance. The addition of a second phase required an amendment to the initial ethics application and a distinct letter of information and consent (Appendix D) and interview guide (Appendix E). The amendment to the ethics application was approved in late December 2019. I provide details on phase two later in this chapter.

Given the issues with recruiting LGBTQ+ people who currently live in the Stratford area, I needed to find a more effective way of connecting with potential participants. I contacted the *St. Marys Independent* and *The Beacon Herald*, Stratford's local paper, asking them to write a piece on my project with the hope that having the project featured in the local paper would allow me to connect with more participants. While I did not get a response from the *St. Marys Independent*, a reporter from *The Beacon Herald* agreed to interview me and they published a piece in early January 2020 (Simmons, 2020a). Following the publication of the *Beacon Herald* article, I shared the article on my personal Facebook page, and it was re-shared by several people. The article was shared from the *Beacon Herald's* website multiple times in various public and private Facebook groups in the Stratford and Perth County area, Kitchener/Waterloo and London[5]. Recognizing the limitations of social media as a way of connecting with people, I created a website with information about the project and how to get in contact with me (Prest, 2020). The website was included in the digital version of the *Beacon Herald* article and provided potential participants with a way to access information about the project that did not require them to have social media or to interact with my personal social media profile. Publishing the website also allowed potential participants greater access to information about the project. Instead of having to contact me to get additional information, they were able to access the letter of information and consent on their own. As of April 2020, the site had 235 views from 89 visitors and by December 2020, the site had 360 views from 128 visitors.

A few of my older participants in particular talk about their decision not to use Facebook during our interviews and note that they cannot access information about a local LGBTQ+ group because they operate almost exclusively on Facebook or other forms of social media. One of the older participants talks about how he found out about my research through the *Beacon Herald* article, which suggests that the article did allow me to reach a wider audience. Furthermore, because of the way that Facebook operates,

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[5] The responses to and comments on this article and my project were varyingly heartwarming and harrowing.

the people who are most likely to come across my recruitment post were people who are friends with me on Facebook, or friends of my Facebook friends who re-shared the recruitment poster. As with any kind of nonprobability sampling, there is a risk of recruiting participants who compose a biased subsect of the population in the sense that they may be demographically or ideologically similar (Morgan, 2008). Throughout this thesis, I endeavour to account for the fact that all of my participants, like myself, are white. In the context of belonging and sense of place in small-town and rural adjacent areas, whiteness cannot be overlooked.

Following the publication of the *Beacon Herald* article, I received emails from 22 people who were interested in participating and who met the eligibility criteria. Of those 22 potential participants, 15 people participated in the project. Of the seven who did not participate, two people were unable to participate due to scheduling issues, and four people did not respond to my subsequent emails. One person did not participate specifically because of concerns about anonymity related to their employment. While several people specifically enquired about anonymity, I do not know if that is connected to their decision to not participate in all but one of those cases. In response to questions about anonymity, I highlighted the relevant sections of the letter of information and consent and reiterated my commitment to protecting participant anonymity while recognizing that particularly given the small-town context of this study, I cannot guarantee complete anonymity.

In January 2020, I also contacted my initial six participants to ask if they wanted to participate in a follow up interview. Two participants responded and I conducted follow up interviews with them. The other three participants did not respond to my email about a follow up interview and one participant responded in mid-March 2020, at which point I was no longer able to conduct the interview because of COVID-19. While my intention was to reach out to the nine phase one participants who I interviewed in January and February 2020 to offer the option of participating in a follow up interview to be conducted between May-June 2020, I was not able to do that due to COVID-19. Because of these circumstances, and being unable to meet participants in person for follow up

walking interviews, I proceeded with analysis[6]. Table 1 displays a summary of the

recruitment process detailed in this section.

Table 1: Recruitment Overview

Participant	Month Interviewed	Phase	First Interview:	Second Interview:
Chris	June	1	Y	N
Clay	June	1	Y	N
Natalie	June	1	Y	N
Jane	July	1	Y	N
Skylar	July & January	1	Y	Y
Serena	July & February	1	Y	Y
Gloria	January	1	Y	N/A
Steven	February	1	Y	N/A
Robert	February	1	Y	N/A
Patrick	February	1	Y	N/A
Drew	February	1	Y	N/A
Sam	February	1	Y	N/A
Alex	February	1	Y	N/A
Regan	February	1	Y	N/A
Meredith	February	1	Y	N/A
Jack	January	2	Y	N/A
Tina	January	2	Y	N/A
Aiden	January	2	Y	N/A
Quinn	January	2	Y	N/A
Trevor	January	2	Y	N/A
Derek	January	2	Y	N/A
A	Did not participate	1	N	-
B	Did not participate	1	N	-
C	Did not participate	1	N	-
D	Did not participate	1	N	-
E	Did not participate	1	N	-
F	Did not participate	1	N	-
G	Did not participate	1	N	-
H	Did not participate	1	N	-
I	Did not participate	1	N	-

Reflecting further on my recruitment process, my ability to position myself as "from" the

Stratford area matters. Beyond motivating me to focus on LGBTQ+ experiences in the

area and framing the way that I approach this research and thesis, my status as someone

who is "from" St. Marys, whose family lives in St. Marys, and as someone who has a

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[6] It is jarring to think that it would be not only unethical but a potential violation of by-laws to meet up with participants and go on a walking interview as I did up until February 2020. We are living in a moment during which we cannot simply go and sit in coffee shops where I met many of my participants. It is interesting to think about how this radical shift in the way we interact with our everyday spaces and the way we conceptualize such relationships, affects our overall sense of place.

range of connections in the area was important to my process of recruiting participants. In the description of the *Beacon Herald* article, for example, I am positioned as a "St. Marys native" which frames me as a (potential) insider by emphasizing that I am from the community and familiar with the area. In the process of putting up recruitment posters at public locations, I would offer a brief explanation of my project and the purpose of the poster. I noticed that once I established that I was born and raised in St. Marys, I sometimes received a warmer reception and people seemed more willing to display my poster. While I grew up and have spent the majority of my life living in St. Marys, I lived in Stratford more recently and had the direct contact information of the reporter who I did an interview with about Stratford Pride Week in 2018. The connections I developed during my involvement in Stratford Pride Week 2018 were indispensable to my process of doing this research, but specifically to my process of connecting with participants.

2.2.2 Interviews

In total, I conducted 23 interviews with 21 participants over a period spanning June 2019 – February 2020. Of the 21 people who participated, 15 participants are currently living in the Stratford area and participated in either in-person walking or stationary interviews as part of phase one, and six participants are currently living outside of the Stratford area and participated in phone or online interviews as part of phase two.

As potential participants contacted me expressing interest in or asking for more information about the study, I sent them a response with the Letter of Information and Consent attached as a PDF file. While this worked well for almost all participants, there was one participant who could not access the PDF. I copied and pasted the text of the Letter of Information and Consent into the body of an email, which worked for this participant and allowed them to access the information. During my interview with this participant, we discussed their issues accessing the PDF and our discussion emphasized that there are limitations to relying on technology and tech-savviness to connect with potential participants. Once potential participants had a chance to review the Letter of Information and Consent and ask any questions, we set up a date, time, and location to meet for our interview. In all cases, I asked participants to choose a place to meet that was comfortable for them. In some cases, participants did not suggest a place and in that

event, I offered suggestions. On the day of an interview, I met participants at the time and place we discussed. I introduced myself and we reviewed and signed the Letter of Information and Consent. At that point, we started the audio recording and proceeded with the interview. Table 2 displays a summary of information about the interviews, including if the interview was walking or stationary, and if the participant lives in Stratford, St. Marys, or Perth County.

Table 2: Interview Overview

Participant	Month Interviewed	Phase	Walking (W), non-walking (N), phone (P), online (O)	Duration	Current Location:	Interview Starting Point:
Chris	June	1	N	45 mins – 1.5 hours	Stratford	home
Clay	June	1	W	Less than 45 minutes	Perth County	home
Natalie	June	1	W	45 mins – 1.5 hours	Perth County	workplace
Jane	July	1	W	45 mins – 1.5 hours	Perth County	home
Skylar	July & Jan	1	W/W	More than 1.5 hours	Stratford	home
Serena	July & Feb	1	W/N	45 mins – 1.5 hours	Stratford	coffee shop
Gloria	January	1	N	45 mins – 1.5 hours	Stratford	church
Steven	February	1	W	More than 1.5 hours	Stratford	home
Robert	February	1	W	45 mins – 1.5 hours	Stratford	home
Patrick	February	1	W	45 mins – 1.5 hours	Stratford	coffee shop
Drew	February	1	N	45 mins – 1.5 hours	Stratford	home
Sam	February	1	W	More than 1.5 hours	Stratford	home
Alex	February	1	W	45 mins – 1.5 hours	Stratford	home
Regan	February	1	W	45 mins – 1.5 hours	St. Marys	high school
Meredith	February	1	N	45 mins – 1.5 hours	St. Marys	home
Jack	January	2	P	45 mins – 1.5 hours	Left the area	online
Tina	January	2	O	Less than 45 minutes	Left the area	online
Aiden	January	2	P	45 mins – 1.5 hours	Left the area	online
Quinn	January	2	O	45 mins – 1.5 hours	Left the area	online
Trevor	January	2	O	45 mins – 1.5 hours	Left the area	online
Derek	January	2	O	45 mins – 1.5 hours	Left the area	online

2.2.3   Walking interviews

The specific method of walking research used in phase one of this study is semi-structured walking interviews. Walking interviews are interviews conducted "on the

move" and are considered well-suited to understanding sense of place and place attachment (Anderson, 2004; Clark & Emmel, 2010; Evan and Jones, 2011; Finlay and Bowman, 2017). In this study, the walking interview involves researcher and participant meeting and going on a walk together while the researcher asks questions to prompt discussion (Finlay and Bowman, 2017). By moving through the participants' everyday spaces, the interview has greater potential to be re-directed by people, places and things we encounter and to have a more affective dimension (Evan & Jones, 2011; Springgay and Truman, 2017). Vannini and Vannini (2017) emphasize that walking has the potential to "animate spatial and sensory dynamics which static modes of inquiry cannot quite scrutinize" (p. 179). Because walking is an embodied experience, it engages the senses: "looking, hearing, the feeling of being touched by air, rain, or other elements of the environmental atmosphere, and contact with changing aromas" (O'Neill and Roberts, 2020, p. 16). As I reflect on the practice of doing walking interviews, I explore the ways in which the walking interviews I conducted were re-directed by a range of encounters. Following the advice of Vannini and Vannini (2017), I endeavour to provide accounts of walking interviews that are "more kinesthetic, more vivid, more sensuous, and more entangled with the material world" throughout this thesis (p. 188).

By attending to a range of sensorial cues and being re-directed by the environment, walking interviews can facilitate an understanding of place that is dynamic and deeply interconnected with participants' social worlds, rather than understanding place as a static, bounded point on a map (Springgay and Truman, 2017; Evans and Jones, 2011; Porta et al., 2017). Finlay and Bowman (2017) suggest that the potential to elicit subjective responses to physical and social environments makes walking interviews well-suited to understand an individual's sense of place. The act of passing through environments brings what O'Neill and Roberts (2020) call, "'cues' – elements that stimulate our imagination, which we 'fit' within our previous remembered experience" and generates a range of affective responses (p. 36). Particularly given the focus on sense of place in my research, I am drawn to walking interviews for their potential to account for place in ways that traditional, stationary interviews cannot (Clark & Emmel, 2010).

I recognize critiques of the notion of "walking interviews", which includes arguments that challenge the efficacy and purpose of language like "method", "interview", and "data collection" (Vannini and Vannini, 2017, p. 187; Springgay and Truman, 2016). The crux of these arguments is that in operationalizing walking as an instrumental method, "the act of walking becomes detached from both body and place, and this reduces walking to a set of over-planned instrumental protocols and procedures" (Vannini and Vannini, 2017, p. 187). While I appreciate the spirit of these critiques, I believe that my approach to doing walking interviews addresses these concerns through a focus on affect and sense of place. I continue to use the language of walking interviews because I believe it provides participants and readers with a more immediate understanding of what is involved in this research: we go on a walk while conducting an interview. Further, "interview" is not the only complicated term involved in "walking interviews".

Walks are subject to the mobility of the researcher and participants and one of the demands of walking methods is to ensure the format is accessible to researchers and participants of all abilities to the greatest extent possible (O'Neill and Roberts, 2020). During an informal presentation on the methods for this project in a graduate Feminist Methodologies course, I received several questions about whether the term "walking" excludes or potentially excludes folks who cannot walk. In response to such concerns, which are also raised in literature on walking research (O'Neill and Roberts, 2020), I shifted the language from "walking" to "mobile" in an attempt to be more inclusive of the multitude of ways people move around their everyday places which includes, but is not limited to, walking. In practice, the language of "mobile interviews" became confusing as a few participants understood "mobile" to mean an interview conducted by phone, not on the move. My shift back to walking interviews is informed in part by the literature on walking research and the reality that my approach to this method is informed by work centered around walking. I recognize that people relate to and have varying access to participate in walking research and that one limitation of this method is that some people may be excluded from this research because of its emphasis on walking. However, the listed recruitment criteria did not specify the ability to walk and the fact that 5 of the 17 phase one interviews were not conducted as mobile or walking interviews suggests that

participants who are (potentially) unable to participate in the walking component still contacted me to participate in the study[7]. In future projects, I would explicitly indicate a willingness to accommodate a range of abilities in the letter of information and consent. O'Neill and Roberts (2020) emphasize that it is important to find ways to ensure issues with walking and mobility do not prevent someone's participation in a study. Particularly considering the historic and ongoing exclusion of disabled people from research that affects them, it is significant that walking methods are potentially contributing to such an exclusion (O'Neill and Roberts, 2020). With these reflections on walking and walking methods in mind, I turn to offer a description of my process of doing these semi-structured walking interviews.

As I note at the onset of this section, my approach to walking interviews is semi-structured. This means that my interview guide is semi-structured, but also that my approach to walking is semi-structured; in the sense that I did not establish a pre-determined route for any of the walking interviews. On a practical level, one reason for not using a predetermined route is that participants did not all share everyday spaces. Beyond that, I chose not to use a predetermined route because I am interested in how, where, and why participants move around Stratford, St. Marys and Perth Country. As much as possible, I let participants direct where we went, the pace we walked at, when we took breaks, and how we moved around. This was sometimes an implicit process, particularly with certain participants who are perhaps more confident and more willing to take control of the situation. In other cases, I had explicit moments of conversation with participants about where we would go or how we would get somewhere. Some participants had very clear ideas of places they wanted to take me while other participants were content to stroll around. I do not feel that either approach is necessarily more valuable but reflects both differences in participants as people, their relationships to places, their understandings of the study, the environments we walk through, and their motivations for participating in the study. My walks in Stratford (and St. Marys to a lesser extent), for example, required more explicit conversations about where we were

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[7] I address why they did not participate in the walking component of the interviews later in this chapter.

going and how we would get there as we navigated traffic, decided on routes, and had potential destinations in mind such as a café, the river, a school, a venue, or a house. During walks in the country or in smaller towns, however, we encountered little to no traffic, few other people, we had no particular destinations in mind and were content to meander around fields and stroll down dirt roads. The experience of going on a walk with participants was a valuable way to elicit a deeper understanding of their sense of place and how they relate to their everyday places.

The flexibility offered by semi-structured interviews allows the researcher to remain responsive to the context of each interview during a walk instead of trying to get through a set list of questions in a particular order, which may be forced and prohibit unanticipated findings from emerging (de Wit, 2013). de Wit (2013) emphasizes that such flexibility can create space for participants to direct the walk and the conversation and to express their thoughts about places. I developed my interview guide for phase one (Appendix A) with reference to Clark and Emmel (2010), de Wit (2013), and Manzo's (2005) work on researching sense of place. My interviews ranged in length from half an hour to over three and a half hours with some questions generating lengthy responses from some participants and almost no response from others. As I conducted the interviews, I made minor adjustments to the interview guide based on experience, feedback from participants, and which questions and topics seemed to be resonating with participants or emerging as more or less salient (Dunn, 2010). Overall, I found that my interview guide worked well to facilitate conversations about queerness and sense of place, community and belonging in the area.

As I mention above, 5 of the 17 interviews for phase one were conducted as stationary interviews instead of walking interviews. In one case, a participant was recovering from an injury and requested that we conduct the interview at their home, which is what we did. During our interview, they told me about three places of significance, which were the places they would have taken me to on our walk or drive if that is how we did the interview. This participant suggested that if the interview was at a different time of year and during a different season, they might be more able to participate in a walk. In three cases, when I met the participant to start our interview, they

requested that we do the interview at the location where we met instead of going on a walk for health and/or mobility related reasons and that is what we did. One of these three interviews was a follow up interview, meaning I had already conducted a walking interview with this participant several months prior. In one case, we did not explicitly address the decision to not walk. The interviews I conducted with the six phase two participants were also non-walking interviews. These interviews were also semi-structured and conducted virtually, with two interviews done over the phone, three using Zoom, and one using Skype.

The experience of going on walks with participants had a significant impact on the research relationship. The beginning of most of my walking interviews involved us figuring out where we were going to go and what route we wanted to take to get there, which allowed for an initial flow of conversation before progressing into the interview questions. In this way, the act of walking with someone lends itself well to building rapport and there is often a comfortability to walking and talking together that allows conversation to flow more easily than it might in a more traditional stationary interview format. Beyond that, there is some degree of connectedness required to walk with someone else. You have to be able to walk close enough to hear each other talk, to find a pace and rhythm that works well for both of you, to navigate directionally and also around any construction, geese, and other obstacles. Some participants took me to specific places in Stratford where they had significant experiences or connections, almost as if they were taking me on a tour. Other participants had fewer specific destinations in mind but would explain the significance of different places (shops, houses, parks, etc.) as we passed by them. The walking element has the potential to shift the dynamic of the interview by allowing the participant to take more control over where we go and also allowing them to redirect the interview as we encounter people, places, and environments during our walk. We encountered striking teachers, stopped to pet dogs they know, said hello to strangers passing by, walked through or sought out places that evoke memories, fished my interview guide out of the river, and a range of other activities that shaped the tone, content and feel of the interview in ways that are less likely to happen in a non-walking interview. Of course, there were also moments where we were interrupted or directed away from an interesting conversation in ways that would not have happened if

we were doing a non-walking interview. While all of my interviews (walking and non-walking) were fruitful and interesting encounters, I feel strongly that the walking component was a valuable facet of my approach to this research. Even in my interviews that were non-walking, the emphasis on walking and sense of place in the overall project facilitated a focus on place and movement – where they go, where they are (un)comfortable, how they get around, and what affects those experiences – in significant ways.

2.2.4   Thematic Analysis

The method I used to identify, analyze, describe and report themes in my interview data is reflexive thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006, 2019a, 2019b). Generally speaking, thematic analysis involves searching across a data set to find repeated patterns of meaning (Braun and Clarke, 2006). I recognize that there are multiple types of thematic analysis with the three most notable being reflexive thematic analysis, coding reliability approaches, and codebook approaches (Braun and Clarke, 2019b). My decision to use reflexive thematic analysis over other thematic analysis approaches is informed by Braun and Clarke's (2019a, 2019b) articulation of reflexive thematic analysis as a method that centers researcher subjectivity as well as their critiques of the positivist underpinnings of other thematic analysis approaches, and most notably coding reliability approaches. The kind of anti-positivistic epistemological and ontological positioning that reflexive thematic analysis demands complements my queer, feminist informed methodological framework. Considering the clarifications Braun and Clarke (2019a, 2019b) offer on reflexive thematic analysis, my process of doing coding and analysis followed Braun & Clarke's (2006) six phases of thematic analysis. Braun and Clarke (2019a, 2019b) emphasize that their six-phase model is a starting point and a guide for doing thematic analysis and not a rigid procedure that can be followed in an (in)correct way.

2.2.4.1   Familiarization with the data

The first phase of reflexive thematic analysis is becoming familiar with the data, which involved transcribing audio recordings of interviews, reviewing route annotations, re-

reading data closely as an entire set, and keeping notes on my initial ideas (Braun & Clarke, 2006). I transcribed all interviews using NVivo, which is a qualitative data analysis software program. While transcription is often conceptualized as a straightforward step in the research process, I am directed by work on critical methods which suggest reconceptualizing transcription as key phase of data analysis and an important interpretive act where meanings are created (Braun and Clarke, 2006; Chadwick, 2017; Vannini and Vannini, 2017). Chadwick (2017) argues for transcribing qualitative data in ways that maintain "the visceral force of speaking bodies" (p. 61) and Vannini and Vannini (2017) further this, noting that "in spite of all the talking, it is soundless textual transcriptions that can be found in the literature" (p. 182). This raises the question of the utility of walking interviews and how the environmental, sensory, embodied and non-textual elements of walking interviews risk being lost in the process of transcription and analysis (Chadwick, 2017; Vannini and Vannini, 2017). Chadwick (2017) emphasizes the importance of "bodily eruptions in speech (in the form of intonation, pitch, rhythm, laughter)" as a critical part of meaning-making and analysis (p. 61). Taking these arguments into account, I transcribed laughter and other non-verbal sounds in my transcripts and focused on engaging with the audio recordings, my reflexive notes and maps of walks and interviews as I iteratively work through my process of analysis and writing. Following Clark and Emmel (2010), I kept detailed notes in my reflexive journal about features in the environment being discussed, places, street names, and anything else of note throughout the process of doing the interviews and I was able to draw on these notes as I worked with transcripts. Being able to match a response with a location and further details is useful because it provides additional context to a participants' response and allows me to recall the interview more vividly as I work with the transcripts (Jones et al., 2008). By including my participation, my questions, and any sounds or reactions like laughter, my intent is to further contextualize the data and to foster engagement with the transcript as more than just a static text (Chadwick, 2017). When I finished transcribing interviews in April 2020, I read through all the transcripts in full to develop my familiarity with the entire data set.

2.2.4.2　Generating initial codes

The second phase in the thematic analysis process is generating initial codes, which involves producing initial codes from the data and organizing the data into meaningful groupings (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Tuckett, 2005). Codes are specific, capture a single idea in a segment of data, and serve as the "building blocks" of themes (Braun and Clarke, 2019a, p. 5). My conceptualization of coding and analysis is informed by Braun and Clarke (2019b), who argue that:

> Themes are analytic *outputs* developed through and from the creative labor of our coding. They reflect considerable analytic 'work,' and are *actively* created by the researcher at the intersection of data, analytic process and subjectivity. (p. 594)

Braun and Clarke's (2019b) emphasis on the creative labour of coding as active work resonates with the need to actively account for researcher subjectivity in all stages of the research process. My approach to coding was primarily inductive, which means that I identified and generated potential codes as I worked with the data and through the coding process without any pre-established codes. Although my approach was primarily inductive, I recognize that I have theoretical and methodological pre-suppositions that inevitably affect the way I coded the transcripts (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Notably, as I was coding, I found myself aware of the way that the theoretical framework I used for my thesis proposal directed my process of generating codes. For example, I was attentive to potential codes relating to concepts like place attachment, place satisfaction, and sense of community. However, congruent with my decision to conduct semi-structured interviews, my coding process was informed by a willingness to remain open to unanticipated themes and interpretations. In terms of the mechanics of this process, I used NVivo and went through each transcript individually, manually tagging data extracts with codes. Following Braun & Clarke's (2006, 2019a, 2019b) advice, I coded as much as possible in this phase, which included coding individual extracts of data with multiple codes as relevant. To enhance the depth of meaning and analysis, I coded extracts of data inclusively by keeping as much of the surrounding data as relevant in order to maintain context (Braun & Clarke, 2019b; Silverman, 2017).

After initially coding all 17 of the interviews from phase one, I generated a total of 335 distinct codes. At this point, I reviewed the codes by exporting a "codebook" from NVivo, which created a word document with a table showing a list of codes, how many files use that code, and how many times the code is used across the interviews (see Appendix F for phase one codebook). To make my coding process more efficient and manageable, I looked specifically at codes that were referenced only one to three times across all the interviews and when possible, I nested those codes within codes that were more relevant across the dataset. For each code with only 1-3 references, I used NVivo's word search function as a way of verifying that I was not missing any additional passages that could be included in that code. If the word search did not yield any additional references to a particular code, I nested the code. Following this process, I reviewed the primary codes, identified any codes that I considered to be quite interconnected, and nested one of the codes under the other. For example, I coded for both "staying in or 'being a hermit'" and "being an introvert." In practice, the reason for this is that some participants frame themselves as 'being a hermit' and/or talk about wanting to stay home while others explicitly talk about being introverts. While these two codes seem almost redundant, I did not want to collapse them because I felt there could be potentially meaningful distinctions between being an introvert and just wanting to stay in. By nesting "being an introvert" under "staying in or 'being a hermit,'" I maintained their potential distinction while streamlining my codes and making the data more manageable to work with. The codes that were nested during this stage are indicated in the phase one codebook (Appendix F). Of the 335 codes, 251 are primary codes and 84 are nested codes.

Once I completed coding the 17 phase one interviews, I proceeded to code the six phase two interviews. As I coded the phase two interviews, I used the codes already generated for the phase one interviews as they were relevant. Additionally, I continued to code inductively by generating new codes to reflect the material in the phase two interview transcripts. Across the six phase two interviews, I used a total of 203 codes. Of those 203 codes, 172 are primary codes and 31 are nested codes. I generated 19 new codes during the phase two coding process and used 183 of the 333 codes from the phase one codebook. At this point, I reviewed the codes by exporting a "codebook" for phase

two (Appendix G). Looking at the 19 new codes generated during the phase two coding process, most of them reflected that the phase two participants had lived in the Stratford at some point in their past but are currently living elsewhere. I completed the process of generating initial codes during May and June 2020.

2.2.4.3   Generating initial themes

After generating initial codes for the transcripts, I moved to the third phase of reflexive thematic analysis, which is generating initial themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2019a, 2019b). Braun and Clarke (2019b) recommend using the language and framing of "generating (initial) themes" rather than "searching for themes" as a way of emphasizing that themes are not 'in' the data, pre-existing analysis, awaiting retrieval" (p. 593; Braun and Clarke, 2006). Following Braun and Clarke (2019b), I conceptualize themes as "creative and interpretive *stories* about the data, produced at the intersection of the researcher's theoretical assumptions, their analytic resources and skill, and the data themselves" (p. 594). What this means is that I understand meaning and experience to be socially (re)produced and am interested in examining the sociocultural conditions that enable accounts (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2019a, 2019b; Clarke and Smith, 2015). During this phase, I grouped codes into potential themes and started to analyze how codes relate to one another (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Starting with the phase one interviews, my first step in the process of generating initial themes was to use NVivo's mind map feature. I sorted my list of primary codes by the number of times they were used throughout the dataset and then proceeded to go through the list starting with the most frequently used codes. I inductively generated themes based on codes in a process that involved sorting each code into groups of potential themes and giving tentative names to each theme. For example, my most used code is "perceptions of Stratford." I grouped this code under a theme tentatively named "how participants talk about the Stratford area." I continued through the list of codes, adding relevant and/or connected codes to that theme and creating new themes as necessary. In many cases, codes were sorted under two or more themes. At the end of this process, I generated 21 themes (Appendix H). My framing of "grouping codes into themes" is a deliberate reflection of Braun and Clarke's (2019b) rejection of the notion

that themes "emerge" from data. The problem with framing themes as "emerging" from the data implies this is something that happens passively, without or regardless of researcher involvement, in a way that obscures the role of researchers in shaping meaning. During the process of generating initial themes, I remained attentive to the interpretive work involved in developing themes in a "thematic analysis at the latent level" which examines the ideas, assumptions and ideologies underpinning the content of the data (Braun and Clarke, 2006, p. 84; 2019a, 2019b). Taking a constructionist approach to thematic analysis, I understand meaning and experience to be socially (re)produced and am interested in examining the sociocultural conditions that enable accounts (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2019a; Clarke and Smith, 2015).

My next step in generating initial themes was to review each of the 21 themes to identify any potential areas of overlap and which themes need to be broken down further. During this process, I generated a mind map for each theme and then, looking at the codes grouped under that theme, I brainstormed potential sub-themes and examined various ways the codes fit together under each theme. By the end of this process, I had 5 potential themes with multiple sub-themes (Appendix I). At the end of phase three, I created an initial "thematic map" as a way of examining cohering potential themes, the relationship between codes, between potential themes, and between levels of potential themes (Appendix J) (Braun and Clarke, 2006, pp. 89-90). I completed this phase in June 2020.

2.2.4.4   Reviewing themes

The fourth phase of thematic analysis is reviewing themes**,** which involves refining the themes identified during phase three (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Braun & Clarke (2006) note that while some potential themes might become themes, others will either have insufficient supporting data or will fold into one another to create a more relevant theme (2006). To qualify as a theme, data within the theme needs to be consistent and meaningful and there needs to be "clear and identifiable distinctions" between themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 91). As I reviewed my initial themes, it became clear that they were not sufficiently distinct from one another and that I needed to think further about the overall organization of themes. My process of reviewing the initial themes involved

reading carefully through all of the coded excerpts within each subtheme and making notes about the contents of each subtheme. From there, I thought about how participants' accounts relate to one another and the complicated ways in which all of my participants talk about their sense of place in the area. In consultation with my supervisor, I identified "liveability" as the overarching, central concept for my analysis and from there, I developed five central themes which I believe capture the crux of participants' accounts. The process of working through these themes involved writing at length about the way I understood participants' interviews and in particular, the ways in which they talk about their sense of being visible and accepted as ambiguous and precarious. At the end of this stage of the thematic analysis process, I was working with the following themes: negotiations of visibility & outness; acceptance as ambiguous; sense of place; perceptions of LGBTQ+ community; and how change happens.

2.2.4.5   Defining and naming themes

Phase five involves defining and naming themes in a process of identifying what each theme is about and what aspect of the data each theme speaks to (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The aim of the fifth phase is to clearly define the scope and content of each theme concisely and to produce clear, descriptive names for each theme (Braun & Clarke, 2006). As I worked with these five themes over the process of writing drafts of chapters, I considered the story told by each theme and how it relates to the overall data and my research questions (Braun & Clarke, 2006). At the end of this stage, my five central themes were as follows: negotiations of (in)visibility; ambiguous (in)tolerance; sense of place; perceptions of LGBTQ+ community; and how change happens (Appendix K).

2.2.4.6   Producing the report

The sixth stage is producing the report, which involves the final analysis and writing up of a report or, in this case, a thesis. The process of doing analysis in thematic analysis is recursive; the researcher immerses themselves in the data and moves back and forth between the entirety of the data set, specific coded extracts of data, and the analysis being produced (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Braun & Clarke (2006) emphasize that writing is an important part of analysis, not something that happens after analysis. I found that I wrote

out substantial drafts of chapters or substantial amounts of work that ended up becoming parts of chapters as I engaged in a process of thinking through the scope of each theme, how themes relate to one another, and to the dataset as a whole. My process of doing thematic analysis was quite iterative and by moving between the audio recordings, transcripts, specific coded extracts and an ongoing process of writing and analysis, I was able to produce a clearer overview of what my themes are, how they relate to one another, and the overall story being told about the interviews (Braun and Clarke, 2006).

2.3   Who are my participants?

In this section, I provide a brief overview of each of my participants, including their relationship to the LGBTQ+ acronym, their age, where and with whom they live and how long they have lived in the Stratford area. These descriptions are based on my understanding of participants from our interview encounters. As indicated on the letter of information and consent for this project, I selected pseudonyms for each participant.

2.3.1   Phase one participants

"Alex" is a non-binary gay person in her late teens who moved to Stratford during elementary school and went to high school in Stratford. Alex left Stratford to go to university and is currently at university.

"Chris" is a queer trans man in his early thirties who is currently living and working in Stratford. He grew up and went to high school in Perth County and has spent time living in Toronto as well as other places. Chris lives on his own in an apartment in Stratford.

"Clay" is a cis gay man in his late twenties who grew up in Perth County and went to high school in St. Marys. He left the area to go to university and has lived in a few different places. Clay currently lives with his parents in the country and spends most weekends in Toronto visiting his boyfriend.

"Drew" is a cis gay man in his late seventies who immigrated to Canada from Holland and moved to Stratford approximately thirty years ago. He lives on his own in a house in Stratford and continues to work as an artist.

"Gloria" is a cis gay woman in her early sixties who grew up in, went to high school in, and currently lives in Stratford. She left Stratford to go to university for a few years but has spent the majority of her life in Stratford. Gloria lives on her own in a house in Stratford.

"Jane" is a cis bi/pan woman in her late twenties who grew up in Perth County and went to high school in St. Marys. She lived at home with her parents while attending university and currently lives on her own in a house in the country.

"Meredith" is a cis bi/pan/queer woman in her forties who moved to St. Marys with her husband several years ago. She has spent time living in a variety of places before coming to St. Marys. Meredith and her husband live in a house in St. Marys.

"Natalie" is a cis gay woman in her mid-twenties who grew up and went to high school in Perth County. She currently works in Perth County and lives in a house with her partner and some of her partner's family.

"Patrick" is a cis gay man in his forties who grew up in and went to high school in Stratford. He moved to Toronto to go to college and lived in the GTA for several years. Patrick currently lives and works in Stratford.

"Regan" is a pansexual trans non-binary person in their mid-twenties living in St. Marys. Regan grew up and went to high school in St. Marys and has spent periods of time living away from St. Marys while at university.

"Steven" is a cis gay man in his early sixties who moved to Stratford approximately five years ago with his husband. Steven and his husband live in a house in Stratford.

"Robert" is a cis gay man in his early sixties who moved to Stratford with his husband. Robert and his husband live in a house in Stratford.

"Sam" is a non-binary person in their mid-twenties who grew up in and went to high school in Stratford. Sam has spent time traveling and working outside of the Stratford area and moved back to Stratford a few months before our interview. Sam lives with their family in Stratford.

"Serena" is a cis pan/queer woman in her late twenties who grew up in the area, went to high school in Stratford. Serena left Stratford to go to university and has spent time living outside the Stratford area. Serena currently works in and lives with her partner in Stratford.

"Skylar" is a trans lesbian in her early thirties who grew up in and went to high school in Stratford. She is currently living at/by her university.

2.3.2   Phase two participants

"Aiden" is a non-binary queer person who grew up in Stratford.

"Derek" is a cis gay man who grew up in Perth County.

"Jack" is a cis gay man who grew up in Stratford.

"Quinn" is a non-binary person who lived in Stratford for many years.

"Tina" is a cis bi woman who grew up in St. Marys.

"Trevor" is a cis gay man who grew up in Perth County.

2.4   The Stratford area

Figure 1: Map of the Stratford area (Google, n.d.)

When I refer to "the Stratford area" I am referring to the City of Stratford, the Town of St. Marys and Perth County (figure 1). Perth County, located in Southwestern Ontario, encompasses the Municipality of North Perth, the Township of Perth East, the Township of Perth South, the Municipality of West Perth. Including the Town of St. Marys, the City of Stratford and the municipalities that make up Perth County, the area has a total population of roughly 76796 (Statistics Canada, 2016c, 2016d, 2016e). As Figure 1 depicts, the major population centers in Perth County are Stratford with a population of around 30 000 people, St. Marys with a population of around 8000 people, followed by the towns of Mitchell, Milverton, Atwood and Listowel.

According to the Stratford Tourism website, Stratford "began" in 1828 when the Canada Company surveyed Huron Road. According to the website:

The Canada Company had been formed in 1824, when the government of Upper Canada was granted a million acres of land to settle. The district was known as the Huron Tract and included what is now Stratford and most of Perth County. (Stratford Tourism, 2020)

The use of passive voice in this description means it remains ambiguous *who* granted the million acres of land to the government of Upper Canada and on whose authority. The lack of active framing of this process of dispossessing Indigenous land to "settle" or, rather, colonize the area facilitates a warm history of Stratford and the surrounding area that centers on industry, progress, and development. Stratford incorporated as a village in 1854, became a town in 1859 and a city in 1885 (Stratford Tourism, 2020). Drawing on the logic of *terra nullius,* such a framing actively erases the presence of peoples and cultures who have been living in what we now know as "the Stratford area" long before 1828. In the accounts of my participants, the notion that Europeans came and "settled" the area in the mid 1800s is framed varyingly as part of family histories or part of participants' overviews of the area. However, it is paramount to maintain an awareness of the way that the "settlement" of Stratford and the "acquisition" of the land on which the Stratford area exists today was not a neutral process of building civilization where nothing existed before. An example of such recognition is provided on the Stratford Festival Theatre website where the "About Us" page begins with a land acknowledgement that recognizes that:

> This territory is governed by two treaties. The first is the Dish With One Spoon Wampum Belt Covenant of 1701, made between the Anishinaabe and the Haudenosaunee Confederacy, an agreement to set violence aside and peacefully share and care for the land in the Great Lakes Basin. The second is the Huron Tract Treaty of 1827, an agreement made by 18 Anishinaabek Chiefs and the Canada Company, an agency of the British Crown. (Stratford Festival, 2020)

Beyond this recognition, the Stratford Festival website emphasizes their ongoing responsibility to learn and to be better treaty partners. Considering the focus on sense of place in this thesis, I make an effort to maintain an awareness that this is a project on settler-LGBTQ+ folks' sense of place. My participants' and my own relationship to the area and the ways we take up space in the area cannot be separated from ongoing processes of colonization through which the Stratford area and its histories are sustained.

At the outset of this project through to the point of conducting the interviews, I used the language of "Perth County" rather than "the Stratford area" because my intention was to focus primarily on the more rural areas within Perth County rather than on Stratford and St. Marys. However, as I recruited and interviewed participants, I found that most participants live in Stratford and thus, I shifted the language to reflect this. It was particularly challenging to connect with participants who live outside of Stratford and St. Marys in Perth County. While I reflect further on the way that participants talk about a lack of centralized, identifiable LGBTQ+ spaces and services in the area in Chapter 5, my process of recruiting participants itself suggests the absence or elusiveness of such networks and/or communities. Furthermore, and as I discuss earlier in this chapter, some potential participants who lived in smaller areas had concerns about anonymity that prevented them from participating in this research. All of this suggests that while LGBTQ+ people living in more rural parts of the Stratford area exist, they may be difficult to connect with and there may be barriers to their participation in walking interviews or any kind of interview research. The shift from "Perth County" to "the Stratford area" is an accurate reflection of my research process; at the same time, it is also a reflection on the state of LGBTQ+ community and networking outside of Stratford in the Perth County. As Table 2 reflects, the majority of my participants live Stratford with only 5 living elsewhere.

2.4.1   How do participants describe the Stratford area?

2.4.1.1   Perth County[8] and St. Marys

> It's a fairly nice community, I guess … After a while it's kind of like everybody knows everybody in a sense. Familiar faces. A lot of memories. (Natalie)

> It's, yeah. I'd just say quiet, I'm kind of a bit of a hermit here on the farm while I'm here. (Clay)

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[8] By discussing Perth County at a general level, my intention is to offer more anonymity to participants by not identifying their particular locations within Perth County.

> I don't like that it's always light [in the city]. I don't like that when it gets nighttime you can't see the stars. I don't like that it's noisy. I don't like that there's people everywhere. (Jane)

Perth County is described as familiar, quiet, as somewhere people have space and can see the stars. In describing what she does not like about living in the city, Jane emphasizes the things that keep her in Perth County, which include being able to see the stars at night, that it is quiet and that she has space to herself. Perth County also is described by participants who live there and by participants who live in Stratford, as being more conservative than Stratford, generally and politically. Whether linked to perceptions of conservativism or not, participants also note the predominance of farming and farmland in Perth County. Perth County – along with St. Marys and Stratford – is described as being relatively white and Christian, which I discuss in greater detail in the next section. St. Marys is also generally described as somewhere that is small and quiet:

> As a kid I hated it. It was really small … But there are many things about growing up here that I love. The public library, we're coming up to actually, has always, that's somewhere my parents had brought me. (Regan)

> I love it. It's a nice little community. It's really pretty. I mean, it's got its foibles, clearly, every small town does. In general, I really like living down there … for St. Marys wise, it's probably one of the nosier areas because we're right across from [redacted]. So, we've got actual traffic … But it's okay. Overall, it's quiet. (Meredith)

Regan's description of St. Marys emphasizes how our relationships to place are complicated, dynamic, and connected with significant people and places. Meredith draws attention to the fact that, while quiet, St. Marys does have areas with more traffic and noise. In their descriptions of Perth County and St. Marys, participants tend to focus on themes of familiarity, quietness, and familial connections. In general, participants did not spend much time talking about their general perceptions of Perth County and St. Marys

compared to the amount of time many participants who live in Stratford spent talking about Stratford.

2.4.1.2   Stratford

In discussing this research, one of the first things I often have to address is whether research on LGBTQ+ experiences is warranted in Stratford because of the presence of the theatre, pride flags downtown, and assumptions that lesbians and gays likely feel quite comfortable and welcome in Stratford[9]. Throughout this thesis I endeavour to account for the presence and effects of the Stratford Festival Theatre[10], the vibrant downtown, and the arts scenes in Stratford more generally. However, as some of my participants note, a risk of these assumptions is that Stratford might be seen as resting on its laurels when it comes to LGBTQ+ acceptance and community. Because of the presence of the theatre and deep associations between the theatre and LGBTQ+ people and gay men in particular, there is sometimes an assertion that Stratford *is* LGBTQ+ friendly without much consideration to what that means in folks' everyday lives and moreover, that there are many people in the Stratford area who are not connected to the theatre and the assumed LGBTQ+ friendly lifestyle that is linked to it. Notably, not all of my participants have attended a show or event at the theatre. There are several potential reasons for this, including that they might not have an interest in theatre and the arts, that the shows do not appeal to them, that the tickets are too expensive, or that they work long hours and live a lifestyle where they theatre is not on their radar. While the theatre and the arts scene in Stratford is undoubtedly part of some participants' sense of place, its effects cannot be assumed or taken for granted.

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[9] My initial response to this is typically, "*Which* gays and lesbians?"

[10] The Stratford Festival is "North America's largest classical repertory theatre company. Each season [they] present a dozen or more productions in four distinctive venues" (Stratford Festival, 2020).

While the theatre is certainly a prominent feature of the Stratford area, there are many other features and characteristics that participants talk about as they describe it as a place:

> Stratford is still a sort of strangely divided city, in my experience. It's like a pie with wedges. One wedge is the old families who settled here and are fourth and fifth generation … Another, of course, is the theatre. I mean, these are both big wedges, right? And if you're not a theatre person, you also don't really get in there very easily … Then, the wedge where I fit in, because I had, until this past September, a little shop to sell my art in my home … I ended up being kind of in with the bed and breakfast people and the shop people and some of the restaurant people, a lot of whom are not born and bred in Stratford but have come here and chosen to live here … Then there is the segment of the pie which, for lack of a better word, blue collar people who used to or still work in the factories and that area … Each of those wedges tends to be a little bit separate. And then there's a growing wedge, which is retirees … I am now moving into that wedge a fair bit. (Drew)

Drew's detailed explanation of how he understands Stratford as having multiple wedges provides insight into not only his perception of Stratford but specifically the way that the multiple communities that make up Stratford are not discrete; people may be part of or socialize within multiple communities and can also move between groups as their life circumstances change and as they age. As I explore in more detail in Chapter 4, participants' sense of place and community where they live are co-constitutive with their subjectivities and histories. Your experience of Stratford will be different, as Drew suggests, depending on if you are running a bed and breakfast downtown and are connected to the downtown business community or if you are working at a factory. Again, my intention is not to suggest that people who work at factories and people who run B&Bs are necessarily very different people but that the kinds of social contexts and environments they are navigating on a daily basis might be different in ways that matter.

Several participants talk about a "class divide" in Stratford as something that is both significant and sometimes overlooked. Building on the way that Drew identifies multiple, somewhat overlapping communities as making up the area, Serena talks about her perception of the chasm between local working-class families and the arts/downtown side of Stratford:

> And definitely there's clashes between all of those classes, and I think it's more evident here than it is in other cities, the class divide. And I've had people argue against that for me and I'm like, 'No. There is a class divide.' … even things like The Hub and Bentley's versus Okazu and Braai House[11]. There are people who will go to one and not the other. (Serena)

In the context of Stratford, I understand these perceived divides and potential tensions between the working-class and the more artistic/theatre communities as central to the way that my participants talk about it as a place. In addition to arts-class/working-class, another division that several participants draw on is a division between liberal/conservative. Throughout my interviews, it becomes clear that Stratford is regarded as the more liberal center of the area and that while there are conservative people living in Stratford, the areas surrounding Stratford in Perth County tend to be classified as more conservative. Data about how people living in Stratford, St. Marys and other areas of Perth County voted in the 2015 federal election supports this perspective (Elections Canada, 2015). Table 3 contains information I aggregated from the Elections Canada website about the results of the federal election in 2015 in the Perth-Wellington riding[12]:

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[11] The Hub, Bentley's, Okazu and Braai House are all restaurants located in downtown Stratford.

[12] Stratford, St. Marys and Perth County are part of the Perth-Wellington riding. I aggregated the data about polling stations located in Stratford, St. Marys and Perth and omitted those located in Wellington (Elections Canada, 2015).

	Stratford	St. Marys	Perth*
Christian Heritage Party	0.86	0.9	1.8
Conservative	28.1	37.3	52.5
Green Party	2.3	2.6	2.4
Liberal	47.4	42.8	30.5
NDP	20.6	16.1	12.2
No Affiliation	0.45	0.3	0.39

*West Perth, Perth South, Sebringville, Perth East, North Perth, Mitchell, Milverton and Millbank

Table 3: Results from the 2015 federal election

As is suggested by participants, this data reflects that Stratford is, politically, the liberal center of the area. While this election saw Perth-Wellington elect a conservative candidate, only 28.1% of voters in Stratford cast their vote for the conservative candidate compared to 37.3% in St. Marys and 52.5% in other parts of Perth County. This data reflects participants' suggestions that Stratford is the liberal center of the area with the surrounding areas in Perth County being more conservative. Underlying these discussions are assumptions about which groups of people are accepting, with conservatives being constructed as antagonistic toward LGBTQ+ people and liberals as more likely to be accepting. While this was the perspective reflected by the majority of my participants, I also recognize that a few participants critique the kind of liberal attitude they see characterizing the area and in doing so, challenge the notion that liberal ideologies are necessarily going to bring about the kind of change that LGBTQ+ people want and need.

In terms of notions of urban and rural space, many participants recognize that while Stratford is classified as a city, it does not have what they understand as an "urban" feel. The reasons for this are multiple but tend to relate to a lack of amenities, entertainment, and a lower population density. In comparison to the rest of the area, Stratford is described as the central hub, as offering more services, businesses, and things to do, particularly in the summer during peak tourist season. However, in relation to places like Toronto, Stratford is described as having a slower pace, as being quieter and more conservative. Notably, a few participants temporalize the difference in feel between

Stratford and Toronto, noting that Stratford feels ten years behind major cities, particularly when it comes to issues like LGBTQ+ acceptance and anti-racism. These descriptions of Stratford speak to the way that, while it is a city, participants do not think of it as a cosmopolitan place. As I engage with participants' accounts throughout the chapters that follow, the way that participants talk about their sense of the area will become clearer.

Again, while Stratford is a city and is not "rural", the accounts of my participants inform my understanding of Stratford as somewhere that is also not "urban" in the sense that it lacks the higher population density, diversity, anonymity and other features that tend to characterize cities. The demographic profile on the City of Stratford's website highlights that "Stratford offers a unique balance of big-city sophistication and small-town values". I posit that visible LGBTQ+ people are complexly positioned as both an exemplar of "big-city sophistication" and as in tension with "small-town values". Stratford is internationally known for the Stratford Festival Theatre and arts scene, which is likely part of its "big-city sophistication" and its urban appeal. The small-town values, on the other hand, might be what allows Stratford to maintain its slower pace and charm but might also be what informs a sense that it is "behind" bigger cities, as some of my participants suggest. While there are other ways this could be interpreted, the framing of Stratford as a mixture of "big-city sophistication" and "small-town values" may also reinscribe the kind of division my participants describe, where Stratford is imagined to be split between those who are artistic/liberal/urban and those who are working-class/conservative/rural.

Another way that participants talk about the Stratford area is as heteronormative. In the following chapters, I examine how participants' accounts speak to a certain level of heteronormativity persisting in the area and affecting their experiences, their negotiations of (in)visibility and acceptance and their sense of place. My understanding of the way heteronormativity manifests in the Stratford area is also informed by discourses about the area as framed on the City of Stratford website, for example. Figure 2 displays a chart that is available on the city's website about the demographic profile of Stratford:

Population Characteristics (2012 Estimate)

Type of Family Structure	Quantity
Husband and wife families	7,529
Lone-parent families	1,608
Average number persons per family	2.9
Average number of children at home	1.0

Figure 2: Population characteristics of Stratford (City of Stratford, 2020)

While Stratford purports to be somewhere that is LGBTQ+ friendly, structuring a table about a city's population characteristics in a way that erases the presence and even the possibility of (or at least the willingness to recognize) families other than "husband and wife families" and "lone parent families" is not an LGBTQ+ friendly move. Another chart on the same webpage displays demographic information by "age and sex" where sex is constructed as a binary between males/females. While this is not an uncommon practice in demography, such charts reinforce and reiterate the heteronormativity, and cisnormativity, of the Stratford area. Interestingly, no information about race or religion is provided on this webpage. Although this data is dated, it is what is currently available on the city's website in such a way that suggests an absence of LGBTQ+ people and couples in the area. Updating this kind of demographic information to reflect the presence or at least the possibility of something other than "husband and wife families" and "males or females" would not only more accurately represent the demographic makeup of the area but would also provide any LGBTQ+ residents or anyone considering moving to the area with a sense that LGBTQ+ people are counted and recognized as families and people in the area. My participants' accounts suggest that it is common for people to research the websites of local governments, churches, service providers and so on as they decide where to move. Thus, having LGBTQ+ friendly information available on such websites is impactful.

2.4.2 Race, religion and place

Within rural studies, particularly in the context of the United States, it is widely acknowledged that there is a deep association between whiteness and rurality and a need to challenge the tendency to dismiss race and racism because of an imagined absence of people of colour (Agyeman & Spooner, 1997; Holloway, 2007; O'Connell, 2010; Panelli et al., 2009; Sibley, 1997). Urban spaces are constituted as diverse, multicultural spaces because they are positioned in relation to rural spaces, which are constituted as homogeneous, white, and less tolerant (O'Connell, 2010; Panelli et al., 2009). Although this configuration constructs rural space as backward or as left behind, it also reinforces the positioning of rural spaces as "idyllic, safe places that uphold true Canadian (white) values" contrary to the multicultural values in urban settings (O'Connell, 2010, p. 542). Holloway (2007) emphasizes that the construction of the rural as a safe space for whiteness reinforces the assertion that an absence of people of colour means that rural spaces are "untroubled by 'race relations'" (p. 8). O'Connell uses the example of redneck culture in Ontario to emphasize the racism underlying some white, rural subjectivities and to draw attention to the way that whiteness is a gendered, classed identity (2010, p. 545). Further, as Gray (2009) emphasizes, certain strategies of accessing belonging through claims of sameness – as "just another local" – are only accessible to some LGBTQ+ folks who are able to successfully sustain such claims to belonging (p. 37; Abelson, 2016).

For Abelson (2016), the question is not why some rural trans people fare worse than their urban counterparts but "which transgender people integrate into rural communities?" (1536). Abelson (2016) argues that for some trans men "normative rural identity and rural sameness are articulated through the performance of rural working-class masculinities and whiteness" (1536). Abelson (2016) offers three possible explanations for some trans men's sense of acceptance, which are that "they are not identifiable as transgender in most settings"; "when trans men can make other claims to rural sameness, their transgender identity is accepted or at least tolerated"; and/or "the possibility of trans men is unbelievable to some rural people even when right in front of them" (1536). In any of these situations, Abelson (2016) emphasizes that not all trans

men will be able to make such claims to rural sameness, a point she underscores with an emphasis on the way shared whiteness and an adherence to and validation of a particular kind of rural masculinity facilitates belonging. Further, these ways of accessing belonging tend to work with/in heteronorms rather than against them. It is imperative to maintain an awareness that live and let live is not a strategy that is equally accessible, desirable, or liveable for all LGBTQ+ people and that it insufficiently challenges systemic heteronormativity, and thus is unable to resolve the (in)visibility dilemma.

In multiple interviews, participants discuss whiteness and racism in ways that provide for further understanding of how participants understand the Stratford area. Quinn reflects:

> Stratford is a very white place. I feel like it is a very cis, het centric place. And there's a surprising amount of religion there that I don't necessarily see on a day-to-day basis now in Toronto and that I don't think I encountered that much growing up in Brantford[13]. I definitely noticed a difference in cultural diversity. I mean, when I lived in Brantford, my first three friends were not white. I don't think I had a white friend until I was actually in grade 3. And in Stratford I think I probably had one or two non-white friends the entire time I was there, so it was definitely a little bit of a shock. And I didn't really take that in until I got older and I kind of looked back on it. (Quinn)

Phase two participants talked more about their perceptions of the Stratford area as white, which is often something they discuss becoming more apparent after having left Stratford, as Quinn suggests above. This perspective, which is common among most participants, is also reinforced by statistics about the area. According to Stratford's Census Profile for 2016, less than 10% of the total population of Stratford is a "visible minority[14]" or a member of an "Aboriginal population" (Statistics Canada, 2016e). In

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[13] Brantford is a city in southwestern Ontario with a population of around 97 500 located approximately an hour from Stratford (Statistics Canada, 2016a).

[14] The definition of visible minorities used by Statistics Canada is any "persons, other than Aboriginal peoples, who are non-Caucasian in race or non-white in colour" (Statistics Canada, 2016b).

comparison, around 16% of London's[15] population, 51% of Toronto's population and 22% of Canada's population belong to a visible minority group according to Statistics Canada data from 2016 (Statistics Canada 2017a, 2017b). While phase two participants talk about their sense of there being "only white people, all the people of colour you could count on your hands" when they were growing up in Stratford, they have observed or know of more people of colour visible in Stratford now, which gives them hope that the area is becoming a more liveable place for people of colour (Aiden).

Thinking further about race and racism in the Stratford area, I want to draw attention to an increase in dialogue about racism and anti-racism in the area in 2020. In late June 2020, a local Black man took a photo of a confederate flag displayed in a window in an apartment in Stratford, which ignited a debate and incited hateful, racist comments and discourse on social media (Maxwell, 2020). Maxwell's (2020) piece for the CBC emphasizes the need for more conversations about racism and anti-racism and that more anti-racist action is needed in the Stratford area. However, when the mayor of North Perth, Todd Kasenberg, raised a motion to establish a "diversity and inclusivity" committee for Perth County in early December 2020, this motion was dismissed without receiving a seconder (Simmons, 2020b). While comments from other council members suggest that their refusal to take up the motion was not motivated by ideological opposition to the motion but a lack of "appetite to form a formal committee at this point in time," a message sent by this refusal is that diversity and inclusivity are not priorities in Perth County (Miller, 2020; Simmons, 2020b). The Perth County council passed a motion to draft a charter on anti-racism and inclusivity in late January 2021 (Simmons, 2021). However, this unfolding discussion points to clear, ongoing issues regarding racism and white supremacy in the Stratford area that are not being sufficiently addressed.

Beyond talking about the area as being a "very white place", other participants talk about being aware of "subtle racism", of their parents or their parent's friends saying

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[15] London is a city in southwestern Ontario with a population of around 384 000 located approximately just under an hour from Stratford (Statistics Canada, 2016b)

racist things, and/or a sense that some people in the area are "scared of people who are Muslim". In addition to being somewhere participants describe as having mostly white people, the Stratford area is also described as a place where "everyone is Christian" and, as Quinn notes above, there is a "surprising amount of religion". As I move into my discussion and analysis of these interviews in the following three chapters, I continue to think about how it matters that participants perceive the area as overwhelmingly white and Christian, not least because of the church's historic and in many cases ongoing persecution of LGBTQ folks and also because of how shared whiteness shapes sense of place, community, belonging and wellbeing in the area (Abelson, 2016).

2.5   Overview of chapters

Through a process of reviewing codes, themes, writing with coded excerpts, and discussion with my supervisor, I worked to find a way to frame and capture the complexity of how participants talk about their experiences in and feelings toward the Stratford area. One of the most challenging aspects of working with these interview transcripts is the complex and nuanced ways in which participants talk about their sense of place and their connections to the area. Chapters 3 and 4 are part of a complicated conversation about sense of place and liveability. In Chapter 3, my focus is on factors, perceptions, and experiences that point to moments and ways that the Stratford area is or becomes less liveable for participants. Chapter 3 is about the limits of comfort zones and the way that participants talk about negotiating (in)visibility and (in)tolerance, and the potential costs and affective work involved in becoming visible. In Chapter 4, I shift my focus to a discussion about what makes the area feel more liveable for participants. While I maintain a focus on the way that participants are engaged in ongoing negotiations of (in)visibility and (in)tolerance, my objective in Chapter 4 is to demonstrate how such negotiations are not necessarily negative but also can be sites of empowerment, resistance and transformation. My discussion of the way that participants talk about and conceptualize LGBTQ+ community starts in Chapter 4 and continues into Chapter 5, where I look at the ways that participants talk about how change happens and their hopes for the future. In Chapter 6, I return to the concepts of the (in)visibility dilemma, comfort zones, and liveability in more detail as I consider how the Stratford area might become

more liveable for more LGBTQ+ folks based on the accounts of my participants. As phase two participants recognize during our interviews, their perceptions of the area are based on their experiences living there several, if not many, years ago, and their typically infrequent visits since. In the chapters that follow, I engage primarily with my interviews with phase one participants and draw on my phase two interviews to develop and extend discussion.

Chapter 3

3   Ambiguous Acceptance and Visibility

In this chapter, I offer an interpretation of the way that participants talk about their sense of ambiguous acceptance and the need to negotiate their (in)visibility. Based on my understanding of participants' accounts, I posit a dilemma around LGBTQ+ (in)visibility and (in)tolerance: LGBTQ+ people avoid taking up space as visibly LGBTQ+ people or couples and remain invisible or less visible to avoid issues, harassment and/or intolerance; as a consequence, they can never be sure if there is or would have been an issue or not. The presence of intolerance is never confirmed or disproven but remains ambiguous, affecting their experiences and the way they move around and take up space in the Stratford area. I proceed in the first section of this chapter by considering how participants talk about a sense of ambiguity surrounding how they are read by others. In the second section of this chapter, I consider how participants talk about their experiences of places in the area and specifically how participants monitor or manage their (in)visibility and outness, both as individuals and in their relationships. In the final section, I focus on the way that participants talk about the potential costs of becoming visible and taking up space as LGBTQ+ people in the Stratford area.

3.1   Ambiguity and relational identities

The way that participants talk about their sense of being out or visible as LGBTQ+ people in the Stratford area suggests a certain level of ambiguity. In my theoretical framework, I draw on Malatino's (2019) work on queer embodiment to think about identity not as "a substantive possession that [he] could somehow seek and claim" but as something that is "claimed by exterior readings of [his] identity, readings that were wildly contradictory" (p. 29). Thus, Malatino (2019) conceptualizes identity as "something constantly negotiated within and across different milieus, as something that *feels* extraordinarily intimate but is in fact trans-individual[16], in some respects radically

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[16] Malatino uses "trans-individual" to mean that identity is beyond the control of individuals and is better conceptualized as something that is happening between individuals.

impersonal" (p. 29). This understanding of identity – and gender and sexuality in particular – as negotiated, co-constructed, and part of a constant process of becoming – frames the way I make sense of participants' accounts. As I consider how participants talk about feeling visible and/or invisible in the Stratford area, I posit that a cycle of perpetual (re)reading, and an ongoing negotiation of identities sustains a sense of ambiguous (in)visibility among participants. I proceed in this section by looking at moments in my interviews where participants express a sense of ambiguous (in)visibility, which includes experiences of being misrecognized.

3.1.1   "If you're around here you're straight": Presumptions of heterosexuality

There's queer men everywhere. They're just afraid. And I'm sure there's as many ladies, it's just not as obvious. And because they've been repressed for so many years, they have no way to self-identify or they don't feel comfortable, so you just think, 'Oh, that's two straight lady friends', but really, they're like a loving couple, they just are afraid to show it. Because that's how they've been trained. (Chris)

I'm not sure if I really know anyone gay in the area to be honest with you. Yeah, I can't say I really know anyone that I- [D: There's definitely a presumption of heterosexuality?] Yeah for sure, you kind of assume. Or other people assume. If you are around here, you're straight, I think. Everyone kind of assumes everyone's straight it seems like. (Jane)

In this excerpt, Chris[17] suggests that there are more LGBQ+ people in Stratford than one might realize and that LGBQ+ people are being misread as heterosexual people or couples. The way that Chris talks about how there are more queer people and couples in Stratford than we see suggests a certain level of heteronormativity in the area. Chris' description of queer people as "afraid" and "repressed" recognizes the effects of a sense of potential intolerance and discrimination. If it does not feel safe or comfortable for people to be out or to take up space as queer, they are unlikely to do so. When Chris

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[17] Chris is a queer trans man living in Stratford.

suggests that some LGBQ+ people may "have no way to self-identify" and/or that they "don't feel comfortable" this informs the (in)visibility dilemma, which I discuss above. A lack of visible LGBTQ+ presence may contribute to a sense of discomfort or fear and may make it more difficult for people to cultivate their identities because of a lack of role models and representations. According to Chris, some LGBTQ+ people in the Stratford area "pass maybe on purpose, maybe by accident." This observation draws attention to intent and that the way that people identify themselves may be overridden by how others make sense of their identity. Returning to Malatino's (2019) analysis on the relationality of identity, Chris' comments illustrate how the ways people identify us are beyond our control.

When Chris notes "that's how they've been trained", "trained" might refer to the presence of fear or discomfort, having experienced violence and harassment, and/or concern about how their reputation might be affected. Chris is acknowledging that it is not just an accident or coincidence that LGBQ+ people in the area may be unwilling to take up space as LGBQ+ in Stratford. I return to this notion of "being trained" in the next section of this chapter as I consider how participants talk about negotiating public displays of affection and how, where, and when they are willing to take up space as visibly LGBQ+ couples in the Stratford area. Chris' comments also indicate that it is not just fear on the part of LGBQ+ people that informs a sense of ambiguous outness but an active heteronormativity that informs a willingness to see heterosexual people and relationships and not queer ones.

Jane's[18] comment also speaks to the presence of heteronormativity as she acknowledges both a lack of visible and/or known gay people in her immediate area and the pervasiveness of presumptions of heterosexuality in the area. While Chris suggests there are more queer people than he knows or sees because they are passing for whatever reason, Jane notes that she does not know any other gay people living in the area. It is important that Chris lives within Stratford while Jane lives in a rural area outside of St.

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[18] Jane is a cis bi/pan woman living outside of St. Marys.

Marys. Jane is speaking specifically about not knowing gay people in her rural area; she does know LGBTQ+ people in Stratford. Jane emphasizes that she does not *know* anyone gay in the area, not that no gay people exist in the area. By emphasizing this, Jane recognizes the possibility that such assumptions might not always be accurate. Some of the people who are being read by Jane or by others as being heterosexual might actually be LGBTQ+. However, by virtue of living in a more rural area ("if you're around here, you're straight"), it seems less likely. Jane's comment, "if you're around here, you're straight" links place and identity and provides some context for the level of heteronormativity participants describe in the area. Both Jane and Chris' comments provide a sense that assumptions of heterosexuality are being made even among people who are LGBTQ+. According to Chris and Jane, heterosexuality operates as the default, natural or neutral state of people living in Stratford and Perth County.

"Derek"[19] also talks about how being made to feel "wrong" made coming out more difficult:

> It just took me a long time to get comfortable with that [coming out] because in every aspect of my upbringing, whether it was the church, whether it was school, whether it was 4-H[20], I was wrong. (Derek)

In this passage, Derek talks about how "every aspect of [his] upbringing" gave him a sense he was "wrong" for being gay. Just as Chris and Jane talk about heterosexuality being the default state of people living in the area, Derek expresses his sense of not only presumptions of heterosexuality, but an active heteronormativity that demands heterosexual subjects and declares anything other than heterosexuality wrong, abnormal and/or deviant. Derek's reflections provide an understanding of how growing up in an environment dominated by heteronormativity, traditional gender roles, and a sense that being gay is wrong makes it difficult to come out and to be out in the area.

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[19] Derek is a cis gay man who grew up in Perth County and lives in the GTA.

[20] 4-H is a "not-for-profit organization that is focused on strong leadership for world-class positive youth development experiences in Canada" (4-H Canada, 2020).

The way that Alex[21] and Clay[22] talk about experiences in which they are assumed to be heterosexual further demonstrates how heteronormativity acts and is enacted:

> I wanted birth control, not for like, birth control, but other reasons and they're like, 'Are you using contraception?' And it's like, 'Well, I'm with a girl. I don't know what kinds of things you want me to use.' And she's like, 'Oh, I don't know then'. (Alex)

> I work in a quite ... heavily hetero arena, working in the trades … lots of straight men, very few women. I remember times where I've been talking to someone I work with closely and knows I'm gay, about something with my partner and another guy at work overheard and said, 'Oh are you talking about your girlfriend?' And I just said, 'Yeah.' [D: Yeah, it's just easier not to have-] Yeah, no need ... I just don't want to have to have that conversation with someone I don't really know. (Clay)

Alex's anecdote about being at the doctor reinforces the notion that there is a certain level of heteronormativity affecting participants' experiences. Alex makes herself visible as non-heterosexual to the doctor in response to a question about her use of contraception because a request for birth control often comes with assumptions about the person making the request, notably that they are likely a cis woman and that they are engaging in particular kinds of sex with a partner of the "opposite" sex. In Alex's case as a non-binary person, neither of these two assumptions is true. My understanding of Alex's account of this experience is that this doctor not only assumed Alex is cis and heterosexual, but also that the doctor is not providing Alex with potentially important information about sexual health. It is inadequate for a doctor to respond "I don't know then" in this context. The doctor would ideally be able to offer information and resources about sex and sexuality for non-heterosexual people and an inability to do so reinforces a certain level of heteronormativity. Alex also notes that she is interested in information

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[21] Alex is a non-binary gay person living in Stratford.

[22] Clay is a cis gay man living outside of St. Marys.

such as the effect that a medication like birth control might have on her body and specifically her hormone levels, which may have implications for her gendered embodiment[23]. She does not ask the doctor these questions, however, because she does not think "she'd have anything to say about it". Given that the doctor had already indicated a lack of knowledge about non-heteronormative sexual health, Alex makes an assumption that the doctor will not respond in a helpful way to her inquiry about birth control, hormones, and gender.

When Alex is put in the position of having to make herself visible as non-heterosexual to the doctor or to decide whether or not she feels comfortable asking a question about the potential effects of a medication, these are examples of the kind of "affective work" she is made to do on a casual basis. While she could opt to avoid or deflect the doctor's question, and indeed does decide not to ask about birth control and hormones, she is still having to think about what to do, what the costs and benefits are, and to make decisions as she negotiates her (in)visibility and, in this case, access to healthcare. While part of affective work is being made to come out, to make oneself visible, to endure potential awkwardness, discomfort or rejection, another part is worrying about whether to come out and how to frame yourself. In other words, affective work includes the work participants like Alex do to navigate heteronormative spaces and social relations. If healthcare professionals adopt more inclusive practices and work to avoid making heteronormative assumptions about their patients, some of this affective work might be displaced from LGBTQ+ people. Further, the practice of asking all patients, and not just those who a doctor may read as potentially LGBTQ+ (if that is on their radar at all), about their identity and sexual orientation also might draw attention to the existence and operations of heteronormativity among cis and/or heterosexual people who expect their normative embodiment to be obvious or clearly legible. Such conversations draw attention to the way that it is not just LGBTQ+ subjects, but also

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[23] I also wanted to know kind of like, if I'm taking, there's more estrogen in birth control and I want to know what that would do to me, gender wise, and I just didn't ask her because I didn't think she'd have anything to say about it. (Alex)

heteronormative subjects that are in constant processes of becoming that exceed the control of autonomous individuals.

In the above passage from Clay, he does not correct a co-worker who assumes he is talking about his girlfriend rather than his boyfriend because he does not want to have "that conversation" with someone he does not really know. When Clay talks about "that conversation" he is referring to coming out or making himself visible or known as a gay man. The ease with which his co-worker interpellates him as a heterosexual man speaks to a certain level of heteronormativity, which Clay acknowledges by noting that he works in a "heavily hetero arena." This example draws attention both to the way that heteronormativity structures the experience of being made to constantly either come out or "pass" and to the kind of affective work that is required to navigate heteronormative social relations. "That conversation" is an example of the kind of affective work that participants are expected to perform repetitively.

Talking about instances of having "that conversation" is also a way that participants explicitly complicate coming out narratives and emphasize that coming out is not a singular act but an ongoing process. While Clay's coworkers with whom he works on a regular basis know him and know that he is talking about his boyfriend, other people he works with, who he does not know as well, assume he is straight. This reinforces the notion that *who* is seeing or reading Clay matters. In my theoretical framework I draw on critiques of coming out discourses which posit that even if someone considers themselves out, they are put in the position of having closets being constantly (re)constructed around them. Clay's example provides an understanding of how this happens. Even though he is comfortable with his identity and people who know him well know that he is gay, as soon as he encounters someone outside of that known sphere, he is put in the position of having to make himself known again (and again). The repetitiveness of affective work is important to understanding its significance. As I note in my theoretical framework by drawing on Ahmed (2006, 2010, 2014) and Nadal et al. (2016), there's a future orientation to the frustration or drain of affective work. It is not just about one isolated experience of a presumption of heterosexuality, but the accumulation of those experiences over several years and a sense that this is something that will persist in the

future. Affective work is not just about the present moment but about past and future moments coalescing to shape the experience of being called to do affective work in the present moment.

Clay's example illustrates the way that ambiguous (in)visibility disrupts and challenges the notion that coming out is a singular event or something that can be done or completed. Clay is certainly not closeted; however, as is apparent in the above example, he is also not visible as gay in all moments. Clay's decision to not have "that conversation" to his co-worker's assumption, may be read as a strategy to avoid an unpleasant conversation or an intolerant reaction from his co-worker. Alternatively, it may be the case that Clay simply does not want to take on this kind of affective work at his job. However, if Clay felt that his co-worker was likely to be fairly tolerant and accepting or was not considering the potential that they might be intolerant or unaccepting, there would be less "work" to be done. Clay and Alex inform my understanding of the kind of affective work that participants engage in and how the need to negotiate one's (in)visibility is sustained by heteronormativity.

The way that Meredith[24] and Serena[25] talk about a sense of (in)visibility furthers my understanding of the way that participants' identities are both relational, ambiguous, and affected by heteronormativity:

[D: What does being out mean to you? Or how does that work in your life?] I'm not entirely sure. I'll say things on Facebook, but ... because I'm married to a man, people just assume, right? ... I'm not sure the average person knows. And the people who do know are friends. Or clients. Although, I don't outwardly tell clients, but those who know or who are in the LGBTQ community, they're like, yeah, we get you. ... but I don't know if I'm visibly out. Or know like, if people know it or not. My next-door neighbour knows for sure. The one that I get along with (laughs). The ones, I don't know if she knows, but the ones that babysit our

[24] Meredith is a cis bi/pan/queer woman living in St. Marys.

[25] Serena is a cis pan/queer woman living in Stratford.

dog and have queer kids too, so, some of our cousins and friends, but the general public? I'm not sure if they do know. Probably not. (Meredith)

I mean, probably for me it doesn't matter as much because I fly under the radar, you know? I'm not visibly queer, quote unquote. I don't know what that means (laughs) but you know what I mean? I'm mostly invisible in the LGBTQ community. (Serena)

Above, I consider how Clay's experience of being known as a heterosexual man at work does not mean he is not "out". Similarly, Meredith is not "in the closet" but rather is contingently visible. She identifies particular friends, clients, and neighbours who know that she is not heterosexual but suggests that the general public or the average person would likely read her as heterosexual. The way that Meredith notes that because she is married to a man "people just assume" that she is heterosexual resonates with the way that Jane talks about how "everyone kind of assumes everyone's straight" in the area. Meredith's account emphasizes that we can never be certain how other people are reading our identities. The way that she remarks "I don't know if she knows" and "I'm not sure if they know" recognizes her lack of control over the way other people "know" things about her. Serena also recognizes her lack of control over the way that other people, and specifically other LGBTQ+ people, read her as she notes that she is "mostly invisible in the LGBTQ community." These reflections provide an understanding of the kinds of affective work that may come with an awareness of contingent visibility. While Meredith is always living life as herself, she does not know how people are reading her, if they "know" she is not heterosexual, and/or if their interactions with her are premised on an assumption of heterosexuality. The sense of ambiguity that comes from not knowing how people perceive you is part of the (in)visibility dilemma I outline at the outset of this chapter. The way that Meredith and Serena talk about a sense of ambiguous (in)visibility illustrates how it is difficult, if not impossible, to know or control how other people are reading you and thus to assess the extent to which you are seen as queer and not as heterosexual. Their comments draw attention to the way that intentionality does not necessarily or always matter. For example, Serena is part of the LGBTQ+ community but expresses a sense that other people do not necessarily see her that way because she is not

"visibly queer". Serena complicates the notion of being "visibly queer" and what it means to be or become "visibly queer", which tends to operate as an elusive and exclusionary construct. It is interesting to consider if there are moments in which heterosexual people are aware of their (in)visibility as heterosexual or of being particularly "visibly hetero".

The way that both Meredith and Serena talk about people and places where they are out and/or visible at other points during our interviews provides an understanding of the way that neither invisibility nor visibility are permanent states. This fluctuation between being visible and invisible is another way that participants' experiences do not fit within a closet/out model. My understanding is that participants express a sense of living in an ambiguous zone in between "the closet" and an injunction to be "out, loud and proud". Informed by Klein et al.'s (2015) analysis on how queer youth in their study live in a space between closeted/out and negotiate their identities and (in)visibility in complex, context-dependent ways, I understand my participants' accounts of ambiguous (in)visibility not as reflecting some kind of desire to be closeted or homonormative, but as the product of ongoing work to navigate heteronormative social relations. Several participants express that what is important to them is being out to their partner(s), potential partners, friends, family, and other people who they are comfortable with in their everyday lives. Beyond that, they are not interested in, or concerned with, whether a general public reads them as LGBTQ+. Meredith, for example, talks about how she is comfortably known as bi/pan/queer by particular friends, neighbours, family and clients. Similarly, Serena expresses that she is mostly invisible within the LGBTQ+ community but that people who know her know that she is queer. Clay's example of not having "that conversation" at work with someone he does not work with frequently also illustrates this. While it is important to him that his family, friends, and people he sees or works with regularly know that he has a boyfriend, he is not concerned about being read as heterosexual by a more general public. In this way, participants express a sense that they cannot just be out on their own: they need people to see and know – to participate in – that outness.

This sense that presumptions of heterosexuality affect the way participants are being read by a general public resonates across the interviews I have discussed so far.

While participants are "out" in the sense that their identity is known by people and in places where they are familiar and comfortable, they are aware that they are not read as non-heterosexual by the "average person" or the "general public" in the area. I do not think that the "average person" and the "general public" refer exclusively to heterosexual people. The accounts of these participants suggest that there is a tendency even among LGBTQ+ people to assume that other people in the area are likely heterosexual. As Chris notes, "I think probably 1 out of 25 of the straight people that you see is not actually a straight person in Stratford". This sense of being read as heterosexual unless you are specifically known to be otherwise by particular people contributes to an understanding of the way that heteronormativity functions in the lives of participants. Beyond this, it also provides a basis for understanding the contingency of (in)visibility and explains the emphasis participants place on having "comfort zones" in which they feel both visible and accepted. Comfort zones, which operate like a network and are made up of supportive people with whom and spaces wherein participants consistently feel comfortable, safe, recognized and validated, provide a reprieve from the affective work involved in living in a heteronormative society.

3.1.2   "You do your thing, I'll do mine" and the limits of comfort zones

Although participants talk about their visibility and outness as ambiguous, they also talk about the importance of people with whom and places in which they comfortable, safe, recognized and validated. In this subsection, I consider how participants talk about their comfort zones, how they talk about spaces beyond their comfort zones, and the ways in which "being known" complicates their experiences in the area. While I examine the importance of comfort zones for participants' sense of place in the next chapter, my focus in this chapter is on how the need for and importance of comfort zones also draws attention to the limits of those zones, beyond which participants cannot expect to be comfortable, safe, recognized and validated.

In the following excerpt, Chris both expresses a sense of gender euphoria as he talks about being properly gendered by cab drivers and in grocery stores and a sense of frustration at experiences of being misgendered:

It's getting better, like the cab drivers and stuff, I've noticed, I've been getting identified properly. It feels good. I go to the grocery store and they'll be like, 'Oh can you help him?' Or, 'Get him a bag', like that feels amazing. But when, if I've notably or even mentioned, like I'll say, 'Oh I'm an uncle', or whatever, and then somebody calls, 'Oh have a good day ma'am,' or something like that, it's like, you frigging know not to call me that, like why do you have to be a dick? (Chris)

Chris' understandable frustration at being misgendered at the grocery store speaks to the casual ways in which people make assumptions about other people's gender on an everyday basis in public spaces. Even in the case that the person misrecognizing Chris did not hear him call himself an uncle, for example, and/or is not misgendering him intentionally or maliciously, this encounter emphasizes the compulsivity of gendering and the pervasive impulse to not only gender people we encounter in public spaces but to act on those (mis)readings by interpellating strangers with gendered language ("somebody calls, 'Oh have a good day ma'am'"). I return to the way participants talk about experiences of being misgendered in the next subsection. It is also significant that Chris talks about his comfort zone as something that is cultivated, not something that is random or can be taken for granted:

I find that I stick to the same cab company because they've gotten to know me, and they respect me and treat me and talk to me by the right gender.

It is important to Chris that he has access to a cab company that is respectful and genders him properly. The way Chris notes that "they've gotten to know me" indicates that this is a relationship that has been built through repeated interactions. Over time, Chris comes to trust that he will be treated well and properly recognized by this cab company in a way that allows it to become part of his comfort zone. Informing this passage, however, is a sense that if he were to use another cab company, he might not be treated with respect and/or he might be misgendered. This is one way that I understand participants' discussions of their comfort zones and support networks: the spaces, routines, networks and people within them are of particular importance in a context where they cannot, or are unwilling to, presume any level of acceptance among the general public. The way

Meredith talks about how she understands visibility as depending on "if you know who's there and how to look for things" illustrates this further:

> Tim's[26] is always full. That's always guaranteed ... it's interesting that it's the hub for the community that's usually, you've got the typical group of the same 5-6 older men who meet at 6 am and complain about everything. But a good chunk of the staff are LGBTQ … I'm wondering if these old men understand. I find that interesting. [D: There is some level of visibility…] Yes. It's there if you know who's there and how to look for things, right? (Meredith)

> During pride month, I wore a lot of rainbows as per usual. And in Tim's, I got tons of compliments and they're always like, 'I love your shirt, I love your bag,' and stuff like that. At Tim's, it was always, by the staff, yeah, we get you. I don't think I got any, comments or anything in Foodland. I know there's a few staff that I love, but I'm not entirely sure if they kind of get it. (Meredith)

Meredith's comments illustrate the way that it matters who is looking in the sense that, "if you know who's there and how to look for things" you are more likely to see those things. When she is in Tim Hortons, Meredith both sees and is seen by the LGBTQ+ employees. She is not sure, however, "if these old men [the other patrons] understand" or if they read her or the LGBTQ+ employees as LGBTQ+ or not. This kind of uncertainty resonates in the accounts of most participants and with a central question of this chapter, which is: I am, but do you recognize me as such? This example also depends on the way that Meredith and any LGBTQ+ employees are reading these older men as cis, hetero and potentially intolerant. Meredith expresses a sense that she expects that some people in the area would have problems with her or would treat her differently if they were aware that she is bi/pan/queer. This draws attention to the way that participants are aware of the limitations of their comfort zones, and also to how the potential for intolerance affects participants' experiences, even if that potential has never been realized.

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[26] "Tim's" is a reference to the popular Canadian coffee chain Tim Hortons.

Meredith's comments also suggest that being ambiguously visible can function to secure a relatively peaceful existence in the area. If she were consistently visible as bi/pan/queer or felt that she was definitively known as bi/pan/queer, she anticipates that she might experience some level of backlash. The fact that she can exist in Tim Hortons and be seen by other LGBTQ+ people in the space while also being (mis)read by older men as heterosexual or at least as not disruptively queer sustains her relative comfort in this public space. In a kind of balancing act, it is through, or as a consequence of, her ambiguous (in)visibility that she is able to be comfortable in Tim Hortons. The other side of this, however, is an awareness that becoming visible may disrupt this balance and challenge her ability to exist without backlash.

The way that Jane and Natalie[27] talk about the level of general acceptance of LGBTQ+ folks furthers this discussion and draws attention to what might exist beyond comfort zones:

> [D: And what is your opinion on the way that queer folks are perceived in the area?] Yeah, I would say, I don't think that anyone is like, I hate gay people in the area, or they wouldn't like, chase a gay person out, but would they go out of their way to make them feel welcome? I'm not exactly sure. (Jane)

> It's like, they couldn't care less [about people being different]. Take it or leave it, kind of thing. You do your thing, I'll do my thing. Pretty much it, kind of thing. (Natalie)

The way Jane remarks that she does not think people would go out of their way to make gay people feel welcome contributes to a sense that both visibility and acceptance happen in ambiguous ways. Again, while it may be acceptable and comfortable for LGBTQ+ people to be visible in their comfort zones, their ability to do so outside of their comfort zone may be curtailed by an injunction to "do your thing" in ways that are not visible to the general public and specifically in ways that do not challenge heteronormativity. The

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[27] Natalie is a cis gay woman living in Perth County.

kind of "live and let live" mentality creates a scenario like Jane describes wherein gay people are neither rejected nor welcomed. In this way, "live and let live" informs the ambiguity that characterizes a sense of LGBTQ+ (in)visibility and (in)tolerance in the area among my participants. This ambiguous, uncertain zone of potential (mis)recognition and potential (in)tolerance creates a context wherein participants can never be sure if they are being properly recognized or if they are being tolerated on the basis of a misrecognition. While I explore other ways that "live and let live" works in the accounts of participants in the next chapter, my focus in this chapter is on the way that "live and let live" creates a constant potential for intolerance, rejection and violence.

3.1.3 "Don't ask, don't tell": The affective consequences of live and let live

Other common framings of the sentiment underlying "you do your thing, I'll do mine" are "don't ask, don't tell[28]" and "live and let live." Derek talks about how a "don't ask, don't tell" response affected his process of coming out to his family:

> The process of coming out was very slow. In terms of my family, they were very ... maybe I shouldn't say very. They were more of a, 'Don't ask, don't tell,' kind of response. My father was a little outwardly abrasive about it the first time I brought a boyfriend home. More it was, don't ask about it, don't talk about it, we don't want to know about it. And no one would tell anyone else. My family loves to just not talk about things. Then I had to come out individually to every single individual person rather than, you know, tell the loudmouth sister and she'll tell everyone else. (Derek)

Derek's comments emphasize how much the scale of a live and let live mentality matters. At the level of a city or town and regarding the interactions between members of a local

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[28] The phrase "don't ask, don't tell" is associated with the United States military because it was the common name for the federal policy banning United States military service members from being openly or knowingly LGBTQ+ from 1994 until it was repealed in 2011 for cis lesbian, gay and bi people and in 2016 for trans people (Guardian Staff, 2019). In 2019, the United States re-banned trans people from military service (Guardian Staff, 2019; HRC, 2020). In January 2021, President Joe Biden signed an executive order to overturn the trans military ban (Ali et al., 2021).

community, a sense of live and let live may contribute to conditions that sustain an (in)visibility dilemma but may also create space for LGBTQ+ people to live and connect under the radar, as I examine further in the next chapter. Even if it means constantly being aware of who is around you and what you are doing, the injunction to *not* be visibly LGBTQ+ and to not make anyone uncomfortable by expressing your gender and/or sexuality is manageable for some participants, and is framed as part of a balance they strike between visibility and tolerance in the area. For many of these participants, their ability or willingness to "live and let live" coexists with the support of people and places that make up their comfort zone. When the injunction to not tell or show anything about your sexuality comes from your family, the trade-off may be less liveable. At the level of family and/or friends, the expectation to live and let live or to abide by a "don't ask don't tell" policy tends to be harmful and can make it difficult for LGBTQ+ people to be themselves around family and friends and even to continue to live in proximity to them. As I explore in the next chapter, a few phase one participants and several phase two participants talk about how leaving the Stratford area allowed them to be themselves more openly.

3.1.3.1　"I know what you really are": Experiences of being misgendered

Thinking further about the limits of live and let live, the focus of this subsection is on the way that participants talk about experiences of being misgendered in the Stratford area. For trans and non-binary participants, discussions of being visible and coming out are complicated in part because processes of coming out as non-hetero and coming out as non-cis are not analogous. Skylar[29] talks about how the response "this doesn't change how I think about you" is misguided when someone comes out as trans:

> How are gays perceived in Stratford … Lukewarm acceptance? Sort of this, 'I've got no problems with your lifestyle dude, you do you, you'll always be whatever to me!' Kind of thing. Actual things people will say to me when I'm just like, 'Hi,

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[29] Skylar is a trans lesbian in Stratford.

I'm a girl, dumbfuck.' People seem to think it's very progressive to be like, 'I tolerate that! I accept you.' It's really funny to me the way that they're always like, 'This doesn't change anything, blah, blah, blah.' And it's like, 'Well, I'd like you to think about how this might change some things (laughs). (Skylar)

Skylar's framing of acceptance in the area as "lukewarm" and as an attitude of, "I've got no problems with your lifestyle" resonates with a "live and let live" mentality and the way that other participants talk about their sense of acceptance in the area as carefully negotiated, as temporary and temporal, and as dependent on particular people and places. The way that Skylar notes people will say things like "you'll always be whatever to me" resonates with the way that other trans and non-binary participants like Chris and Sam[30] talk about how people they have known for a long time either struggle to or refuse to see them for who they are because they grew up together. For trans and non-binary participants in particular, a sense of being known over time can function as a limitation or can contribute to experiences of being misgendered and deadnamed:

I have had difficulties with the people that have known me for a really long time, that don't see me like, that know me but haven't seen me for years or they've only seen me a couple times. They just have a tough time. I get a lot of [deadname] and 'she' and a lot of that. And I have to be like, 'Yo, how many times do we have to, like my seven-year-old niece can remember, I think you can.' (Chris)

Especially with being non-binary and only using my pronouns for maybe about a year now, it's, I've only been doing it in Stratford for maybe like, three months. Because I just got back to Ontario … It's been a bit difficult. Because talking to people, only about maybe 5 people in town maybe use my pronouns total … obviously growing up in a city where everyone knows you, they already have a preconceived notion about you and they already know like, they're going to be like, 'Oh that's your name, that's your pronouns.' Like, yes. Shit changes. (laughs). (Sam)

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[30] Sam is a non-binary person in Stratford.

As Sam and Chris note, it can be difficult to live as a trans and non-binary person in an area where your deadname is known and where people may not be willing to see you for who you are. Sam very clearly notes the way that people make assumptions about how they identify by saying things like "Oh that's your name, that's your pronouns" based on prior knowledge of them from having grown up together. As Sam says, however "Shit changes"; participants' accounts of navigating such changes suggest that people are not always willing to embrace identity as fluid and subject to change. Sam expresses that the degree to which they are already known in Stratford as someone who grew up there informs their potential to be misgendered and deadnamed. Furthermore, these accounts point to the kinds of affective work that trans and non-binary participants are called to do in the course of living their everyday lives.

Sam's reflections on their experience of moving back to Stratford as a non-binary person also informs my understanding of the limits of comfort zones. While participants talk about how being known and having a network of people who know, respect and use your name and pronouns is important for their wellbeing, the process of cultivating and maintaining such a network not only requires work and time but also serves as a reminder that they are at risk of being deadnamed, misgendered, or worse, beyond that network. The fact that some participants' networks are small or limited may be frustrating and reaffirm a sense of being potentially rejected or not accepted within the area. Through this discussion of comfort zones, my aim is to demonstrate how important those zones are *because* the rest of the area is ambiguous and potentially unaccepting.

Returning to the way that Skylar talks about how an expressed ambivalence toward trans and non-binary people ("you'll always be whatever to me") functions as a refusal to know or see someone as the gender they are, the experience of being mis-recognized as cis is distinct from the experience of being mis-recognized as heterosexual. Among cis LGBQ+ participants, there is some awareness that they are potentially being read as heterosexual or not seen as LGBQ+ on an everyday basis in public spaces. For the most part, this is happening tacitly; it is not that they are actively being inscribed as heterosexual but that they are existing neutrally and, through a (potential) misreading, are being afforded the kind of non-visibility of belonging to an unmarked (heterosexual)

group. For trans and non-binary participants, however, there is less "neutral" space to occupy:

> You're never completely unaware of how much your being watched when you're trans. You're never going to completely put away 'I wonder if that person sees me, looks at me and sees a man or do they see a woman, or do they see something else or do they see a gigantic question mark?' You know all those kinds of things, sometimes it changes, I can tell, it changes as they look at me. Sometimes I can see their tactics with how they stare. Sometimes I'll be standing behind someone in line, and I'm the kind of person who likes to have fun with people's perceptions of me. But I remember one time at Shopper's right here in Stratford there was this guy in front of me and he kept on kind of like slowly kind of looking around and just sort of looking as if he was looking as if at something other than obviously, he was looking at, trying to look at me because he was trying to figure out what the fuck was going on. He kept on doing that, and every single time I would just stare back. I would be like staring at him before he was staring at me and he'd just sort of avert his gaze and eventually I think he got the message. But you know, I guess that's one thing that cis people can take into account is that yes. We know you're staring (laughs). Believe me, you're not unnoticed. (Skylar)

The way Skylar talks about her awareness of the way that other people, and cis people in particular, look at her illustrates the kinds of encounters and interpretations that people potentially engage in and are subject to on an everyday basis in public spaces. Skylar's awareness of the way that someone in Shoppers repetitively turned around to try to look at her, trying to figure her out, draws attention to the pervasive desire to gender other people when we meet or encounter them. Sam also express frustration with not only the incessant need to gender and be gendered but specifically with the way that people make assumptions when they are reading a stranger or acquaintance's gender:

> Someone can have long hair and still be non-binary and stuff like that and if you're very feminine presenting people are going to be like, 'Oh, she/her.' It's like, mm, maybe they use they/them pronouns or maybe they're just a guy with

long hair. It's a lot of assumptions still and being like, 'Do I see stubble? Okay, guy.' It's like, 'Do I see lumps? Okay girl.' It's a very quick, okay, I know what you really are. (Sam)

Sam draws attention to the kinds of assumptions that the general public relies on to read gender off of people's bodies and critiques the premises of those assumptions. The way that they note "It's a very quick, okay, I know what you really are" resonates across the accounts of my trans and non-binary participants and informs my understanding of the relational nature of identity. Regardless of how they identify, they are subject to people's (mis)readings based on assumptions about their physical characteristics, including the way they dress and act. As these quotes demonstrate, trans and non-binary participants are aware of and express frustration with the pervasive impulse to gender people in public spaces.

Most cis participants' accounts imply that they are being properly gendered on an everyday basis. Participants who are cis tend to talk exclusively about misrecognition in terms their sexuality by recognizing moments when they are either visible, ambiguously visible, or invisible in terms of their sexuality. One exception to this is Natalie, a cis woman, who expresses frustration at being misgendered "all the fucking time" because she is a "more masculine looking woman." Natalie's experiences show that while non-cis participants are more likely to be misgendered, cis people can also be subject to misgendering.

3.1.3.2   "Obviously they know it's two men sharing the house": Ambiguously visible relationships

My focus in this section has been on the way that participants talk about heteronormativity, an awareness of the limits of comfort zones, experiences of being misgendered, and how these discussions inform my understanding of a sense of ambiguous (in)visibility among participants. In this subsection, I consider how participants talk about a sense of ambiguous outness and an inability to know if other people are reading them "properly" in the context of their relationships. In the following

passage, Steven[31] reflects on how visible he and his husband are as a gay couple in their neighbourhood:

> The house next door is a rental. And we've had two different, this is the third group that's been in that house since we moved. And the first two were fine. This one? She's kind of lukewarm. I mean, the other neighbours across the street, we don't have as much interaction with them, but certainly there's been nothing outwardly negative with them. And obviously they know it's two men sharing the house. (Steven)

The way that Steven frames this suggests that the absence of outward negativity speaks to some level of tolerance of their presence as a gay couple. However, this sense of tolerance is predicated on being properly recognized as a gay couple. When Steven notes that "obviously they know it's two men sharing the house" he suggests that by being two men living in the house together, they are visible as a gay couple and are being read by their neighbours as a gay couple. It is not just that there is room for ambiguity in the presumption that neighbours are necessarily reading two men living together as a gay couple, but that Steven is aware that some kind of reading needs to happen in order for them to become visible as a couple. While Steven is expressing an absence of outward negativity toward himself and his husband in their neighbourhood, the way in which he does this suggests an awareness that it is conceivable that something outwardly negative might happen. Another part of Steven's reflections is the way that he recognizes the possibility or even likelihood of change over time. The first two neighbours were fine, and the current neighbour is lukewarm, and there is a possibility that future neighbours might be just as tolerant, even more accepting, or even LGBTQ+ themselves. There is also the possibility, however, that future neighbours might be less accepting or even outrightly negative or intolerant. The way that Steven talks about the visibility of his relationships suggests that while enjoying a relative level of comfort in Stratford, he is aware of the possibility that this is subject to change. Reflecting Steven's sense that their

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[31] Steven is a cis gay man living in Stratford.

neighbourhood is subject to change over time, Robert[32] notes that his sense of being tolerated in his neighbourhood is "temporary and temporal" in part because it depends on factors beyond his control.

Gloria[33] talks about how she is unsure if many people knew about her relationship with her late partner and that some people misread their relationship as if they were just friends, which became apparent after her partner passed away. There were select people who "saw" their relationship for what it was, but the misrecognition became apparent as people were not appropriately empathetic in the way they might have been if they knew Gloria lost a partner rather than a close friend. For example, her workplace did not appropriately recognize her relationship meaning that she was not able to take the time she needed for bereavement. While she did not have support at work, Gloria and her partner were visible to friends and family who knew them well and she did have a support network to rely on during such a difficult loss. Again, this draws attention to the importance of, and the limits of, comfort zones and support networks which, while undoubtably vital to participants' abilities to survive and thrive in the Stratford area, emphasize the pervasiveness and effects of heteronormative structures.

While some participants talk about being unsure if their neighbours or coworkers are reading them "properly", Drew[34] talks about how he is aware of being misread as heterosexual at times:

> Now and then people think that my sister is my wife. Because we do a lot of stuff together. (Drew)

> In the short time that we've been here, places like the grocery stores, the tellers know us. And if we're not together, they often ask, where's your other half? Because we're always here together. Now that I'm working nights, that doesn't

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[32] Robert is a cis gay man living in Stratford.

[33] Gloria is a cis gay woman living in Stratford. I do not have permission to include direct quotations from my interview with Gloria. Instead, I paraphrase from our interview.

[34] Drew is a cis gay man living in Stratford.

happen as much because [my husband] has to do all of this in the daytime when I'm sound asleep. But all the tellers had gotten to know us, it doesn't matter which grocery store we went into. Everywhere, they just, 'Where's your friend? Where's your friend?' And it's like, would you get that in other places? I don't know'. (Steven)

Drew's experience of having people around Stratford assume that his sister is his wife suggests a certain level of heteronormativity and informs my understanding of the way that heteronormativity informs misreadings of LGBTQ+ people. While Drew is openly gay and expresses satisfaction with his sense of acceptance in Stratford, his comment about people assuming he is in a heterosexual relationship with his sister suggests that he is not always read as a gay man. Informed by Ahmed's (2006) analysis on the "straightening" of relationships or of queer existence more generally, it is interesting to put Drew's example of having people assume his sister is his wife beside Steven's example of he and his husband being recognized as "friends" around town. Depending on the context and the level of familiarity between those involved in an exchange, being recognized as "friends" may be a case of someone unintentionally misrecognizing the gay couple or intentionally misrecognizing and straightening the gay couple. However, "friends" may also be said in a way that subtly acknowledges that the gay couple are not just friends, or "friends" may be said in a knowing way that clearly recognizes the gay couple as more than friends. Steven and Drew do not express a sense of being upset or invalidated by these moments of (mis)recognition. When Steven talks about how he and his husband are known by local shopkeepers as a pair and that they often ask one of them, "Where's your friend?" if they are not together, he frames these experiences as a positive feature of life in Stratford; he and his husband are known as belonging together, and they are not having any outwardly negative experiences in their neighbourhood. I return to this example as I discuss how being known contributes to a sense of place satisfaction for Steven and other participants in the next chapter. However, I think the framing of the couple as "friends" is notable given that the history of positioning of LGBTQ+ couples as friends being used as a way of minimizing or 'straightening' queer relationships (Ahmed, 2006).

Among participants who are either married or in relationships, it is common to talk about how they cannot be sure if people around town know they are a couple. The way Regan[35] talks about an experience they had while their girlfriend was visiting St. Marys provides another example of the way heteronormative misreadings happen:

> But I had one time that, girlfriend was visiting, we're holding hands. Someone who's known me my entire life, knows my only brother, 'Oh it's so nice your sister is visiting from out of town.' … You know me, you know my family, you know that this is not my sister. (Regan)

In this case, it is not even that Regan and their girlfriend were ambiguously visible, but that they are being actively or purposively misread. This person knows that Regan is not holding hands with their sister and yet actively makes a point to explain Regan and their girlfriend's connection to one another within a framework that refuses the possibility of a queer relationship. Beyond providing an example of how some people will go out of their way to enforce heteronormativity, this also informs my understanding of the kind of routine affective work participants are made to engage in. Regardless of whether Regan does the work of correcting this acquaintance, they are being put in a situation where they are effectively "closeted" through a presumption of heterosexuality in the same moment that they are arguably more visible through the act of holding hands with their girlfriend. Another way of reading this example is that by holding hands, Regan and their girlfriend are contravening the injunction to "live and let live" and in doing so, provoke a reaction that attempts to police or call their existence and their clearly intimate relationship back into heteronorms. In this case, knowing people and being known does not necessarily translate to being known in the ways you want to be known. This example where an acquaintance misreads Regan's relationship by positioning them as siblings demonstrates one way in which participants are ambiguously (in)visible in ways that are beyond their control. Regan considers themselves out, they are holding hands with their girlfriend and yet, they are still made invisible by an acquaintance who reads the couple as sisters.

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[35] Regan is a pansexual trans non-binary person living in St. Marys.

Drawing on the critiques of coming out discourses that I outline in my theoretical framework, participants' accounts reflect an understanding that coming out is always unfinished and relational and that visibility, while often demanded, is ultimately unattainable. Further, tolerance toward LGBTQ+ couples often depends on a couple appearing in desexualized ways (McQueen, 2015). When couples become visible like Regan and their girlfriend do by holding hands, their existence becomes perceived as threatening or disruptive and needs to be called back into line.

3.2   Experiences of place

Throughout this section, I consider how participants talk about places as having a particular vibe, about feeling (un)comfortable in particular places, about changing their behaviours to avoid encountering issues, and/or how they feel limited in the ways they can express themselves in the Stratford area. Across these interviews, participants talk about moments, practices, habits, or ways that they either consistently or occasionally make decisions about their appearance or behaviour to avoid negative experiences and to actively negotiate and maintain a sense of tolerance and/or acceptance in the Stratford area. I draw attention to this because I think it is challenging to understand and account for the affective work that these negotiations involve. It is significant that participants will report being satisfied with the increasing acceptance of LGBTQ+ people in their communities while also discussing strategies they use to negotiate and maintain that acceptance. I begin this section by looking at how participants talk about their experiences of place as individuals and then move to consider how they talk about their experiences with their partner(s).

3.2.1   Being careful: Negotiations of (in)visibility and (in)tolerance

In this section, I focus on how participants talk about being careful, being mindful of, and/or making deliberate decisions about how they appear and how they express themselves as a way of managing their level (in)visibility and (in)tolerance in the Stratford area. At many points during our interviews, participants talk about how negotiating their safety and comfort in the area and how achieving a sense of tolerance depends on their ability to negotiate (in)visibility, which can mean not doing certain

things, like wearing crop tops or flying the pride flag, as tactics that anticipate and/or pre-empt rejection and intolerance. In the following excerpts, Chris and Skylar talk about being aware of having to negotiate their (in)visibility and (in)tolerance:

> Yeah, I haven't really gotten any bad remarks. But I am careful who I talk to about things … Well, I mean, I don't ... flaunt my trans visibility in front of people, like mostly older people, people that I feel might get uncomfortable or it's more the fear that they're going to make me feel uncomfortable too. That they are going to make some sort of remark that's going to upset me and it's easier if I just don't trigger it. Which sucks. Because I just want to be my flamboyant self, but you know. I have a lot of old neighbours, so. But when I'm on, like if I'm outside with my dog and stuff, I don't care. I'll wear this [crop top] out and barbecue. I don't care. But I'm not going to, like I said, I'm not going to walk around in a crop top doing laundry and make everyone feel uncomfortable and then plus, risk a hate crime on my account, like, vandalism or something like that. (Chris)

> I mean, it really depends. You know. I spent most of my time here like ... not being particularly overtly trans. Right now, I'm not as much as I could be, which is saying something since I'm obviously wearing makeup and shit. (Skylar)

In the previous section I consider how trans and non-binary participants are particularly aware of the way that people are looking at them and working to gender or to classify them. In this section, I suggest that part of that awareness includes careful and often calculated decisions about how they look, what they wear, how they walk, and where they go. For several trans and non-binary participants, they cannot simply exist but have to be vigilantly aware of their embodiment, their potential experiences of place, how and where they appear, and how they are being read by other people.

Throughout our interview Chris talks about a sense that he is not able to be himself fully in Stratford. As Chris notes in the above quotation, what is acceptable or safe is context dependent. He notes that he is not going to "flaunt [his] trans visibility in front of people" and older people specifically. One way that I understand Chris' reflections on how he cannot fully be himself in Stratford is through the notion of "live

and let live", which I discuss earlier in this chapter. Chris acknowledges the possibility of a hate crime like vandalism taking place if he were to wear a crop top in the wrong place, for example. However, when he is in his yard with his dog or in his apartment doing an interview with me, he is able to wear what he wants. This excerpt provides an understanding of the kind of negotiations participants engage in and the way that their senses of safety and comfort are contingent and contextual. Particularly in public spaces and spaces in which one is interacting with people outside of their comfort zones, there is an awareness that doing particular things or appearing in particular ways might be perceived as a transgression of the injunction to "live and let live" and the heteronorms implicit in that injunction. While Chris offers these reflections casually, I think that living with the sense that wearing the wrong thing could potentially incite vandalism or harassment against you has the potential to negatively affect a person's wellbeing. Another form of affective work, then, is living with the possibility that you are one wrong move away from experiencing violence or harassment and that it is your responsibility to act in ways that avoids or prevents bad reactions. While arguably not as impactful as realized experiences of violence or harassment, the future oriented fear that something might happen or could happen is still a form of affective work that can be draining or distressing. As Sedgwick (2003) argues, paranoia is anticipatory: "because there must be no bad surprises, and because learning of the possibility of a bad surprise would itself constitute a bad surprise, paranoia requires that bad news be always already known" (p. 130). Thus, while anticipatory paranoia is future oriented in the sense that one is anticipating bad surprises to come, Sedgwick (2003) emphasizes that – in the sense that bad news must always already be known - "the unidirectionally future-oriented vigilance of paranoia generates, paradoxically, a complex relation to temporarily that burrows both backward and forward" (p. 130). A paranoid disposition and the impulse to anticipate bad surprises is difficult to resist, particularly when it serves as a defense mechanism for participants who do not want to be caught off guard or unprepared.

Building on my earlier analysis of comfort zones, Chris' reflections emphasize how much his comfort zone matters in that it determines what is safe to wear when. While Chris enjoys a certain level of comfort and has a support network in the area, he is aware that conditions and limitations persist. For many trans and non-binary participants,

there is an awareness that their embodiment is constantly being scrutinized, read and classified, particularly in public spaces. The way that Chris talks about his sense of being careful or of being aware of his potential visibility underscores the importance of embodied experiences as he notes how crop tops and haircuts are not just aesthetic choices but gender markers that affect the way one is read and treated. These quotes from Skylar and Chris provide an understanding of the kind of negotiations and decisions that determine how participants are willing to appear in public spaces.

The following passage from Quinn[36], who participated in phase two of this research, speaks further to the way that it feels risky and/or uncomfortable to be non-cis in Stratford:

> If I did have to move back to Stratford, I would 100% not feel comfortable presenting any other way than a cis male. I mean, maybe a cis gay male, but definitely not feminine and definitely not male to female trans or anything like that. [D: And that's because of your perception of the culture there or the way that people would react to you existing-] Yeah. Definitely. And I don't know if that's founded, but 100% that's how I feel about it. (Quinn)

As Quinn notes here, they are not certain that they would encounter issues or transphobia if they moved back to Stratford and presented "any other way than a cis male" or a cis gay male, but they would be worried about it to the extent that they would not feel comfortable doing so. Quinn's reflections emphasize that it does not matter if their fear is "founded" or if they would encounter issues and/or harassment if they were to move to Stratford and exist as a non-cis person. Regardless of whether their fears are founded, the possibility that they might be affects the way that Quinn thinks about Stratford, how they feel when they are in Stratford, and the likelihood that they would return to Stratford[37].

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[36] Quinn is a non-binary person living in Toronto.

[37] I feel like I lose aspects of myself when I come back to Stratford, or I have to tone down who I am. And I don't know if that's actually true, but that is the feeling. I literally feel more, I don't want to say oppressed because I am not oppressed, but I feel like a literal pressure to be different once I get to Stratford. (Quinn)

Meredith and Natalie's reflections on negotiating their visibility speak further to the idea that participants experience a sense of contingent tolerance based on their ability to be resilient and/or to adapt themselves or behave in ways that allow them to "fit in" where they live:

> Because I definitely feel, again, I don't know if there's evidence, right, that ... the farmer / truck culture would not be super open. There are certain people that I probably wouldn't be like, 'Oh yeah, hi, I'm queer.' That wouldn't happen. We have kind of the truck, dude-bro culture fairly often that I'm like, okay. I don't really interact, nobody has said anything directly, but again, our pride flag got stolen. It's like, what's going on? It's hard to, you don't want to think the worst, but you always have to be cautious too, right? (Meredith)

> And it's like, I like, I've kind of felt it [being gay] for a while but never really acted on it. Because my Grandma was a pivotal person in my life when I was younger, she helped raise me and all this other shit. She was a Jehovah's Witness. That lifestyle is kind of against the whole LGBT, shit like that. I came out after she passed away. (Natalie)

Meredith talks about a sense of being aware of who is around you and how they might react to your embodiment as she reflects on the way that she is not always "super open" about her queerness in St. Marys. The way that Meredith talks about not wanting to think the worst but always having to be cautious speaks to a tension brought on by the ambiguousness of acceptance that I discuss in relation to Chris' reflections above. Participants, as Meredith does here, express a sense that the area or certain people or places within the area are likely to be intolerant or are regarded as plausible sources or sites of intolerance. Because of this potential for intolerance, participants monitor and modify how open they are about their identity which includes making decisions about how they dress, where they go, and how visible they are willing to be either as an individual or a couple. These acts of monitoring and modifying are forms of affective work as well as tactics that sustain a sense of comfort and liveability in the area. The way that Meredith cannot know whether the farmer/truck culture or the truck, dude-bro

culture would be open and accepting, homophobic, or somewhere in between emphasizes the paradox of the (in)visibility dilemma. While there is a possibility that these groups might be accepting or at least tolerant of LGBTQ+ people, Meredith, and other LGBTQ+ folks (fairly) do not want to take on the risk that they might not be. Without a way to *know* that someone or some group of people will be accepting, participants are put in the position of either making themselves visible by being/becoming openly LGBTQ+ or remaining invisible or ambiguously visible in a way that might adhere to the maxim, "live and let live". What I want to emphasize in this discussion is that the inability to know whether particular places and people are tolerant or accepting of LGBTQ+ people and more specifically, the degree to which their sense of acceptance relies on a successful performance of managing their (in)visibility, has affective consequences. The affective consequences of having to constantly manage (in)visibility include being drained, exhausted, increased stress, which all result from consequences like being subject to microaggressions. Not being able to or having limited space to openly express one's gender identity or sexuality can have negative effects on a person's wellbeing.

While Meredith's negotiations of (in)visibility are framed in terms of different groups of people in the area, Natalie talks about her decision to wait to come out until after her Grandmother passed away. Having grown up around religion, Natalie is aware that this particular religious community, including her Grandmother, would not be able to accept that she is gay. Natalie's sense that her Grandmother and her religious community were unlikely to accept her affected the timing of her coming out. I return to this discussion of coming out, religion and loss of community in the final section of this chapter as I address the way participants talk about the (potential) costs of becoming visibly LGBTQ+ in the Stratford area.

Another way that participants talk about negotiating their (in)visibility in the Stratford area is in relation to pride flags. Several participants talk about the importance of LGBTQ+ inclusive markers such as pride flags and rainbow crosswalks. While I return to a discussion of the importance of these symbols in Chapter 4, in this chapter I focus on the way that participants' reflections on pride flags intersect with the way they talk about being careful and negotiating their (in)visibility. Meredith talks about how she and her

husband had an explicit discussion about the risk involved with flying the pride flag at their house:

> And that was a risk that my husband and I talked about. We live in a very conservative town. Do we want to keep this [the pride flag] up? And we both went, 'You know, yeah.' Although, he wanted to, like I have a pan/bi flag, and he wanted to fly that and that's a little too personal, right? He actually put it up and I'm like, 'That's not yours to put up'. (Meredith)

Despite the risk, they kept the pride flag up because it is a way to show people, both LGBTQ+ and not, that there is support for LGBTQ+ people in St. Marys. By flying the pride flag at their house, they are able to become visible either as LGBTQ+ allies or as LGBTQ+, depending on the degree to which people seeing the pride flag know them or read into its presence. While she is comfortable flying the pride flag, Meredith does not feel comfortable flying the pan/bi flag because it is more of a personal disclosure for her than a demonstration of support and allyship which less directly implicates her as an LGBTQ+ person. Meredith's hesitation to become potentially visible as bi/pan/queer by flying a specific flag speaks to a sense that becoming visible as LGBTQ+ requires taking on some degree of risk and comes with potential consequences. Further, it might require the ability or possibility to be misrecognized as an ally rather than as an LGBTQ+ community member.

Gloria notes that while being an affirming church, her church made a deliberate choice not to fly the pride flag at the church to avoid potential backlash and vandalism. Gloria recognizes the potential that the church may become a target if they were to fly a pride flag, and also how difficult it would be for the church, and for her personally, if anything negative like vandalism took place. It would be too hurtful if something were to happen to the church because it would make the potential for intolerance and discrimination tangible, it might make the church feel like less of a safe space for her and for others, and it would come with a potential material/economic cost to the church. This example suggests that in addition to having to negotiate (in)visibility on a personal/individual level, participants must also manage their (in)visibility in ways that

protect the people and places that make up their comfort zones. In a similar way to Gloria explaining how potential consequences inform the church's decision to not fly a flag, Steven explains that his husband does not feel comfortable with flying a pride flag at their house because of bad experiences in his past. These examples point to the way that becoming visible as LGBTQ+ or even as an LGBTQ+ ally by flying a pride flag is an act that comes with potential risks and consequences and is not something all participants can take on lightly. At several points during our interview, Meredith talks about how the pride flag she and her husband decided to keep up at their house was stolen. Meredith recognizes that she cannot be sure that their pride flag was stolen with malicious intent and that there is a chance that the person who took it just wanted to have a flag or that it was a random act rather than a targeted act. However, there is also the possibility that the pride flag was stolen with the intent to send a message that LGBTQ+ people, or even support for LGBTQ+ people, is not acceptable in St. Marys.

As Skylar puts it as we talk about her experiences in Stratford, "it's one of those things where Stratford hasn't had that much opportunity to be an asshole to me (laughs)". I understand this notion of not giving Stratford the opportunity to be an asshole as functioning in a similar way to the church not flying the flag in the sense of not giving other people the opportunity to be homophobic. I want to reiterate that I am not judging or evaluating the church's or anyone's decision to not fly a pride flag or to remain less visible in any other way. Rather, I am drawing attention to the way that these accounts, which I understand as part of the practice of "being careful", inflect my understanding of LGBTQ+ acceptance in Stratford. If participants are engaging in balancing acts and negotiations to limit their potential exposure to non-acceptance and bad experiences, that needs to be considered when we proclaim Stratford an accepting space for LGBTQ+ people.

3.2.2 "We pretended it wasn't anything": Navigating public displays of affection

The way that participants talk about whether or not they would hold a partner's hand in public provides further understanding of how the potential for intolerance affects the way that they express themselves and how comfortable they feel in the area. In this

subsection, I look at how participants talk about managing their visibility as a couple by monitoring and/or modifying their behaviour to maintain a sense of comfort as they go about their everyday lives. The ways in which participants talk about their feelings in regard to public displays of affection, and whether they would hold a partner's hand in the Stratford area, informs my understanding of the way that visibility and outness are "temporary and temporal" as well as part of complex negotiations of acceptance in the area.

Clay and Patrick[38] talk about handholding as something they would do with relative ease in the area:

> [D: Would you be more likely to hold your partner's hand in Toronto than St. Marys?] Um ... I don't know. I think, no. I think I would just as soon hold his hand here if we were out for a walk or something. Not that he comes here very often, (laughs). (Clay)

> [D: Would you feel comfortable holding a partner's hand, or do you see a lot of PDA[39]-] I don't see a lot of it. But I don't think people would have a big issue with it. I mean, you might have the odd hick going by and saying something, but again, it's not a big deal anymore. I don't think it'd be a huge deal. I don't think people would even look anymore just because it's so common now. (Patrick)

Clay talks about how he would hold his boyfriend's hand in the Stratford area just as he would in Toronto but indicates that this is not something that is happening on a regular basis because his boyfriend does not visit the area very often. Patrick talks about his understanding of non-heterosexual PDA as "not a big deal anymore." By recognizing that that there might be some opposition from "the odd hick" Patrick is drawing on assumptions about who is likely to take issue with gay PDA in public and is also locating non-acceptance in specific people rather than specific places. I continue to think about

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[38] Patrick is a cis gay man living in Stratford.

[39] PDA stands for public displays of affection such as hand holding.

this complicated relationship between places, the people who are imagined as inhabiting places, and/or the people actually in a place at a given time as I think further about participants' sense of place and experiences of places. As I look at later in this section, religion and religious people are also identified as groups of people who, like "the hick" are positioned as sources of non-acceptance of LGBTQ+ people in the area. I understand the pinpointing of specific groups – Evangelical Christians, Jehovah's Witnesses, hicks – to further complicate the way ambiguous acceptance functions. Instead of a monolithic understanding of the entire area being uniformly opposed to LGBTQ+ existence or at least LGBTQ+ visibility, there are specific groups of people who are opposed to LGBTQ+ existence who do not make up the entirety of the population. It is not that the Stratford area or the public spaces within it are necessarily homophobic or transphobic spaces, but that they may be unpredictably occupied by some homophobic or transphobic people. Returning to the notion of the (in)visibility dilemma, the absence of blatant homophobia and transphobia does not necessarily produce the conditions that sustain an embodied sense among LGBTQ+ people that they are accepted and supported within an area or even a specific space within the area. Again, this is informed by a sense of tolerance or acceptance as "temporary and temporal" and participants' understandings that they can never be certain how they are going to be read and/or how accepting other people are going to be. The act of holding hands in public is the means by which a gay couple becomes visibly gay or *together*, but it also produces the conditions in which "the hick" becomes visible in their voiced opposition to the gay couple holding hands.

While Clay and Patrick talk about being willing to hold a partner's hand with relative comfort in the area, Regan, Chris and Skylar talk about how they would hold a partner's hand, but with the expectation that they would be taking on some amount of risk and/or potential unacceptance in doing so:

[D: Would you hold your girlfriend's hand here?] I have, yeah. Again, I would maybe get some 'Jesus loves you' comments. I don't get a lot of, aside from the new group in town, they're more fire and brimstone-y. Usually it's a 'Jesus loves you' message. But still in a, 'Jesus loves you so you should change,' kind of way … But yeah. I wouldn't worry that something bad was going to happen. (Regan)

Yeah, I don't really care about that. It's all about the other person, really. But, yeah, I wouldn't care. Girl, boy, doesn't matter. I would hold their hand. (Chris)

I would feel comfortable doing it [holding hands]. And if I got yelled at, then I'd flip them off. I mean, I would caveat that I don't think most people would. I am just so used to pushing the envelope because someone's fucking got to, that I personally, like maybe I would feel uncomfortable, but I would do it anyway. (Skylar)

Regan talks about how they will hold their girlfriend's hand and although they do not worry that something bad will happen, they expect to and do receive religiously motivated comments that urge them to change. The sense of acceptance that Regan articulates here is premised on their ability to be a confident person with a support network that enables them to withstand certain levels and expressions of intolerance. This reflection emphasizes that comfort zones might provide a level of support and reassurance which sustains the confidence to stand up for oneself, to not be overly negatively affected by religious heckling, and to do the affective work involved in becoming visible by holding a partner's hand. Chris and Skylar also reflect a sense that while they would hold a partner's hand, they would be making a conscious decision to potentially take on some amount of trouble for doing so. Chris expresses that he would not care about being harassed for PDA while also recognizing that it would depend on his partner's comfort level. Skylar talks about how she might feel uncomfortable doing it, but that it is important for someone to push the envelope. This notion of "pushing the envelope" suggests that becoming visible is not just something people do for themselves but is also as a way of disrupting heteronormative assumptions about the area and the people who exist there.

As I discuss throughout this chapter in terms of the (in)visibility dilemma, the ambiguity that surrounds visibility and acceptance is tricky. If LGBTQ+ people do not feel comfortable holding hands and do not hold hands as a result, ambiguity prevails. If more LGBTQ+ people hold hands around the area, there is an increased level of visibility which may be beneficial and meaningful for other LGBTQ+ folks in the area. The act of

becoming visible by holding hands might challenge a sense of "live and let live" thereby creating a situation where the potential for a lack of acceptance is tested and may be either be confirmed, challenged or both. Like Chris and Skylar, Alex notes that the decision to hold hands in Stratford would depend on her partner's comfort level:

> I am not going to go parading around and like I said, it depends on the people. My ex and I were on a date and we were just at Jen & Larry's having an ice cream and some people that were from church community came up, and we kind of pretended it wasn't anything. I don't know if anyone would actually do anything, but it's just to be safe. To kind of avoid that. (Alex)

Alex offers an anecdote where she and her ex were on a date and they downplayed their relationship to avoid any potential trouble when people from her church community entered the space. The decision to "pretend it wasn't anything" in order to "to kind of avoid that" – with "that" being some kind of homophobic or potentially unpleasant encounter – is a tactic Alex and her ex employ to ensure that they do not encounter any issues or homophobia in that moment. In a move similar to Clay choosing not to have "that conversation" with an acquaintance at work, Alex is choosing not to put herself in a situation where she may be rejected by potentially unaccepting people. It is not that Jen & Larry's is an unaccepting space but that it becomes a potentially or likely unaccepting space when people from the church community enter. Here, Alex draws attention to the dynamic, contextual nature of acceptance. As I emphasize in my overview of queer space in my theoretical framework, it is not that this space or that space *is*, in some kind of enduring sense, accepting or unaccepting, queer or heterosexual. Rather, any space has the potential to be accepting, unaccepting or somewhere in between. Again, acceptance, like visibility, is ambiguous, shifting, and contextual. While the possibility that a space might be accepting is never foreclosed, the potential risk is the participants to take on. The emphasis that participants place on the potential to feel uncomfortable and their readiness to deal with potential issues and/or harassment provides an understanding of the way that LGBTQ+ acceptance in the Stratford area is "temporal and temporary" and substantiates that Stratford – like most places – is not necessarily a safe space for LGBTQ+ expression. These comments offer an understanding of the way that

participants require a certain level of confidence and support, and have to be willing to take on a certain level of potential risk when they decide to hold their partners hand.

While other participants indicate that they would be willing to hold a partner's hand in the area, Steven talks about how his husband is not comfortable with public displays of affection:

> [My husband] doesn't like doing that [public displays of affection] at all. And that's because he's been bashed several times. (Steven)

While none of these experiences took place in the Stratford area, the effect of having such negative and violent experiences informs the way that he is willing to become visible as a couple by holding hands, for example. Whether or not Steven and his husband would have negative experiences holding hands in Stratford does not matter as much as the way that the potential for non-acceptance and for violent or negative responses shifts how comfortable they feel and how they are willing to express themselves. Steven's reflections emphasize the risk involved in becoming visible as a non-heterosexual couple by holding hands. While the participants whose comments I discussed earlier in this section are willing to take on the risk as long as their partner is, Steven does not take on that risk because his partner is not comfortable with it. At other points in our interview, however, Steven talks about how seeing non-heterosexual couples attending the theatre and holding hands is an important display of visibility that allows the residents of Stratford to have more exposure to and potentially become more accepting of visible displays of non-heterosexuality.

Trevor[40], who participated in phase two, talks about his experiences and feelings about holding hands with his boyfriend in Perth County and in Toronto:

> Because even, we live in a super amazing neighbourhood, we've been here four and a half years. But in our first few years of dating, we held each other's hand

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[40] Trevor is a cis gay man living in Toronto.

every day, but we had a few nights coming home from the bar where drunken guys would, you know, scream profanities at us, and it made us kind of rethink what safety meant to us and as two white, like straight passing from far away gay guys, we have it easy … My point is that I still felt unsafe at times. Yeah. I'd hold his hand on the way to the farmer's market, or we'll hold it on the way to the grocery store, but we're not going to do it on a busy street always. In Perth County of all places, probably not. But I still may, and all the time in Toronto, but in Perth County, I'd still like, lean over and peck him in public probably if I feel like no one is watching. (Trevor)

Like Steven's comment about his husband's experiences of bashing affecting their decision not to hold hands, Trevor's reflections draw attention to the way that experiences of harassment have lasting effects on the way that people "rethink what safety mean[s]" and when and where they feel comfortable holding hands or displaying affection in public. Trevor is constantly engaging in calculations about when and where he feels comfortable or safe enough to hold hands. Trevor also emphasizes that it matters not only that he is a gay man, but that he is a white cis gay man who is "straight passing from far away." His reflections draw attention to the way that embodiment matters and for people who are coded as "different" from the hegemonic white, cis, able-bodied, heterosexual norm, calculations about when and where feels safe and/or comfortable are often more complicated and can have different stakes. The way that Trevor notes that he would "peck him in public probably if I feel like no one is watching" informs my understanding of the kind of live and let live mentality that demands that LGBTQ+ folks monitor their visibility and that places a responsibility on LGBTQ+ folks to ensure that they do not expose cis, heterosexual people to their "difference". Throughout this passage, Trevor recognizes the potential for harassment or backlash if he and his boyfriend hold hands or engage in PDA. Significantly, he notes that he has experienced harassment even in his "super amazing neighbourhood" in Toronto. It is not just in the Stratford area that LGBTQ+ folks have to think carefully about where they are, who is around them, and if it is safe or comfortable to hold hands or to engage in other forms of PDA with their partner.

As I consider throughout this chapter, at the level of both the individual and the couple, being read "properly" is not a given and in some cases, is not desirable, safe and/or comfortable. While it is frustrating or unwelcome for some participants, being perceived as straight may also be useful, strategic, or safer for others or in certain moments. The way that participants talk about public displays of affection informs my understanding of the level of heteronormativity in the Stratford area, the "temporal and temporary" nature of acceptance and the affective work involved in the complicated negotiations of (in)visibility that are required to maintain such acceptance.

3.3   The costs of visibility

The way that participants talk about experiences of place and negotiations of (in)visibility also informs my understanding of the potential costs of visibility and the fears and risks involved in being or becoming visible as LGBTQ+ in the Stratford area. My discussions in the previous section about the way that participants navigate public displays of affection and their perceptions of (in)visibility and (in)tolerance provide an understanding of the way that the potential for bad things to happen affects participants' experiences. In this section, I look further at the way participants talk about their awareness of the potential costs of visibility and the effects of that potential.

3.3.1   "I got made fun of every single day": Experiences of harassment at school and work

> Well, I came out shortly after I started working at the factory. And that was kind of ... a hard go … I told a couple of people and then that couple of people was like (explosion sound effect) … It was people that I trusted, or that I thought I trusted … It was more so how everybody handled it. Like some people were like, 'Oh it's cool, I don't care.' Other people were like, they just like, would make fun of me for it. Or say you just haven't had the right guy. (Natalie)

> While I was away [from high school] this happened. Because rumors started and then I came back and it was like, it was terrible. It was horrible. I got made fun of every single day. The teachers, the principles had to step in. We had to start

having assemblies about bullying and stuff because not just me, like there are other kids that were getting it, but in different ways. (Chris)

In Natalie's case, she told a couple of people who she trusted that she is gay, and they outed her to other people at their work. Natalie's experience of being outed at work offers an understanding of some of the potential risks of coming out, even to a few people you trust. The experience of being outed also speaks to a level of heteronormativity pervading Natalie's workplace, which is particularly evident as she recounts the way that some coworkers would make fun of her and tell her "you just haven't had the right guy". Dealing with being outed, harassed, and made fun of are all examples of the affective work that participants like Natalie are made to do in the course of going to work and living their everyday lives. Having to deal with harassment at work is a potential cost of visibility.

Like Natalie, Chris' experience of being outed to his school and being bullied speaks to a level of heterosexism and homophobia. Chris went to high school in Perth County in the mid 2000s. While this context is important, it is also significant to note that some participants in this study are in their early twenties and others are in their late seventies and yet, all but one of them talk about experiences of being bullied for being LGBTQ+ at school or witnessing bullying of other LGBTQ+ students at school. Several participants from both phase one and phase two talk about how they are aware of recent situations regarding LGBTQ+ students and bullying in schools in the Stratford area. Although participants generally express a sense of optimism about progress, and specifically about the presence and availability of gay straight alliances and similar groups in schools, there is also concern that bullying and specifically anti-LGBTQ+ bullying persists.

3.3.2 "Turns out there are a lot of bad apples around here": Experiences of threats and/or harassment

Another way that participants talk about the costs of being visible in the Stratford area is by sharing experiences of being threatened or harassed in public spaces in Stratford.

Skylar speaks to the presence of some level of anti-trans, anti-queer sentiment in Stratford and the area:

> I once went along looking less femme leaning than I am right now, and a guy threatened to kill me. In Stratford. I think that's part of what visibility looks like sometimes (laughs). [D: It's just not safe to be visible.] For a lot of people, it certainly isn't. That was an empty threat. And it absolutely was. My response to it, well, it's certainly something I remember and certainly something I can bring up in circumstances like this to emphasize that fact that Stratford is not safe. It's also something where my immediate response to it was like, '(Scoffs) Okay.' Like, that's just fucking weird. This guy, he was this weird, anemic looking dude who's all hunched over and obviously just tremendously homophobic and whatever and that's petty and kind of funny, but it's not really threatening. But at the same time, it's indicative of a kind of attitude that certainly is part of a wider issue and can't be narrowed down. The naysayers would be like, oh that's just a bad apple, but like, turns out there are a lot of bad apples around here and I've totally seen that attitude reciprocated in more subtle ways. (Skylar)

I want to emphasize the way that Skylar notes "that's part of what visibility looks like". Visibility comes with potential costs and risks that constantly need to be (re)evaluated, depending on where you are, what time it is, what is going on around you and a variety of other factors. Being or becoming visible is not necessarily a choice someone can make. As I have emphasized throughout this chapter by discussing the relational nature of identities, we only have so much control over the way that other people (mis)read us, and the veracity of their reading does not negate its potential costs and consequences. As Skylar suggests at another point, the general public tends to conceptualize homophobia as a violent threat, as being very overtly hateful, when that is not always what homophobia looks like. While Skylar notes that receiving a violent threat may not be a common occurrence in Stratford, such violent outbursts are indicative of a wider issue. Further, Skylar emphasizes that framing a transphobe as a "bad apple" locates the problem within that individual while ignoring the systemic nature of homophobia and transphobia.

Both Steven and Robert share experiences where they were harassed by "strangers" or "teenagers" in public in Stratford:

> And I mean, there are occasions where you'll hear some teenager go by and shout something out of a car window here, which shouldn't be happening anywhere. But, it's not the kind of thing that makes you feel so uncomfortable because the rest of the time you can feel quite comfortable. You don't get that, I mean, you don't get that kind of leering look as often here as I would have felt it in a place like Woodstock[41]. (Steven)

> I remember going to Shoppers Drug Mart for example, one cold February day. And [my husband] and I were being followed around by this guy who was harassing us. You know? [D: A stranger?] A stranger. Who was, you know, I was very upset by it. He was sort of, 'Oh, you faggots.' And this and that. We didn't get to the point of me complaining to the store manager. But it got to that point. Probably the worst episode that I've had in Stratford since we've been here. But really, the experience here has been really great. People are happy to have us around. I think, (Laughs). (Robert)

Steven emphasizes that the experience of being shouted at by teenagers does not make him feel "so uncomfortable" because it seems out of the ordinary, which implies that the ordinary is him feeling relatively comfortable. Significantly, the people who perpetrate these acts of verbal harassment are described as "strangers" and "teenagers", which frames these experiences as isolated events by people who are not necessarily representative of the Stratford community. Framing someone who calls them a slur in the drug store as a "stranger" maintains a hope that someone who is familiar with or part of (not a stranger in) the Stratford community would not conduct themselves in such a homophobic way. Further, the way that Steven and Robert talk about their experiences suggests a balance between being affected by the harassment, but also recognizing that

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[41] Woodstock is a city with a population of 40 902 located approximately half an hour from Stratford (Statistics Canada, 2016f).

the experience was not that bad or that they would likely be experiencing more and worse harassment if they lived in elsewhere.

Steven compares his level of comfort in Stratford to how comfortable he imagines he would feel if he lived in or was spending time in a nearby city like Woodstock. In comparison to other places, Stratford feels comfortable for him and the odd experience of someone yelling or saying something is not enough to disrupt that. However, it is a potential cost of being visible, of being perceived as gay, in Stratford. For Robert, the experience of being followed and harassed by a guy in Shoppers was upsetting. However, like Steven, Robert focuses on his sense that most people are happy to have him and his husband around and that they are generally quite happy and accepted in the area, despite this negative experience. This is an interesting example of the way that Robert is managing his sense of place within the interview. He offers a story of a negative experience but follows it up with a positive framing of the area. While harassment is a potential cost of visibility in the area, these participants qualify experiences of harassment by emphasizing how they feel comfortable and relatively accepted in general. Underlying this discussion of the potential costs of visibility is a recognition that these costs are not experienced in uniform ways within and among LGBTQ+ people. Rather, the calculations and negotiations participants make as they manage their (in)visibility, like their capacity to engage in affective work, depends on their subjectivities, the vibrance of their comfort zones, their access to resources, and their history in the area, among other factors.

3.3.3   "It's predominantly a Christian-centered city": Religion as an anti-LGBTQ+ presence

Participants discuss religion and churches in the Stratford area in the majority of interviews. Several participants talk about church and religion as a source of community and as providing a place where they feel accepted in the area, which I address in the next chapter. In this section, however, I consider the ways that participants talk about religion as a source of anti-LGBTQ+ sentiment in the area. Steven, whose own church is significant to his sense of place, expresses one of the more explicit critiques of some other churches in Stratford:

> … a number of what I would consider right-wing churches here in town who would probably be advocating for parents throwing their gay and lesbian children out of the house instead of welcoming them and embracing them as who they are. (Steven)

Steven notes the presence of right-wing churches in town who he understands not only as unaccepting of LGBTQ+ people but as actively advocating for parents to reject their LGBTQ+ children. Steven talks at length about churches in Stratford that are accepting, supportive places for LGBTQ+ people at other points in our interview, which demonstrates the impossibility of generalizing churches and religions as tolerant or intolerant of LGBTQ+ people. Similarly, while her own church is affirming and accepting, Gloria recognizes and expresses a frustration with the way that other churches and religions use the bible and Christianity to make anti-LGBTQ+ arguments.

The way that Regan talks about the semi-recent opening of a specific anti-LGBTQ+ church downtown St. Marys extends this discussion:

> I can't remember the dude's name. But he is a fairly fundamentalist Christian who preaches on street corners and gives out pamphlets. Has gotten in trouble for giving things to students on school property and the group that he runs is ... is not at all supportive, will hand out material that is clearly anti-LGBT and have definitely said before that they will pray for me. I am very secure in who I am … I'm also very comfortable with saying that you're on public property, you can't say that, and I will contact authorities if you continue to say that. But I feel bad for people in town who might have had more unpleasant experiences before who may not have supportive families. Like I have an amazing support network to fall back on when things like that happen. And a lot of people don't. (Regan)

> Some churches are inclusive and they're like, 'Definitely, we don't care about queer, whatever, I don't give a shit.' And then there's some that are just like, 'Nope. Go die.' (Laughs). But it really depends. Because there's just so many churches in the area and it's predominantly a Christian centered city. (Sam)

Throughout this chapter I am interested in the ways that participants' accounts provide an understanding of how the potential for, or the realization of intolerance, rejection, harassment and/or violence has affective consequences. This fundamentalist Christian church is not just an anti-LGBTQ+ presence but is actively advocating against LGBTQ+ rights by preaching and giving out pamphlets. Regan and I walked by the permanent location of the church downtown St. Marys and at multiple points during our walk we saw posters put up by the church in the downtown area. While these posters were not directly anti-LGBTQ+, they contribute to a physical presence of an anti-LGBTQ+ church in town and might send a message to LGBTQ+ people that there is visible opposition to their existence and acceptance in St. Marys. This passage reinforces the idea that LGBTQ+ people living in the area need to be secure in who they are and confident enough to stand up for themselves and their right to exist as part of the general community. Regan attributes their ability to stand up for themselves as connected to their support network in the area and recognizes that people who do not have a strong support network would likely be affected in different, more negative ways by having people hand out anti-LGBT material and telling them they will pray for them downtown. Regan's reflections about having to stand up for themselves draws attention to how an active anti-LGBTQ+ presence creates even more affective work for participants, drawing attention to the importance of – and limits of – comfort zones. While Regan does not seem to see this church as reflecting the sentiments of the majority of people living in St. Marys, they emphasize that the presence of a fundamentalist Christianity inflects the way LGBTQ+ acceptance happens in town.

As Sam emphasizes in the above passage, it is difficult for LGBTQ+ people to know whether a church is going to be accepting or not. For Sam, it is the unknowingness that is tricky when it comes to churches and acceptance. Many churches are supportive and accepting but it is difficult to know or trust that, particularly if someone has had negative experiences or has been rejected by a church or religious community in the past. In terms of the potential costs, there is a potential affective cost to knowing, as Sam and Steven point out, that there are organizations in your city that would reject someone and advocate for their exclusion from the community because they are LGBTQ+. Returning to my earlier discussion about experiences of place, it is emotionally draining and

dehumanizing to have to wonder whether a church, or any place, is going to accept you, tolerate you, or tell you to "go die."

Two participants in particular talk about their experiences with church and religion as a former source of community that they no longer have access to since coming out:

> I've kind of felt it [being gay] for a while but never really acted on it. Because my Grandma was a pivotal person in my life when I was younger, she helped raise me and all this other shit. She was a Jehovah's Witness. That lifestyle is kind of against the whole LGBT, shit like that. I came out after she passed away. And then it's like, I had like, friends and mentors and shit like that within the congregation, church, whatever you want to call it … Yeah, and like, there was some of them that I viewed them as family. I would go for sleepovers with them when I was a kid and it's like, I can run into them out in public now and they completely ignore me. [D: Because you're gay?] Because I'm gay. Yeah. (Natalie)

> My family was Christian so we kind of left that community a year before [I came out]. But there were some people I was still in contact with so that was, kind of, a step, I wanted to tell some of them, just because they're like, 'I want to see you, I want to see you.' I was like, 'This is who I am now. If you want to see me, that's what you're seeing.' And most people were... they just wanted to ignore the fact. They had nothing against me personally, but they didn't want anything to do with sexuality or gender and that kind of thing. (Alex)

Natalie talks about how religion was a source of community and also part of a deep connection to her grandmother. She waited until after her grandmother passed away to come out because she knew that being LGBT is contrary to her grandmother's religious beliefs. Natalie also talks about the experience of losing friends and mentors, people who she was very close to growing up, who no longer want to interact with her because she is gay. Like Natalie, Alex talks about a sense of losing her Christian friends and community because of her sexuality and gender. For Natalie and Alex, one of the costs associated with coming out is the loss of particular friends and community. As I establish in my

theoretical framework, comfort zones are not static or given, but cultivated, dynamic, and subject to change over time. Given the importance of comfort zones, these examples offer an understanding of how difficult it can be when coming out means losing touch with some of the people and places that were an important part of your comfort zone.

3.4   Conclusion

Malatino (2019) elaborates on the stakes of identity negotiations, noting that "'what we are' must be adjudicated prior to sexualization or erotic interest, so that the boundaries of the perceiver's sexual identity are not broached; our bodies are disarticulated from a corporeal whole … because the perceiver doesn't know what we are" (p. 31). This point is significant because it underscores how our negotiations of identity are never discreet in multiple senses. It is not just that we are subject to (mis)reading by other people by virtue of existing in the world together, but that the way we understand our own bodies depends intimately on the way we understand other people's bodies. To remain coherent as a hetero man, for example, one must ensure their desires are directed toward the "proper" subject, which depends on an ability to read and identify such subjects. Malatino's (2019) analysis on the trickiness of the heterosexual matrix and the way it renders all kinds of embodiments unintelligible is central to the notion that our identities are never just our own but rather, are bound up in complex, relational dynamics. This conceptualization of the relational dynamics of identity informs my understanding of participants' discussions of being ambiguously (in)visible. The way that participants talk about experiences of harassment and the effects of the potential for intolerance or harassment is bound up in a sense of knowing that you are constantly being read and potentially misread. It is not just the potential for misrecognition but a sense of not knowing how you are being read and not knowing if your sense of acceptance hinges on misrecognition and therefore can be lost at any point when and/or if recognition happens. As Skylar notes:

> But at the same time, it's like, there is a concrete way in which ... I could get screwed over in certain circumstances. I know that that's the case, and I know very well that if I were to ... constantly expect that potential to come out, that I'm just not even going to live a life worth living anyhow. I kind of just go with it. (Skylar)

To varying extents, participants are aware that there are potential risks to becoming visible, being themselves and/or existing in particular times and places in the Stratford area. The point of this discussion and this chapter is not to evaluate or judge the level of heterosexism, cissexism, homophobia, transphobia (etc.) in the Stratford area. Rather, the point is to draw attention to the way that the potential for intolerance, discrimination, harassment and/or violence matters and affects participants in complicated ways.

Chapter 4

4   Sense of Place and LGBTQ+ Community

In the previous chapter I examine how participants talk about feeling ambiguously (in)visible and (in)tolerated, their experiences of places, and the potential costs of visibility. In this chapter, I look at moments where participants talk in more optimistic ways about their experiences in the area and what makes the area more liveable for them. Many of these discussions illustrate the intricacy of our relationships with places; it is not just what the Stratford area is or what it provides for participants, but also how they understand themselves to be part of a local community.

I begin this chapter by looking at how participants talk about their sense of place satisfaction and place dissatisfaction in the area and the way that length of residence, participant subjectivity, and other factors inform their senses of (dis)satisfaction. I focus on the way that knowing people and being known, as well as a sense of being monitored, inform participants' accounts. As well, I attend to how participants talk about their support networks, comfort zones, and other factors, like shopping downtown Stratford, as affecting their sense of place in the area. In the second section of this chapter, I consider how participants talk about their sense of LGBTQ+ community, the ways they understand LGBTQ+ community, their proximity to an LGBTQ+ community and their connections to other LGBTQ+ people in the area. I continue this conversation about LGBTQ+ community in the next chapter on how change happens and hopes for the future.

4.1   Sense of place

In this section I draw on conversations with participants about why they live in the Stratford area, how they feel about living in the Stratford area, and how satisfied they are with where they live, to think about their sense of place in the area. My approach to making sense of participants' sense of place in their accounts is informed by the concepts of place satisfaction, place attachment and place dependence, as established in my theoretical framework. Soini et al. (2012) define place satisfaction as the "judgement of

the perceived quality of a certain setting" or "the utilitarian value of a place to meet basic needs" (p. 125). As I work with participants' accounts, I am interested in how they talk about their place satisfaction and factors that contribute to or affect their sense of place satisfaction. Place attachment refers to the emotional bonds that develop between people and places or the bonds that develop between people and their environments (Altman & Low, 1992; Hummon, 1992; Jorgensen & Stedman, 2006; Manzo, 2005; Ngo & Brklacich, 2014; Scannell & Gifford, 2010). Work on place attachment informs my understanding of the way that participants express connections to the area and specific places within the area. I am attentive to the way participants talk about positive bonds, which are often discussed in terms of love, roots and positive attachment, but also the way that participants talk about other kinds of attachments – places that haunt, places we have experienced trauma or had break ups, or any number of affectively driven "attachments" to place that are not necessarily motivated by "positive" feelings (Manzo, 2005).

The third component of my sense of place framework, place dependence, informs my understanding of the way that participants talk about particular physical and social features of the area as an important part of what makes it a desirable place for them to live (Kolodziejski, 2014). Particularly as I look at how participants talk about their sense of the area as somewhere where they "fit" and/or somewhere that offers the kinds of amenities and activities that they are interested in, the concept of place dependence is useful. A focus on place dependence also emphasizes the importance of the degree of agency someone has in determining where they live, including to what extent they rely on the conditions (either social of physical) of a place for their work or living or if they are actively choosing to be in the place they live. As Crawford (2016) emphasizes, people stay in a place for reasons other than being positively attached to and/or satisfied with that place. As I move into a discussion of participants' accounts, I aim to be attentive to the way that their accounts are informed by their positionality both in terms of their subjectivities and their relationships to and within the area.

4.1.1 "This is my kind of place": Place satisfaction in the Stratford area

[D: And you feel a sense of belonging generally in Stratford?] Oh yes. I have never looked back on that decision. It's definitely a good place for an artist and for a person who is a kind of backward, I'm sort of more of a 19th century person than a 21st century person. I can choose plays and things like that, I can choose music that I like. No, I would not go to a hip-hop performance. But if there's, Mozart is on at the Factory 163 tomorrow night? I'll be there! You know what I'm saying? And there's plenty of that for all tastes. (Drew)

In this passage, Drew talks about Stratford as a fitting place for him and as somewhere that offers events, activities and culture that are of interest to him. The theatre and arts scene in Stratford is an important feature of the city for many participants. Other participants, like Gloria, talk about how Stratford offers a range of activities and things to do that interest her through her church, the theatre and other local organizations. Drew and Gloria talk about feeling a connection with many features of Stratford and express a sense of both attachment and satisfaction toward what it has to offer in terms of culture and entertainment. One way that they both articulate a sense of belonging is through a connection to or participation in the theatre and/or an arts scene. In a direct sense, artistic activities and hobbies, such as participating in a choir or semi-regularly attending events at a specific venue, allows for the development of community by meeting and connecting with other people on a regular basis. Beyond that, in a city like Stratford, that is known for its theatre and arts scene, a connection to theatre and the arts can serve as a means of local belonging. While framed in different ways by various participants, across the interviews there is a sense that to be interested in the arts and a patron of the theatre is to be part of life and culture in Stratford. As Serena notes in a passage that I consider later in this chapter, Stratford can have a vibe of, "if you don't know about Shakespeare, what are you doing in the downtown?" The other side of this is that if you do know about Shakespeare, you might be more likely to find a sense of belonging in the downtown. Not only does the presence of the theatre and the arts matter to some participants, but the appreciation of and engagement with local theatre and arts scenes is a way that

participants express their sense of satisfaction with and belonging in Stratford. The way that participants like Drew and Gloria talk about their experiences and excitement attending artistic and cultural events they find interesting suggests that regular events and certain spaces associated with the theatre itself may be part of their comfort zones. While this is significant for them, it is also important that this experience is not universal; some participants are not interested in and/or do not have the time or money to attend these kinds of events or to frequent event spaces.

Beyond being a way to claim or access a sense of belonging in Stratford, there is a perception among most participants that the theatre is associated with LGBTQ+ people and culture:

> Because even with people like, the stereotype of queer people with musicals and stuff like that, they've been doing more musicals recently … And with that, you're going to have more LGBT population coming. But things like Rocky Horror, when Rocky Horror was in town, I knew a lot of people who came out during Rocky Horror, which was only because they were going to the show in drag and were like, 'Oh yeah, by the way, I have a boyfriend.' I'm like, 'Good for you, I'm proud of you!' Kind of thing. But because of Rocky, they were a bit more comfortable being like, 'Okay, freaks like me. Like it!' (Sam)

> I put a lot of that credit to the theatre community. Which is another reason why we felt this was a better place for us. Because there is a large artistic community in Stratford because of the theatres, and not just seasonal people. Some of the actors actually have homes here although they may be performing elsewhere during the off season. They actually have invested in the community and it has, over 60 odd years, has transformed ... [D: The theatre and the arts community here provide some additional support for-] I wouldn't even describe it necessarily as support, it's visibility. And it's been visibility in the community for a long period of time and has allowed the residents here in Stratford, whether they love the theatre or not, and a lot of them don't, to become at least acclimatized. And used to the fact that there is sexual diversity in the community. I mean, when I can

see theatre patrons in the downtown core walking hand in hand and no one saying

anything to them. (Steven)

In this passage, Sam remarks that, "there's obviously queer people in the festival, there's no fucking way there isn't." Several participants, including Sam and Steven, discuss a sense that there are queer people in and around the theatre both as employees and as patrons and that the kind of visibility that the theatre generates is important. As Sam suggests, there is a stereotype of queer people liking musicals and a result of the theatre doing more musicals is that there are more LGBTQ+ people coming to see shows. Sam mentions the Rocky Horror Picture Show in particular, which was part of the Stratford Festival season in 2018, as a show that is of interest to a queer audience[42]. Sam draws a direct connection between the theatre putting on Rocky Horror and people in Stratford feeling comfortable to express themselves and to be open about who they are and their relationships. The notion that a musical production can create a situation where people feel empowered to come out or, as Sam puts it, to say, "freaks like me" is remarkable. Specifically, in relation to shows like Rocky Horror, Sam's reflections contribute to an understanding of how the theatre and arts scene can function as part of people's comfort zones. Even if only at certain moments and times around a show, the theatre has the potential to facilitate the creation of meaningful space for queer expression and connection. This example of Rocky Horror speaks to the ephemerality of elements that make up one's comfort zone. I also posit that part of what might be so important about the "queer space" or space for public queer expression created around performances of Rocky Horror is that a connection to the theatre as a respected presence in Stratford may insulate individual people from having to bear the responsibility of making queerness visible. When the theatre puts on a queer production like Rocky Horror, they are providing a kind of visibility that disrupts a "live and let live" philosophy. What I mean by this is that "live and let live", which tends to operate in such a way that non-

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[42] Based on my experience attending this production of Rocky Horror and living in Stratford during the summer it was on, it was amazing to see folks in drag and intricate costumes walking around downtown Stratford before going to the show. In this way, the theatre certainly contributes to (temporary) queer visibility and queer folks (temporarily) taking up space in Stratford.

heteronormative displays or embodiments are unacceptable and threaten a sense of tolerance. This is shifted, however, by creating more public space for visible queerness through productions like Rocky Horror. The space created in and around the show allows for people to come out, to do drag; it creates space for possibilities to be enacted. In this way, and as Steven notes in the above passage, the theatre brings an important level of visibility to LGBTQ+ issues in Stratford.

Steven draws attention to the way that the impact of the theatre is not just seasonal and that there are actors and people associated with the theatre who have settled in Stratford, who live there and are part of the community. Steven emphasizes that he understands the theatre as a source of visibility in the community more than support. The way that he makes this distinction is important. Steven emphasizes that even people in Stratford who do not love the theatre have to coexist with its presence and influence in the city and the kind of values that come with that, which includes being tolerant toward LGBTQ+ people. Even if someone has never attended a show or event at the theatre and is not particularly interested in the presence of the theatre in Stratford, the theatre is undeniably a staple of Stratford that affects the overall vibe of the place. This discussion of theatre and the arts as affecting participants' sense of place is specific to Stratford. A few participants who live outside of Stratford also talk about the theatre as a source of positive attachment to the area. While most participants who live in Stratford tend to note that they know little about and spent little time in St. Marys and the surrounding area outside of Stratford, participants who live in St. Marys and the surrounding area tend to have attachments to Stratford in ways that indicate that proximity to Stratford factors into their sense of place in the area. This is not surprising, given Stratford's size and role as an economic and commercial hub in the area.

It is interesting to contrast Steven's hopefulness at seeing theatre patrons walking and holding hands with no one saying anything to them with my discussion about the way that participants discuss public displays of affection like handholding in the previous chapter. Most participants, including Steven, talk about how they do not feel entirely comfortable holding a partner's hand in the Stratford area and that if they do hold hands, they are likely to expect some kind of backlash or verbal harassment. Against such

feelings, for some LGBTQ+ people living in Stratford, the visibility provided by LGBTQ+ tourists and theatre patrons holding hands and not being harassed is meaningful. The way that Steven and other participants talk about seeing gay couples holding hands and the importance of visible LGBTQ+ symbols like pride flags suggests that such displays – even if fleeting – matter to them and may be part of their comfort zones. While I discuss the way that my participants talk about how becoming visible allows them to educate others and be role models for other LGBTQ+ people later in this chapter, in this example Steven draws attention to the way that the visibility of other LGBTQ+ people contributes to his sense of comfort and place in the area.

Thinking further about the way that participants talk about the theatre and arts in relation to their sense of place beyond these more explicit conversations about the theatre and its significance, discussions about the theatre are woven throughout my interviews. One participant bought the house of someone who was prominently involved with the theatre while another told a story about working in the Stratford hospital in the 1980s and treating a prominent actor who was dying of AIDS. One participant works at the theatre in the summer and another participant recounts how someone asked for his number outside a showing of Rocky Horror. It is not just that people are going to shows and enjoying the theatre but that the theatre is enmeshed with/in the Stratford community and the lives of many people living in Stratford in complex ways. As Serena comments, "the theatre is the lifeblood of Stratford." While participants relate to the theatre and arts scene in Stratford in various ways, there is a general recognition that the theatre is an important part of the fabric of Stratford. However, the ways that participants talk about the theatre are not entirely positive and/or celebratory and I return to critiques of the theatre in the next chapter as part of a discussion about the way participants talk about how change happens in the Stratford area.

Beyond the theatre and arts scene, one of the common ways that participants talk about their sense of place in Stratford is in relation to their sense of other places they have either visited, lived in, or considered living in:

And I would never have been comfortable living in Toronto. I would go there and when my sister was there and had an apartment, I might stay a couple of nights with her. Thoroughly relieved to get out of the place (laughs) because I just wasn't ... yes, I would go, there was the Glad Day Bookshop and that would be one of my destinations. And a few other places. But to live there? Stratford is, for me, of a size where there is lots of culture. There are wonderful shops, there are wonderful little restaurants. I'm not a big eater out, but they're there. There is a garden club that was formed in the 1870s and has existed non-stop. I think it's the oldest in the country. I have access to those kinds of things, which we might almost associate more with bigger cities, but they're here. But I can, now that I walk slowly, I can walk across town in half an hour. Well, I couldn't do that in Metro Toronto. This is my kind of place. And it was a very conscious choice. And I've lived almost always in rural or small towns. (Drew)

We first were thinking of a house in Avondale but it's such a small, little burg that there's nothing there (laughs). And we kind of rejected that and started looking here in Stratford as a next best choice to something that rural. Because the amenities are here with the hospital and what not. And we also felt when we'd been in Stratford for whatever reason that it's a more comfortable place to be as a couple. You don't feel the kind of vibe because the downtown is vibrant compared to Woodstock where the downtown is being gutted by the establishment of box stores on the edge of town. (Steven)

Drew talks about Stratford in relation to Toronto, describing Toronto as somewhere he would never be comfortable living and as somewhere that he is thoroughly relieved to get out of. Stratford, in comparison, is somewhere Drew describes as "my kind of place." The notion that Stratford is his "kind of place" speaks to a level of positive place dependence that informs his overall positive sense of place in Stratford. Stratford provides the kind of lifestyle, pace and activities he is looking for. The way that Drew notes that "it was a very conscious choice" speaks to his level of agency over where he lives. While he enjoys living in Stratford and does not want to live elsewhere, his ability to potentially live elsewhere and his experience having lived elsewhere shapes and also

demonstrates his enjoyment of and attachment to Stratford. The kind of positive attachment that is expressed in articulating a "conscious choice" to live somewhere is meaningful. While Drew recognizes that Toronto does have specific queer spaces such as the Glad Day Bookshop[43], he does not need to be in Toronto to do the things he wants to do. Stratford has the kinds of amenities and activities that Drew is looking for, while also being geographically small enough for him to walk to places and to maintain connections with the people living around him. On multiple levels, Stratford provides a lifestyle that works for Drew and that he enjoys. Drew's appreciation of the kind of lifestyle Stratford offers and emphasis on his active choice to stay in Stratford both factor into his sense of place.

Like Drew, Steven comments on the way he understands Stratford as a comfortable place that offers the kind of lifestyle, pace, and amenities that he and his husband are looking for. Steven talks specifically about the vibe of a place, which is an interesting and useful way to express the intuitive feelings and assessments we have in and about places. Affective experiences of place can be tricky to discuss because we often do not process the ways that we perceive and move through places on a conscious level. The vibe of a place is about the sense you get when you are somewhere; the downtown of Stratford *feels* better and more comfortable for them as a couple compared to Woodstock. The vibe of a place is very subjective and, as will become apparent through my discussion of these interviews, some participants understand Stratford as somewhere with a vibe that resonates with them and others decidedly do not.

In talking about how he and his husband felt more comfortable as a couple in Stratford, particularly in comparison to Woodstock, Steven draws attention to the kinds

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[43] Regan and Steven also mention Glad Day Bookshop as a notable LGBTQ+ place in Toronto. I return to a discussion about how participants talk about queer-centric spaces in the Stratford area in the analysis chapter. The following two quotes speak to this:
But I don't regret moving to Stratford and that says a lot. There are things, yes, certainly I miss things about the city, I mean, I miss ... I would still go down to Church St., going out on the street and to a couple of the shops, having access to things like Glad Day. (Steven)
I got to go to an LGBT bookstore. Because like, we don't have that in St. Marys. But they have that in Toronto! (Regan)

of calculations that were involved with deciding where to move to retire. The way Steven explains how he and his husband consciously thought about how comfortable they would be as a couple depending on where they moved is a reflection of the way that people do not experience place universally but might have to consider how they will be perceived there and how comfortable and safe they will feel. Both Steven and Drew emphasize the importance of the vibe of a place and the kind of lifestyle, amenities and services that are available and accessible in a place fitting with who they are and what they are looking for. As I am trying to emphasize, it is not just a coincidence that Drew and Steven are satisfied with their lives in Stratford and seem to have well developed comfort zones. They both view Stratford as a good place to live and chose it as somewhere to live because it offers the kinds of amenities and activities they are looking for.

The way that Drew talks about feeling "thoroughly relieved" to get out of Toronto and back to Stratford is echoed by several participants and suggests that participants perceive a different vibe and a difference in pace between Toronto and Stratford. As Gloria describes her experiences traveling to Toronto, she talks about feeling overwhelmed, stressed and makes it clear that she would not want to live in Toronto. Gloria, like Drew, feels a sense of relief at being back in Stratford in comparison to the stressful experience that is traveling to and through Toronto. The way that these participants talk about an embodied sense of the differences between being in Stratford and being in Toronto is one way in which they frame their sense of satisfaction with life in Stratford. While difficult to measure, some places just *feel* like a better fit for particular people at certain times and life stages.

Informed by scholarship that emphasizes that it is not just the social/cultural but also the physical features of a place that shape our sense of place, I also posit that the differences in the physical landscape between Stratford and Toronto factor into sense of place. The way that Drew emphasizes that he enjoys being able to walk across town, and Gloria talks about the importance of specific outdoor places where she goes to relax and feel in touch with nature contributes to my understanding of this. It is not just their social connections and appreciation of local arts and theatre that informs their positive place attachment, place dependence and place satisfaction, but specific things about the

landscape, the geographic size of the city and features like its low population density in comparison to places like Toronto also shape participants' sense of place. Further, for participants who vibe with Stratford, that vibe might contribute to their comfort zone. While having a sense of comfort or of enjoying the vibe, or pace, of a place does not mean one will always be comfortable, it does have the potential to contribute to a sense of a place as being liveable. Of course, there are different vibes and paces within and across Stratford, St. Marys and Perth County, at different times of day, times of year, and so on. But on some general level, these participants talk about differences they sense between the quiet, but still commercially and intellectually vibrant, vibe of the Stratford area and the exciting and potentially stressful vibe of Toronto.

Just as Drew, Steven, and Gloria talk about Stratford as somewhere that has a comfortable vibe for them and as a place where they can do the kinds of activities they are interested in, Clay and Serena reflect on how the quiet atmosphere of the Stratford area is something they are comfortable with:

> It's easy to say that there's more to do in Toronto. That's like, yeah, I guess that's the easy answer. But that's not always the case, I guess. I don't know. Just more, there's more going on. And it just, it's just a sense of more excitement. But it's nice here, it's quiet. I end up getting a lot of stuff done in my free time here, but that's from the influence of my Dad, living with them still too, (laughs). (Clay)

> Life in Stratford is quiet. You have to be very comfortable with the idea that everyone goes out at like 8 pm and goes to bed by 10:30. Which I am very comfortable with (laughs). Yeah, there's not a night scene. I mean, I'm sure there's people who would disagree with me on that. (Serena)

The way that Clay differentiates between there being "more to do" and "a sense of more excitement" in Toronto is significant. Clay is troubling an assumption that Toronto obviously offers more to do than the Stratford area because of its size and diversity. As I consider the way participants talk about the Stratford area in this chapter, my aim is to emphasize that not all participants perceive a split between Stratford as somewhere where this is nothing to do and Toronto somewhere there is lots to do, but rather they

understand each place as offering different things to do and a different feel or vibe that will be more or less appealing depending on the person. The way that Toronto has "a sense of more excitement" for Clay resonates with the way Drew describes Stratford as the kind of place for him and speaks to the subjectivity of place dependence. Clay's reflections also emphasize how it is possible to have attachments to multiple places.

Like Clay, Serena describes Stratford as quiet and as somewhere that doesn't have much of a night scene. Part of the vibe of a place is not only pace but timing more generally and here, Serena draws attention to the way that Stratford is somewhere people go out early and go to bed early. The early schedule of Stratford may be compared to the pace of a city like Toronto where people go out and stay out much later, partially due to businesses and restaurants being open much later than they tend to be in the Stratford area. For Serena, the vibe and quietness of Stratford and her comfort with the lifestyle that comes with it contributes to a sense of place satisfaction. Further, as Serena acknowledges, her assessment of Stratford as quiet and having no night life is not universal. The way that participants perceive the vibe of a place and the features that make them satisfied with a place are not only subjective, but subject to change over time as both the people and the places continue to change. Thus, the way that participants feel about and relate to Stratford has changed and will continue to change over time.

Robert and Steven also talk about how a desire for a quiet routine and tendencies toward introversion and staying in facilitate a sense of place satisfaction in the area:

> [My husband] and I generally are kind of homebodies. We don't do a lot of social things outside the house except with each other. (Steven)

> I think the other thing is that we're a fairly tight knit ... gay couple. And we've got our life, we do our shopping. We look after our house. We've got my husband's clinic and my work and stuff, so it all becomes a little bit insular. If I was a single person, I'd be reaching out a lot more than I am. (Robert)

Steven describes him and his husband as "homebodies" and notes that any socializing they do outside of the house tends to be together. Similarly, Robert talks about how he

and his husband are a "tight knit" couple and that they are a "little bit insular." Both Steven and Robert indicate that they generally have the things they need, are happy to stay home with their husbands, and are not necessarily looking to go to events and bars. In this way, their preferred lifestyle and lack of interest in events and bars sustains their sense of place dependence in the area. Participants' accounts demonstrate how positive place attachments and place satisfaction are reliant on their ability or willingness to sustain a level of place dependence in a particular place. As I suggest above, sustaining place dependence depends, to some degree, on perceiving one's interests and preferences as aligning with the kind of lifestyle offered in a particular place. For participants whose interests and preferences do not align or are not easily sustained in a particular place, it is likely they will experience lower levels of place satisfaction.

The way that Steven and Robert talk about being homebodies and tight knit gay couples also emphasizes how being in a relationship structures their routine and contributes to their sense of place satisfaction in the area. For participants like Steven and Robert who are married and spend a lot of their non-working time either at home or around town with their husbands, they do not have the time or the inclination to search out many events or groups and thus, the lack of existence of those groups might not be particularly impactful for them. Furthermore, the close bonds that form between couples provides a source of support, comfort and companionship that contributes to their overall sense of wellbeing and is certainly part of their comfort zones. Robert talks about how he might have to move to Toronto if he were single, which speaks to the way that being in a relationship and being able to live a particular lifestyle is an important part of his satisfaction with life in Stratford. My point here is not causal; it is not that being in a relationship means one is likely to have a positive sense of place but that the benefits that can come from being in a relationship – companionship, economic stability – can contribute to participants' comfort zones in important ways. Further, the participants I am discussing have a home in which they can be a homebody. Steven, Robert and Gloria discuss the time and energy that goes into living and maintaining a house with a partner and how the practice of co-managing the responsibilities and demands of life and work is both consuming and rewarding. These participants discuss the importance of the support and comfort provided by relationships and by having a house that they are connected to

and feel safe in but emphasize that the time they spend together and maintaining a household means they do not have as much time or energy to develop connections and community beyond their household. Not only do their houses provide a source of activity (maintaining the house, shoveling the laneway, mowing the grass) but they also provide a physical home base that is a crucial part of their comfort zones. As I establish in my theoretical framework, and throughout my discussion of participants' accounts, comfort zones are nebulous, made up of feelings and moments, in addition to people and places.

Having a home where participants feel comfortable and can be themselves makes life more liveable. The following excerpt from Sam illustrates this further:

> … most people are poor and they're living with their parents or they're living with roommates, so they don't have their own space, for one. They don't have their own space to be like, come over, let's hang out, kind of thing. (Sam)

Here, Sam is talking about LGBTQ+ youth in Stratford. Sam's reflections reinforce my earlier point about how having a house or apartment, a place of your own, contributes to the liveability of the area for some participants. People who have their own houses or apartments may take for granted their ability to have friends over or to have a date over. For people who do not have access to their own space, the search for places to hang out, hook up, be a homebody, or any number of other activities is limited and depends on how accepting their family and/or roommates are. The effects and constraints of this lack of space may contribute to a lack of place satisfaction and a sense of feeling stuck or trapped in the area, which also suggests a lack of place agency. As I examine the accounts of participants like Sam who talk about being less satisfied with life in Stratford in the next section, I am attentive to the way that factors like one's living situation and economic stability matter, alongside factors like age and life stage. Sam's reflections emphasize how much it matters whether participants have a living space where they feel comfortable and safe in a discussion of what facilitates a sense of place satisfaction. An extension of this is that for participants who lack access to indoor spaces where they feel comfortable, outdoor spaces serve an important function during times of year when they are accessible. Sam and other participants talk about how, both presently and in the past, specific

outdoor spaces in the area have served important functions for them as places to meet up with people, to hang out, and to exist as themselves without having to pay to be in a commercial space. In this way, Sam's reflections emphasize how timing matters in terms of the flow of seasons and the difference it makes whether it is summer or winter in Stratford. Sam and other participants also discuss how life in Stratford feels quite different during the summer and the winter; the summer has more activity fueled by tourism and the theatre whereas the winter, which is especially quiet. There is a different vibe or feel to Stratford in the winter when the weather sometimes leaves people quite literally stuck in a place which has fewer activities, events, and networking available[44]. I return to this discussion about seasons and discuss the effect of seasonal depression as I consider how participants talk about barriers to organizing in the next chapter.

Thinking further about how factors like place agency and length of residence affect people's experiences, Serena, Chris, Clay and Patrick grew up in the Stratford area and talk about choosing to move back to and stay in Stratford after having moved elsewhere after high school. In the following passages, Serena and Patrick talk about how their sense of satisfaction in the Stratford area has shifted over time:

> I couldn't wait to get out of here in high school. But I think that's a normal high school experience. And then I did get out of here and I lived lots of other places and I kept coming back … but then when I did definitively decide that I was going to come back, it just all fell into place in like a bizarre way. (Serena)

> I think my impressions of Stratford kind of changed over the years as people kind of became more accepting. [D: And is it's somewhere you've come back to. Do you envision yourself going elsewhere ever or are you happy here?] No, I think I'm good here now. I think I finally found my spot; I feel like I found my home. (Patrick)

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[44] The Stratford area is located within a snowbelt, which means that heavy snowfall is common because of lake-effect snow. Heavy snow results in road closures and makes it more difficult to move around the area.

Serena and Patrick recognize how their feelings toward Stratford have changed over time as they note that they had a strong desire to leave when they were younger. However, in the process of leaving and returning, the area became somewhere they see themselves living long term. This begs the question of how we calibrate what level of acceptance we need to be comfortable or how we "find [our] spot". The process of leaving the area and returning to the area (sometimes repeatedly) is framed as important in terms of transforming themselves and their perceptions of and feelings toward, and in, the Stratford area. This draws attention to the way that having the agency (which includes the resources) to leave the area, or to potentially leave the area, if necessary, shapes one's sense of place. At another point, Serena notes that she came back to Stratford with the "intention of setting roots". There is a level of agency involved in Serena's decision to return to Stratford to set down roots; it is somewhere she wants to set down roots. She does not feel stuck here or like she just ended up here and her decision is likely motivated by her familiarity with the Stratford area and her existing connections within the area. Patrick talks about how much Stratford has changed over the years to become more accepting of LGBTQ+ people and how that is part of what has made Stratford a more liveable place for him.

Jane is among a few participants who grew up in the area and continue to live in the area without having left for a substantial amount of time[45]. Jane, a self-described introvert who lives in the country, elaborates on what she likes about living in the Stratford area and why she would not want to move to a larger city:

> Nope. I am not a city person. Like, when we go on vacation like, three days in a city? I'm good. That's my limit … I don't like that it's always light. I don't like that when it gets nighttime you can't see the stars. I don't like that it's noisy. I don't like that there's people everywhere. (Jane)

The way that Jane talks about her dislike of cities, that she does not have the desire to go to bars, clubs or events and that she recharges by being on her own resonates with the

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[45] Natalie and Gloria also grew up in the area and have lived there consistently.

way that Steven and Robert talk about being homebodies. Like Steven and Robert, Jane's reflections emphasize how factors like economic stability, having space to recharge, and her sense of her house as a safe haven contribute to her comfort zone and to a sense of the area as liveable. Jane's reflections also demonstrate how long-term romantic/sexual relationships are not a necessary part of one's comfort zone to feel supported and satisfied with life in the area. The area offers Jane what she needs, which is access to family/friends and space away from (other) people and noise; where she can see the stars and connect with her surroundings. While Jane continues to live in the area she grew up, she does so happily and expresses a sense that it is very much her choice to continue to live there. In my theoretical framework, I distinguish between place dependence and place agency with place dependence referring to people who have sought out a feature of a place that they are dependent on, and place agency referring to the level of agency people have in where they live and if they have the means to live elsewhere if they want or need to (Kolodziejski, 2014). It is interesting to note the way that the difference between place dependence and place agency rests on an affective disposition, in many cases. Jane is place dependent in the sense of being tied to the area because it provides her with the things she needs and she is happy to be there (Kolodziejski, 2014) whereas other people who are unable to leave the area because they are not financially independent, for example, and might be unhappily stuck there, lack place agency. In this way, the concept of place agency directs attention to the way that people might have a "lack of choice over where [they] find themselves located. People may feel that they have to stay in a particular location because of work, family ties, lack of opportunity elsewhere, or lack of agency on their part to seek out other places" (Kolodziejski, 2014, 44). Kolodziejski's (2014) work on place dependence and place agency provides a framework for thinking about how our attachments to places can be positive and happy but also cruel and constraining, sometimes simultaneously.

Within the literature on sense of place, studies suggest that place attachment is related to length of residence (Scannell & Gifford, 2010). I posit that "place agency" seems to affect participants' experiences more than length of residence. Rather than affirming a perspective that understands length of residence and having grown up somewhere as positively affecting people's place attachments and support networks in a

place, some sense of place scholars find that people who choose to move to an area for particular reasons may express higher levels of place dependence and satisfaction than people who grew up in the area (Kolodziejski, 2014; Szersynski, 2006). My participants' varied accounts suggest that there is no easy or deterministic relationship between length of residence and the concepts of place attachment, dependence, agency, and satisfaction. Looking at the accounts of participants like Jane who have always lived in the area, Serena and Patrick who grew up there and moved back, or Drew, Steven, and Robert who moved to the area as adults, it becomes clear that while length of residence can positively contribute to one's comfort zone and a positive sense of place in the area, participants who moved there as adults also express having robust comfort zones and a positive sense of place in the area.

4.1.2 "The people I want to have in my life are here": Knowing people and being known

[D: and you don't have a desire to be going elsewhere to live, to move?] Absolutely not. And I don't even go outside Stratford all that much. A day trip here or there … And also, very much the people I want to have in my life are here. I don't have to go to a big city for that. (Drew)

I wouldn't want to live somewhere where I don't have family nearby. My family is really important to me and I do also consider my friends my family, that's my group. And I want to be near them. Even if I'm not seeing them, I like knowing that if I were in trouble, there are so many people, not just family, that I could call who could be here in an hour. You know, like I wouldn't want to live in Ottawa where it's a however many hour drive to get to my parents. That wouldn't work for me. (Jane)

Having important people close by is discussed by many participants as something that connects them to the Stratford area and factors into their satisfaction with and desire to remain in the area. Earlier in this chapter I discussed the way that Drew describes Stratford as "my kind of place" as reflecting a positive sense of place dependence and place satisfaction. The above passage extends my understanding of how Drew's positive

sense of place in Stratford is also connected to being near important people in his life. For example, Drew talks at several point in our interview about his connection to his sister and the time they spend together. He also talks about how a network of friends supported him when he was in an accident and he had soup on his doorstep almost every day. I understand Drew's sense of having a solid support network that he can rely on as contributing to a robust comfort zone that seems to be a significant part of what makes Stratford a viable place for him to live.

Just as connections to his family and friends are important for Drew, Jane talks about the significance of her connections to her family and friends. In the above passage, Jane is very clear that it "wouldn't work for [her]" to be several hours away from her friends and family. In this way, Jane connects her strong place attachment and place dependence to her connections with family/friends, the role those connections play, and the kind of support network they provide. Although I challenge any clear link between length of residence, place dependence, place agency, place attachment and place satisfaction, Jane's case is one where length of residence does positively intersect with place dependence, place attachment and place satisfaction. For Jane, having lived in the same area for her whole life is important because she is deeply, positively attached to the area and the physical landscape of her property and has longstanding, well-developed attachments to family/friends, which contribute to a robust comfort zone. These attachments contribute to her sense of place satisfaction but also her sense of place dependence. Jane is dependent on the area not in the sense that she does not have the means to go elsewhere or is stuck there but that the area has particular positive features (her family/friends, landscape she is attached to) which, in being attached to, she is dependent on. It is not just that she does not want to move somewhere else, but also that she does not feel she could move somewhere else; living elsewhere is not a viable option for her.

It is not only connections to close friends and family that contribute to participants' comfort zones and affect participants' sense of place but also connections to other people living in proximity to them like neighbours. Jane's reflections provide a

sense of how knowing people and being known is central to her sense of place satisfaction and community in the area:

> It's normal for people on Sundays to just drive up and down the road and just look at things. Like once one of my attic windows was open and my neighbours called my parents to tell them … Surveillance would be an apt word. But it doesn't feel like that to me. It's like, because there's not a lot to do in some ways, everyone's kind of interested in what everyone else is doing … And it is a community in a lot of senses. If someone on this road drives by my house in the winter and they see my driveway is packed with snow, they'll just do a passthrough and blow the snow and not even say anything. (Jane)

In this passage, Jane describes the way that people on her rural road take an interest in what other people living around them are doing as being motivated by mostly well-intentioned concerns and/or a lack of other activity to be interested in. While Jane could describe the way that her neighbours notice things going on at her house as a kind of invasive surveillance, she notes that "it doesn't feel like that to [her]" and that it provides a sense of community to know that people are looking out for her. Although it may mean slightly less privacy and less anonymity, it is worth it for Jane to be part of a neighbourhood community and to have people who are concerned about her wellbeing. Another example of this is how Jane knows who owns and/or runs the farms on the short drive between her house and her parent's house and talks about how generally, it is expected that people in her area know who is living around them and that it is notable when someone new moves in. The fact that neighbours are looking out for her gives Jane a sense of being seen and known by those around her in a way that contributes to a sense of community. Notably, the way that Jane is seen and known is as a fellow community member, is connected to where she lives and to the fact that her family is known to and respected by many of her neighbours. However, she is not known, and clarifies that it is not important for her to be known, as bi/pan. This raises the question of whether or to what degree Jane's sense of community is linked to her willingness and ability to live and let live in ways that do not disrupt the assumption of heteronormativity she identifies as governing the area.

It is interesting to note that Jane is not the only participant who talks about moments of connection with neighbours over activities like snow and the clearing of snow. Steven also talks about how the task of clearing snow in the winter provides moments of connection with his neighbours as they work together to clear neighbour's driveways and the sidewalks. The example of neighbours coming together or looking out for one another by blowing snow off of a driveway emphasizes the way that a sense of place satisfaction and community is made up of a complex interplay between the people living around us and the physical environment of a place. Actions like clearing a neighbour's driveway contribute to the vibe of a place, to a sense of community and a sense of place satisfaction, even if they do not involve any direct interaction between people. For participants like Jane, Drew and Steven, interactions and a sense of being valued as community members, seen as worth helping, and networked with neighbours and community members extends their comfort zones and contributes to a sense of the area as liveable. An important caveat here is, like with my earlier discussion of being a homebody, in order to participate in and benefit from the kind of networking and interaction Jane and Steven discuss, one has to have a driveway they are responsible for clearing. Furthermore, these relations are not stable but are subject to change over time as neighbours move and the neighbourhood changes. Sense of place, like visibility and tolerance/acceptance, is temporal and temporary, negotiated, relational and also dependent on participant subjectivity in all kinds of ways; these factors include participants' physical ability to shovel snow as a way of bonding with neighbours, how a neighbour's friendliness may depend on a participants' whiteness and middle-class status, their normative gender presentations and/or how adept one is at making small talk.

Steven's accounts of his neighbourhood interactions also draw attention to the way that factors like being a dog owner and walking the dog on a regular basis shape sense of place. While some interactions Steven has with people he passes while walking his dog may be fleeting and one-off, other interactions are repeated over time and may be part of his comfort network and contribute to his sense of place satisfaction and sense of community in the area. For example, during our walking interview we encountered a person walking two large dogs. While I moved aside to let the trio pass, Steven stopped and started petting the dogs and chatting with their owner. It was clear from their

interactions and later confirmed by Steven that he sees this trio on a regular basis. These kinds of interactions while, again, dependent on factors like whether somebody owns a dog, are meaningful and contribute to this participant's sense of place and comfort zone. The idea that people we see periodically can be part of our comfort zone further demonstrates how comfort zones are nebulous networks that are not statically tied to physical spaces (although specific physical spaces may consistently be part of a comfort zone) but made up of a constellation of people and places and memories and things that make life comfortable, liveable and enjoyable in the area.

In a similar way to how Steven running into the same people while walking the dog contributes positively to his sense of place via a sense of knowing people and being known, Serena talks about how a sense knowing people and being known contributes to her sense of place in Stratford:

> I like, most of the time, I like that I go everywhere, and I know everyone. That feels very safe and secure and I like that I have my routines and I know who I'm going to see in those routines and anyone who I see who I didn't expect is a nice surprise, usually. I would say 95% of the time. I would say there are days that I wish I could just go get my groceries and not have a conversation with everyone. But that, the benefits way outweigh the flip side of that. Those moments of like, 'I just wanted eggs! (Laughs) I don't want to see you'. (Serena)

> Those [tourists I met who were visiting Stratford from elsewhere], with a few exceptions, didn't ever really become what I would have called close friends. It isn't that I didn't like them, but they would only be here for maybe 3-4 days in the summer so the friendship didn't consolidate that the way that people that you see at the library talk and the next day in the lineup at the LCBO and etcetera. And you'll see them regularly, and after a while, you'll knit more. (Drew)

In this passage, Serena talks about how she likes that she knows everyone everywhere, "most of the time" and that while she sometimes just wants to run an errand without seeing people she knows everywhere, the benefit of feeling like she is part of a community is worth the trade-off. The emphasis on running into other people and having

conversations as she goes about her everyday routines suggests a sense of knowing people and being known which, in turn, contributes to a sense of place satisfaction and community. For Serena, life in Stratford is characterized by familiarity, by going to the same places and seeing the same people and coming to "knit" with those people over time, as Drew discusses.

In the above passage, Drew describes the way that connections with people happen over time and sustained interaction. As I mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, regular participation in a choir, for example, or regularly attending local events allows for the development of a sense of community. Here, Drew provides an understanding of how that happens and how friendships consolidate as you run into people regularly. Both Serena and Drew's comments provide an understanding of how a sense of knowing people and being known, of regularly seeing the same people around town as you go about your everyday life, contributes to a feeling of community and ultimately to their sense of satisfaction with life in Stratford. As I consider below, not all participants enjoy this sense of being known. While Serena, Drew, Steven, Jane and other participants frame knowing people and being known as something that generally contributes to their comfort zones and positive sense of place, other participants talk about a sense of knowing people and being known as part of what makes the area less liveable for them.

In this section, I have discussed the accounts of participants who express a sense of place satisfaction, positive place attachments, and place dependence. This is not the case for all participants, however. In the next section, I discuss my interviews with participants who express dissatisfaction with life in the area.

4.1.3   "If you're retired it's great to live here": Place dissatisfaction in the Stratford area

Stratford as a place to live is pretty good. I would say, if you are retired it's great to live here (laughs). Or if you are a young family, it's good to live here. Other than that, you're pretty much stuck … Well, just because there's nothing to do here (laughs). Especially in the winter, there's nothing to do here. There is nothing

to do here. It's kind of like, there's nothing else to do except gossip, talk. Or, do drugs, get pregnant. (Laughs). (Sam)

The way that Sam articulates an understanding of who Stratford is for and, simultaneously, how Stratford is not for them is informed by my understanding of place dependence. In explaining that Stratford is a good place to live for young families and retired people suggests that Sam understands place dependence to happen for particular people in the area and not others. To be place dependent in a positive way, one has to be looking for the features Stratford has to offer, which include being a good place to raise a family, to retire, and to enjoy the pace of life and quiet lifestyle the area offers. Other participants like Steven share this understanding – the factors that Sam mentions are part of what drew him to Stratford as a place to retire. Sam's account of who Stratford is for – the retired and young families – aligns quite neatly with the way that other participants like Steven and Serena talk about Stratford and what makes Stratford a desirable place for them to live. In other words, what facilitates and sustains some participants' place dependence and place satisfaction may be the same things that contribute to other participants feeling dissatisfied and stuck. Sam talks about how Stratford does not offer the kinds of activities and lifestyle they are looking for, which includes more accessible, low-cost activities, opportunities to volunteer at queer events, and a more established "queer scene". In this passage, Sam reiterates that they feel like "there's nothing to do here." Participants who are dissatisfied with Stratford tend to be looking for things that Stratford struggles to provide, including an active sense of queer community, whereas those participants who are satisfied place more value on things like arts communities and quiet, slow living, which Stratford is more able to deliver on.

Informed by work on place dependence and place agency, my discussion with Sam suggests that they do not experience a positive sense of place dependence and that Stratford does not provide the conditions or activities that allow them to do the things they want to do. Sam elaborates:

I'm honestly basically getting a job to leave essentially. I'm getting a job to be able to save up money to be able to leave. Just because, obviously I'm living in a

place where people don't use my pronouns and stuff like that. I'm living in a place where people consistently use my deadname[46] and I correct them and then they're like, 'No.' (Laughs). (Sam)

For Sam to sustain a sense of place dependence, they would need to live in a place where people use their name and pronouns. Sam's reflections in the above passage draw attention to the importance of comfort zones in this discussion of sense of place. Sam's comment draws attention to the way that place satisfaction or a lack of place satisfaction is connected to the robustness of one's comfort zone and, by extension, whether they perceive where they live to provide the conditions required for their life to feel liveable. For participants with more robust comfort zones – who have places and people and events and memories and connections – in the area that support and sustain them, these comfort zones contribute to place dependence and place satisfaction and are thus integral to one's sense of place. Comfort zones which are smaller, more limited, and lack consistent safe spaces and people may not be able to provide the support and sustenance some participants need to thrive or even survive in the area which translates to a lack of place satisfaction. Drawing on work on sense of place, one explanation for why someone who lacks a robust support network and finds the area less liveable might continue to stay in that place because they lack place agency, which means that they remain where they are because they "have few options to move elsewhere, whether … through economic constraints" (Kolodziejski, 2014, p. 43). Sam's lack of place agency means that they are stuck living in a situation that they want to leave. Once they save up enough money, they will likely leave the Stratford area.

Sam's account also demonstrates that there is no clear correlation between having lived somewhere a long time and having positive attachments to or a well-developed support network in that place. While Sam grew up in Stratford and members of their family live there, this does not necessarily translate into support. This is not to say that Sam does not have friends and networks who they can draw on and who validate and

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[46] My understanding is that Sam is talking specifically about their family consistently using their deadname.

support them, but to emphasize that their network in the area is relatively limited and also inflected by being non-binary. Many of the people and networks that Sam and other non-binary folks develop as they grow up do not necessarily know them in the way they want to be known. Living as a non-binary person in the place you grew up can be challenging and frustrating, especially if you are known by your deadname, by a gender you are not, or pronouns that you do not use. While those networks and connections exist from having grown up somewhere, they do not exist in ways that work or sustain liveable conditions for non-binary folks.

In the previous section I looked at how some participants talk about how the passage of time and the process leaving and returning to the area allowed their relationship with Stratford to change. While Stratford became a better place for Serena and Patrick over time, other participants like Skylar and Alex do not share this experience:

> I just think that I sort of associate Stratford with a lot of things I don't much care for. And I don't really like London either. But I like London more than Stratford. I feel like I've always been more of an urban person. And I wish that my parents hadn't discouraged me from just like, acting on that. [D: And Stratford doesn't feel urban to you?] Oh god no, not at all. I mean, it qualifies as a city because of the population but that's completely on the level of, that's in name only. (Skylar)

> [D: Would Stratford become more appealing to you if some things changed?] I think only if it was bigger. Which it's not really going to... Yeah. I do rock climbing and there's no rock-climbing gym here. These things that I don't expect Stratford to have, it's just that it doesn't and it's not the lifestyle I'm looking for. (Alex)

Skylar talks about Stratford as a place she does not like and notes that she has felt trapped there at times, stating bluntly: "I constantly wanted to get the fuck out of Stratford and could not". As she indicates in the above passage, Skylar does not see Stratford as a place that works for her or that offers the kind of feel, amenities or opportunities that she is looking for. Both Skylar and Alex talk about how despite qualifying as a city, Stratford

does not have an urban or city feel for them. While participants like Serena, Gloria, and Drew talk about Stratford as a vibrant place with many opportunities to become involved in the community, Skylar and Alex do not share this perspective. For Skylar and Alex, bigger cities have things that Stratford does not and will not, like more diversity and activities like rock-climbing gyms. In this way, Stratford is not able to facilitate or sustain a sense of place dependence for them. As Alex notes above, the Stratford lifestyle is "not the lifestyle I'm looking for." This lack of place dependence and the way that participants, like Alex, frame Stratford as not being able to offer what they are looking for in a place points to the way that a lack of place dependence and a lack of place satisfaction seem to be connected. Like Sam, Alex and Skylar have certain notions about who Stratford is for (not them) and what Stratford has to offer (not what they are looking for). Despite this, all three participants express complicated and somewhat enduring attachments to the area.

Part of what emerges from these accounts is an understanding of the way that places have particular vibes and that the kind of vibes that participants sense in a place affect how they feel about and move in and through that place. For some participants, the Stratford area has a vibe that feels comfortable, comforting, and/or safe while places like Toronto seem stressful, undesirable, and/or overwhelming. For other participants, places outside the Stratford area offer a sense of relief, more amenities, things to do and a more desirable pace of life while Stratford is too quiet, boring and/or does not offer the kind of lifestyle they are looking for.

4.1.4 "When I moved to Toronto, I completely relaxed": A sense of being monitored

That's something I've noticed that … a stress I constantly felt in Stratford that I constantly had to be, not putting up a front, but always being like, if I'm not nice, there's going to be someone else who someone knows, it's going to get to someone else and that person is going to know … But when I moved to Toronto, I completely relaxed and I was like, nobody knows who I am. It's great. It's great. Wow. A sense of relief. It's like I'm not being watched all the time. That was definitely something, in transitioning from moving to Stratford to Toronto, I kept

sitting on the bus and kept moving and looking back and being like, who's near me? And it's like, I don't know these people. I don't know anyone. I don't know a single person, kind of thing. (Sam)

While a sense of community, being known and being part of something is worth giving up some degree of anonymity and privacy for some participants, not all participants feel that way. As Sam notes in the above passage, they experience a sense of being watched and known in Stratford as stressful rather than comforting. Like Serena and other participants, Sam has a sense that people know who they are in Stratford and that they are going to be constantly running into someone they know. For Sam, this is stressful because it requires that they are constantly vigilant about how they are acting and what people might be thinking about them as they move around. Sam's comments also emphasize how embodied their sense of being monitored and their relief at not being monitored is. The sense of relief that Sam feels in Toronto allows them to "completely relax" and feel relieved that no one is watching them and/or knowing them in a way that will have potential future consequences. A sense of not being comfortable in and not being able to relax in Stratford is part of what makes Sam dissatisfied with it as a place to live. Earlier in this chapter I looked at how Drew and Gloria talk about a sense of relief at returning to Stratford from Toronto. Here, Sam is expressing a sense of relief upon arriving in Toronto from Stratford. The difference in their experiences speaks to the way that people experience places differently and how people look for different things in a place depending on who they are and where they are in their lives.

The way that phase two participants talk about this extends my understanding of Sam's account of feeling relieved in Toronto compared to feeling monitored in Stratford:

I like that I go places and I don't necessarily know people. And that doesn't mean, like I know people where I visit frequently. I know my corner store and grocery stores and that kind of thing. But you know, I have the option of remaining anonymous if I go somewhere. And … one thing I don't like about Stratford is that when people know you and they know your history and they know your

family; *they have an expectation of you that you are immediately kind of shaped under*. (Quinn)

And I remember coming to Toronto for the first few times- during high school I had a friend who was a year older than me who had moved here, and I came down to her a few times and I felt this comfort in Toronto and this ability to feel myself that I felt like I had to hide away in Listowel. When I finally came here it was, it kind of was this release where I was like, 'Oh my god, this is, I can actually be me'. (Trevor)

And I, my friend said when I first moved to Toronto, 'You've become gayer.' Like, I was not, I didn't police my mannerisms as much, kind of thing. (Aiden)

Quinn's reflections on the way that people "know you and they know your history and they know your family; they have an expectation of you that you are immediately shaped under" resonates with the way that Sam talks about both feeling monitored and the importance of knowing people and having connections in Stratford. While Quinn has the option of going to corner stores or grocery stores that they visit frequently and may know people in, they can also choose to go elsewhere for any reason at any time. The "option of remaining anonymous" is something Quinn enjoys and is also part of what makes Sam feel "a sense of relief" upon moving to Toronto. Both Trevor and Aiden talk about how they experienced a sense of being able to be themselves more fully when they arrived in Toronto compared to the Stratford area, where they were more aware of a need to "police [their] mannerisms" and/or the risks of taking up space as a visibly LGBTQ+ person. Aiden reflects specifically on how they "didn't police [their] mannerisms as much" in Toronto compared to Stratford, where there was a "sort of element of homophobic danger at all times." As these reflections suggest, leaving the Stratford area allows some participants to relax and be themselves more openly. In part because they have opted to leave the area, phase two participants tend to talk about the Stratford area as a place where they are not able to be themselves.

4.1.5 "My main support system is here": Support Networks and Comfort Zones

It's like, I've always thought of maybe someday moving to a place where nobody knows you and you can completely start fresh and everything else, but it's like, I'm not really the type of person to step outside of my shell too much, right? It's like, I'd rather be around people that I know and stuff. Over going and trying to meet new people. (Natalie)

Well, just, I'm connected to here because my support system, like my main support system is here, my work, friends and family and I'm close to my brother, so. I stay just for the comfort, really. The main support system that I have here. Aunts, uncles, which showed when I was going through surgery because a lot of people visited me, brought me some nice stuff (laughs). Got some nice little gifts and some flowers, so that was good. (Chris)

These passages speak further to the way that participants relate in a range of ways to a sense of knowing people and being known in the area. For Natalie, a sense of knowing people and being known around town and at work is meaningful and contributes to a sense of community that constitutes a kind of comfort zone. Natalie recognizes at several points that connections with people she knows is part of the reason she stays in and is relatively satisfied with life in Perth County. While she does consider what it would be like to move somewhere else where nobody knows her, she chooses to stay where she is because it is familiar, and it is comfortable. Thinking in relation to the concepts of place agency and place dependence, while it is possible that Natalie could leave the area and she has thought about the possibility, factors like the presence of friends and family and a familiarity in/with the area keep Natalie here. For Natalie, having an established comfort zone makes it more desirable to stay in the area compared to going somewhere else where she would have to meet new people and develop new connections. Further, she has a job and a partner in Perth County, which both contribute to her comfort zone and anchor her to the area. Factors such as length of residence, jobs, and relationships have the potential to support one's comfort zones and sustained attachments to/in the area and the potential to create a kind of dependent relationship. By creating a dependent

relationship, what I mean is that the presence of family and friends and a developed comfort zone are things that Natalie depends on to sustain a sense of liveablity; she is not able to go elsewhere because she relies on these things. While Natalie's reflections are similar to the way that Jane talks about her connections to friends/family and the area, there are some differences in their accounts. Based on my understanding, the distinction is that Jane cannot imagine living elsewhere because her family/friends are what makes life liveable while Natalie can imagine living elsewhere but that would require her to "step outside [her] shell", which she is not comfortable with.

In the above passage, Chris is also reflecting on how a sense of comfort factors into his decision to stay in Stratford. Like Natalie, Chris grew up in the Perth County area and has a fairly well-developed network of friends and/or family in the area. Chris talks about how important his support system is and how the comfort provided by the support of family and friends is a significant factor in his decision to stay in Stratford. Chris notes the importance of the support of his family and close friends after he had a surgery and that being known by coworkers and people around Stratford makes things easier for him as he is introduced with the proper name and pronouns and feels seen and respected. For both Natalie and Chris, even if they might consider what it would be like to be elsewhere, connections to family, friends, and people they know and are comfortable around keeps them here; a sense of comfort and support is important.

4.1.6 "Just not being a stranger is all it takes": Length of Residence and Belonging

[D: And do you think having grown up here characterizes your experience here quite a bit?] Yep. Yep. In the fact that people know me. I'm not a stranger. And in small towns, sometimes, just not being a stranger is all it takes. (Regan)

If you weren't born in St. Marys, you're typically considered new, no matter how long you've been there. There's some 'new' people that are like, 'Let's make things better and change a few things', and people who are born in St. Marys don't want the changes. (Meredith)

Thinking further about how length of residence matters, Regan's reflections draw attention to the way that length of residence and knowing people and being known around town allows them to be known as familiar instead of as a stranger. As Regan emphasizes, it matters that they grew up in St. Marys and that this contributes to them being known as not a stranger. Regan talks about the ways they are known to various people in various capacities within St. Marys and how one effect of that is experiencing criticism from homophobic and/or transphobic people but another effect is that it allows them to be a role model for other people around town. I return to a discussion about the way participants talk about their sense of being role models for other LGBTQ+ folks in the community at the end of this chapter. For Regan, as for many participants, being known is a source of connection to St. Marys and a way in which they feel some level of comfort and safety in St. Marys.

Unlike Regan, Meredith did not grow up in St. Marys and talks about what it feels like to be someone who moved to St. Marys as an adult. As she suggests in the above passage, many people who are "St. Marys people" are resistant to new ideas and anyone who was not born in St. Marys is likely to be considered "new" no matter how long they have lived there. While Meredith does not talk about being framed as a "stranger" she expresses an awareness of being considered "new" and a certain feeling that goes along with that. Meredith's reflections suggest another way that length of residence can affect sense of place. Meredith expresses frustration at the way that people in St. Marys are committed to tradition, to doing things the way they've always been done, and not being open to new ideas or ways of doing things. When Regan mentions the difference that not being a stranger makes in St. Marys, part of what they mean might be that they do not have to contend with being seen as "new" and that they might have a different grounding from which they can critique and advocate for change within St. Marys as someone who is "from" St. Marys.

In a similar way to how Meredith talks about people who are not born in St. Marys being considered "new", Robert notes that people in Stratford are "very closed" and that there can be unspoken requirements or parameters around who gets to consider themselves as being "from" Stratford:

Well, it's like most small communities. People are very closed. It's taken us years to kind of integrate ... We have a straight friend who moved to Stratford and she was out looking for a job, and she got told by one of the local employers, I won't mention any names, that until you've actually buried someone in Stratford, you're not entitled to call yourself a person from Stratford … And we get that. We get that. Even today, I think there's people here who kind of think that we're not, you know, we shouldn't be here. [D: And that's mostly because you didn't grow up here?] I think it's because we didn't grow up here and because we're gay … But we're paying our taxes. We have a house that we maintain, and we've done a pretty good job of being members of the neighbourhood and contributing, so fuck them, (laughs). (Robert)

I don't have any other family here other than my immediate family, because my family moved here from Toronto before I was born. I don't have the same connection as I would say other people in the community would have, who have multiple generations here … It's like, my Dad built Madelyn's[47] or something, shit like that. [D: And those connections sort of mean a lot here still.] They definitely do mean a lot in terms of like, well, especially to get jobs and stuff like that. You need to know people to know people to get at least a good job. (Sam)

The anecdote Robert shares about a friend being told she is not from Stratford until she has buried someone there offers a stark example of the way that some people have expectations and opinions about who qualifies as being "from" a place. Robert expresses a sense that there are some people who think that he and his husband do not belong in Stratford or at least do not qualify as "Stratford people" because they are not from Stratford and also because they are gay. While Robert is secure in himself and is enabled by various factors to say "fuck them" to people who challenge his belonging in Stratford, it is notable that he has to do so. I return to the way that participants express a sense of having to be confident and stand up for themselves as a way to claim belonging and

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[47] Madelyn's is a well known local diner in Stratford, Ontario.

advocate for change in the next chapter. Both Sam and Robert's comments speak to the way that belonging in Stratford is not simply about living there or even being born there but is a matter of how connected you are to certain local communities and/or businesses, whether your family is from or is known in Stratford, and other factors at the nexus of knowing people and being known and length of residence. Although Sam has lived in Stratford for most of their life, they express a sense of not being connected with and within Stratford to the extent that other people are. These reflections resonate with the way that Robert talks about who gets to be from Stratford and specifically the sense that if you do not have generational family connections to Stratford then you do not fully belong in Stratford. Belonging cannot be conceptualized as a neat binary where you either belong or do not belong. Rather, belonging is a complex gradient that participants talk about experiencing in embodied, affective ways and at different intensities depending on where they are, who they are with and how they are being perceived by those around them. What becomes clear across these passages is that, regardless of sexual orientation, belonging in Stratford is complicated. There is no clear divide between participants who grew up in the area and those who did not in terms of their expressed levels of place attachment, satisfaction and/or belonging.

4.1.7 "You buy things, people recognize you": Shopping and community

> We identify a great deal with our house. But we also go to the markets ... when you go to the stores and you buy things and stuff, people recognize you. And it just sort of makes me feel happy and connected and people are accepting. I think that's the best way to put it. (Robert)

In this passage, Robert talks about how going to stores and being recognized around Stratford provides a sense of community and contributes to his sense of satisfaction with life in Stratford. Drew, Gloria, Steven, and Serena also talk about how routinely visiting local shops, cafes, and businesses provides a sense of community and familiarity as they get to know people and are recognized by people in these places. As I discuss earlier in this chapter, the vibrant downtown core and a sense of knowing people and being known contributes to a positive sense of place for many participants. For example, Steven

references his perception of Stratford as somewhere with a vibrant downtown that is not being drained by big box stores as something he and his husband considered when they chose to move to Stratford. The sense of familiarity and being known that comes from local shopkeepers recognizing you or the sense that you will run into people you know as you run errands contributes to participants' senses of being part of a community and to a sense of feeling recognized and known.

While links between buying things and an increase in LGBTQ+ acceptance are often identified and critiqued as a market phenomenon known as the "pink dollar[48]" and as producing homonormative subjects, the local context of a small downtown like Stratford matters. Most of the shops that these participants are referring to are locally run, independent stores, many of which are (re)investing in the wellbeing of the local community. At the same time, I also recognize that even in this more localized sense, only people who can afford to eat and shop downtown on a regular basis have the ability to access this sense of community. For other people, including several of my participants, the downtown core does not positively affect their sense of place in Stratford because they cannot afford to frequent it or to cultivate a sense of community in its commercial venues on a regular basis. My understanding of the tensions between the ways that various participants talk about the downtown core relates to both the inaccessibility of the downtown core and perceptions of multiple communities and class tensions in Stratford. This discussion also reiterates how the features that draw some people to the area and sustain their positive place dependence are the same factors that contribute to a sense among other people that the area is not for them. The way that Alex and Serena talk about downtown Stratford illustrates this:

> I guess, it's small town, but it's not kind of what you see. I guess it kind of depends, too, on social class and if you can be a part of all this, that's great. If not, it's just a small town … I just find that you kind of see the more, I don't know, preppy side of it. (Alex)

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[48] The "pink dollar" refers to purchasing power of the LGBT community and an acceptance of LGBT people as consumers without addressing substantive LGBTQ+ issues and inequalities (Bengry, 2011).

I wonder, as well, if it comes back to that classic like the people who are downtown Stratford come from pretty wealthy families, have a lot of access to education and extra curriculars and have the ability to open your own business and not to discount those people working really hard to do that, but there is a cultural capital that the downtown starts at. Versus, you know, if you don't know about Shakespeare, what are you doing in the downtown? There's a vibe of that. (Serena)

Alex's comment that, "if you can be a part of all this, that's great. If not, it's just a small town" resonates with the above discussion about the potential inaccessibility of some of the features of Stratford that other participants find alluring. For Alex, who talks about not spending much time downtown simply because it is too expensive, the downtown core and its shops and restaurants do not have a significant impact on the way that she experiences Stratford and do not make her more likely to be satisfied with or to stay in Stratford. As Alex notes, the side of Stratford that people tend to see and think about is the "preppy" or artistic side of Stratford and while that certainly does exist, it is not the only part of Stratford and is not equally accessible to and beneficial for all people living in Stratford. Belonging or participating in that community does not just require money and time, but also a kind of cultural capital, which may involve familiarity with Shakespeare and/or an involvement in the arts and local business scene[49]. Quinn reflects on how they were surprised by the level of knowledge and interest in plays when they were living in Stratford and emphasizes that folks who have grown up in Stratford might not be aware of how unique it is that "people in Stratford know a lot more about theatre than the average population everywhere else" (Quinn). Quinn's reflections further contextualize Serena's comment about how there may be a particular cultural and material capital that is necessary for participation in the downtown core, which also reinforces the way that Alex talks about downtown Stratford. Throughout this thesis, I

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[49] I don't know if anybody from Stratford would ever recognize this, but somebody who's come in, people in Stratford know a lot more about theatre than the average population everywhere else, I've got to say. I didn't know anything about theatre, and it was surprising to me, just socializing with people, how they'd just be like, 'Oh, in this play-' And I'm like, people talk about plays? That's crazy. I didn't know that. (Quinn)

endeavour to attend to the way that participants talk about the cost of living in the Stratford area and how being able to afford to own a house and/or buy tickets for events, go to restaurants, and other more consumer-based ways of accessing a sense of belonging and/or the kind of lifestyle features the area offers affects participants' experiences and senses of place satisfaction.

4.2   LGBTQ+ Community

In the previous section I looked at the way that participants talk about their sense of place in the Stratford area and the ways in which they talk about a sense of "fitting" in the area. In this section, I focus on how participants discuss their connections to local places, communities and organizations and the ways in which those connections matter to them. In the first part of the section, I look at how participants talk about their perceptions of LGBTQ+ community in the area and their sense of connection to such a community. This includes a focus on participants' connections to other LGBTQ+ people in the area, and the importance of inclusive LGBTQ+ symbols. My understanding of the way that participants talk about LGBTQ+ community and space is informed by my theoretical framework on queer space, queer community, and comfort zones. This discussion extends into the next chapter, which focuses on the way that participants talk about how change happens and their hopes for the future in the Stratford area.

4.2.1   "We are here, just kind of all over": Sense of LGBTQ+ community

> I don't think there's necessarily a gay community here, but there's a lot of gay people here. I think everybody just kind of socializes in their own little circle. You'll probably meet people if you come here, just give it time. We don't have Church street in Toronto, kind of this is where the gays hang out kind of area. We are here, just kind of all over (laughs). (Patrick)

> [D: Do you feel like you are part of a community in Stratford?] Not really, no. I have a group of friends and we kind of do our own thing within that, but not really. Around pride months there are some events and that was nice. It was good

to be a part of that. But I think it's so undercover that if I wanted a community like that, it'd be hard to find. (Alex)

In these passages both Patrick and Alex talk about LGBTQ+ community in the Stratford area as gay people socializing in their own little circles without any kind of central organization or permanent spatial presence. Patrick's comment about Stratford not having Church street[50] suggests that there is a lack of visible, permanent space that is easily mapped and found in Stratford. Although no formal or easily locatable queer community exists in Stratford by his account, Patrick talks about the existence of informal networks ("little circles") that characterize social life and community in the area and in doing so, he emphasizes the importance of knowing people and being known. Since there is no formal community or any specific space to go to access or look for LGBTQ+ community, people are required to find their way to a social circle that works for them on their own through informal networking. The way that Patrick talks about gays being "here, just kind of all over" suggests that he understands LGBTQ+ people in the Stratford area as more integrated into the general community rather than separated in their own community and/or space. In the next part of this section, I look at how participants talk about the notion that LGBTQ+ people are all over the area more than we realize or see. While there may not be a visible or permanent community space, there is a sense that LGBTQ+ people do exist here and that someone you meet might be LGBTQ+ and/or you might discover that someone you already know is LGBTQ+. There is a hopefulness in the potential that there are always more LGBTQ+ folks around than we are aware of.

My understanding of Patrick and other participants' accounts is informed by my understanding of competing conceptualizations of queer space, as outlined in my theoretical framework. The way Patrick notes, "we don't have Church street" is a recognition that normative or urban models of what queer space looks like (gay villages, gay bars) are not present in Stratford. The absence of explicitly or publicly queer spaces

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[50] This is a reference to Toronto's "gay village" area, located around Church St. and Wellesley St. This area and/or specific locations within or around it comes up in many interviews.

that we come to expect and associate with "queer space" and "queer community" leave participants with an uncertainty about whether or not community exists or if they are a part of it. While, of course, "little circles" made up of LGBTQ+ folks can still constitute community, it may not be the kind of community that some people are searching for or it may not align with what they imagine community to look or feel like. My point here is to emphasize how rethinking queer space as made up of zones, informal networks and connections allows for more possibilities and, indeed, more space for LGBTQ+ folks. Further, this understanding of queer space is more resonant with the ways in which queer communities operate historically (Ghaziani, 2014; Millward, 2015). Another point that Patrick gestures to as he notes, "give it time" in the above excerpt is the time and energy to develop the kinds of social circles he talks about. The way that Alex expresses that the community that likely does exist here is so "undercover" that it would be hard to find resonates with the time Patrick recognizes it takes to develop a social circle. Neither of these participants are suggesting that it is impossible or unlikely to find a supportive group of people or a sense of community in Stratford, but that doing so is not likely to be quick or easy[51].

The way that Alex talks about feeling like she is not a part of a community in Stratford and that she has a group of friends who do their own thing rather than being part of a larger community and/or attending events is interesting. Alex's comments align with Patrick's assessment of gay people being "kind of all over" in Stratford rather than collected or networked. However, Alex does not frame her group of friends and their activities as a "community" which is a term she seems to associate with a more formal or organized community that extends beyond her interpersonal connections. Relatedly, Alex also notes that pride events tend to only happen around pride month each June and that beyond that she is not aware of many opportunities to attend LGBTQ+ events. Thus, while interpersonal connections and "little circles" may constitute a community for some

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[51] Trevor, who is a phase two participant, talks about how it took him a while to find a group of LGBTQ+ friends in Toronto. It's not just in smaller areas like Stratford that people struggle to make connections and build networks when they first move there. I return to this discussion in my analysis chapter.

people, it does not satisfy the requirements of a community for others, who are searching for a more consistent, visible and/or organized sense of community.

Skylar notes that while there are certainly LGBTQ+ people living in the area and while those people might occasionally interact with each other, they are not organizing in a way that seems recognizable as a community:

> I think that there's this idea that a gay movement, an LGBTQ+ movement in Stratford, basically comes down to a bunch of just like, celebrating and whatever. And it's like, there's no basis for solidarity here. There is no like, I mean, there are gays in Stratford. Some of them interact with each other. I guess, the simple answer is no, I don't. But I guess it also depends on what you mean by a queer community, of course. (Skylar)

> [D: Do you sense that there is a gay community here?] There's got to be. I could individually say, yes, there's so and so and there's so and so, but I don't feel that there's a community in the sense that they have any kind of real networking. That's, now that's my sense. And I may be wrong. But that's my sense. I would welcome it if it were there, and I would welcome, I would be happy to take part in it if I were welcome, I would love to be part of it. (Drew)

The way that Skylar notes that, "there are gays in Stratford. Some of them interact with each other" is similar to Patrick's description of gays in Stratford being here, "just kind of all over." Here, Skylar raises an important point, which is what "queer community" means is quite ambiguous and subjective. As I emphasize in my theoretical framework, my objective is not to define what the term community means; rather, I am interested in what community *does* in participants' accounts. Skylar offers a clear response to this, which is that the notion of queer community is not doing much in Stratford. While, again, my aim is not to offer any kind of definition of or conditions for "queer community", it seems that several participants do not equate the mere presence of LGBTQ+ people in an area with the presence of an identifiable queer community. Drew's comment that there are individual people he could name but that there is an absence of "real networking" that might constitute a gay community resonates with the way that Patrick, Alex and Skylar

talk about the presence of individual LGBTQ+ people who may occasionally interact with each other in casual social ways. The kind of "real networking" that Drew suggests may be required for the proximate presence of LGBTQ+ people to become more of a community might facilitate or support building the kind of solidarity that Skylar observes as lacking in Stratford. Further, the kind of "real networking" Drew and other participants express a desire for is not just absent in Stratford but does not necessarily exist anywhere. The notion of a cohesive, networked, consistent queer community exists as a mythic or utopic fantasy of or a longing for such a community rather than something that they know tangibly exists in specific times and places. When Drew says, "there's got to be" community, this suggests that while he does not necessarily feel like he is connected to or actively part of a gay community, he believes one must exist. This suggests a potential hopefulness that there is a community out there that he does not know about, which I see reflected in the accounts of multiple participants, but also a sadness to not be connected to such a community. The way that Drew talks about how "there's got to be" a gay community as well as the way he notes that he only knows a few LGBTQ+ people in the area currently gives me the impression that while he would "love to be part of" a more formal network, he does not currently feel like he is part of a distinctive LGBTQ+ community in Stratford. One reason that Drew discusses as potentially contributing to his sense of disconnection from a local gay community is that he is not tech-savvy and does not use social media. As I discuss in the next chapter, not being online or on social media may affect participants' ability to know about and attend LGBTQ+ events in the area.

Of all of my participants, Steven and Chris express the clearest sense that there is some kind of queer community Stratford and in the surrounding area:

> [D: Do you think that there is a gay community here?] Oh, I know there is. I mean, I haven't, because of work with the theatre, I usually am working the day of the pride parade and it has been the two years there's been a pride parade. We had looked into that aspect before moving here as well, to see what was around. We had seen, [my husband]'s on Facebook, I'm not. … But [my husband]'s on Facebook and he's seen a couple of Facebook pages for a couple different groups in Stratford, so we knew there was a community here. (Steven)

[D: Do you think that Perth County has a queer community?] Oh, for sure. Especially, there's queer men everywhere. They're just, they're just afraid. And I'm sure there's as many ladies, it's just not as obvious. And because they've been repressed for so many years, they have no way to self-identify or they don't feel comfortable, so you just think, oh, that's two straight lady friends, but really, they're like a loving couple, they just are afraid to show it. Because that's how they've been trained. (Chris)

Although both Steven and Chris both talk about having a sense of there being an LGBTQ+ community in the Stratford area, their conceptualization of community and what they take as evidence of community differs. For Steven, community is some kind of organized activities or presence while for Chris, community is just queer bodies in the area. At other points, Steven talks about how the availability of LGBT friendly churches and his appreciation of the theatre and downtown core in Stratford were factors in his decision to move there. In the above passage, he notes the presence of a pride parade and a Facebook presence for local LGBTQ+ groups as additional factors in his decision to move to Stratford. Steven's reflections emphasize the kinds of considerations that go into moving to a new place and how the availability of visible LGBTQ+ events matters to him in terms of making it clear that there is some level of support for and acceptance of LGBTQ+ people in Stratford. For Steven, the presence of the pride parade is significant in terms of marking the presence of a gay community in the area. I return to this notion as I discuss local pride events in greater detail in the next chapter. Even though Steven has not been able to attend the parade and does not access Facebook himself, he appreciates the presence of these features and they provide him with a sense that there is an LGBTQ+ community in Stratford. The way that Steven talks about community suggests that he understands it as something more organized – pride parades and Facebook groups – compared to the notion of informal social networks as community, something that is echoed in some of my other participants' accounts. Another place that multiple participants discuss as an LGBTQ+ community space is a local affirming church. Both Steven and Gloria talk about this church as a space of comfort and as a place where they feel supported and safe as LGBTQ+ people. The way that they talk about their connections to the church makes it clear that the church is an important place and

somewhere that facilitates a sense of community and belonging. Both Gloria and Steven also talk about the way that the church is making increasing contact with local LGBTQ+ initiatives and that they are optimistic about the church as a future source of LGBTQ+ community and support in Stratford. I return to a more detailed discussion about participants' perceptions of local pride events and organizing in the next chapter.

While Chris' reflections on community focus on the potential for some people to be afraid or uncomfortable about being openly LGBTQ+ in the area, he also believes that there is a community that exists. As I explore throughout this section, a sense or hopefulness that there are more LGBTQ+ people in the area than participants see or know personally matters. Chris expresses such a hopefulness as he comments that queer people are there but have been trained to be less visible. Both the potential that they exist and that they might eventually become visible can be meaningful in terms of helping participants feel like they are not alone. The way that Chris responds to my question about community by emphasizing the presence of queer men and other queer folks suggests that more than other participants, the presence of and the potential to connect with other LGBTQ+ people creates some sense of community. Again, my aim is not to evaluate how much queer community exists in the Stratford area. Rather, I am interested in the ways that a sense of the presence of or of belonging in a local queer community matters to participants and affects the way they make sense of Stratford as somewhere that is liveable for them. The presence of some level of community and the potential for more is meaningful for Chris.

The participants whose sense of local LGBTQ+ community I have discussed so far in this section all live in Stratford. Clay and Jane, who both live in the country, talk about a sense of not knowing other LGBTQ+ people living in their immediate areas:

> ... I have never felt really a sense of community here. I can't even think of another queer person I know that lives here right now- Yeah. I mean, like, aside from like Grindr (laughs) … And if they are, they're like in Exeter or something. (Clay)

> [D: And do you think this area has a queer community of any kind?] I wouldn't say much of one. I'm not sure if I really know anyone gay in the area to be honest

with you. Yeah, I can't say I really know anyone that I- [D: There's definitely a presumption of heterosexuality?] Yeah, for sure, you kind of assume. Or other people assume. If you are around here, you're straight, I think, everyone kind of assumes everyone's straight it seems like. (Jane)

Clay's statement that he "can't even think of another queer person [he] know[s] that lives here right now" provides a sense that by any definition of community being offered thus far, Clay does not have a sense of community in the area. While other participants talk about their sense of being connected to other LGBTQ+ folks in the Stratford area, Clay does not know anyone else to potentially connect with. This does not mean, however, that Clay is necessarily isolated or dissatisfied with where he is living. Clay talks about being relatively satisfied with life in Perth County, his routine, hobbies and seeing family and occasionally friends. The lack of other queer people is an observation for Clay, but not necessarily something that negatively affects him. Thinking in terms of place agency, part of this may also be that Clay is in a relationship with a partner who lives in Toronto and is able to visit his partner and spend time in Toronto regularly.

Echoing Clay's remarks, Jane talks about how she is not sure if she knows anyone who is gay in the area. Jane is speaking specifically about not knowing gay people in the more rural areas of Perth County; she does know other LGBTQ+ people in Stratford. Like Clay, Jane does not necessarily express a sense of isolation or dissatisfaction due to the fact that she does not know other LGBTQ+ folks living directly around her. As I discuss earlier in this chapter, the quiet pace of life and attachments to the land and family/friends are fulfilling and meaningful for Jane to the extent that she does not have the desire to seek out any community or events beyond that. The fact that Jane talks about not needing or wanting to seek out LGBTQ+ events and connections might contribute to her sense of there being few to no gay people in the area. Someone else who is more actively interested in meeting other LGBTQ+ people or who is in need of a sense of queer community or companionship, may spend more time and energy searching for and potentially connecting with gay people in the area. Again, for Clay and Jane, there is a sense that a more identifiable or locatable LGBTQ+ community may not be something they are interested in or in need of. However, as becomes apparent by looking at the

accounts of other participants, it seems that several participants remain interested in or in search of a more identifiable LGBTQ+ community in the area.

Meredith and Regan, who are both from St. Marys, express a sense that the queer community in the area is "hidden", "not super known", and difficult to access:

[D: How would you characterize the queer community there? Or is there one?] Small? I don't know how much community. Because, it'd be friends that know each other. It's there. I don't know if I'd use the term underground, because I don't even know if it's there. It's ... it's hidden. It's not super known. (Meredith)

I was aware of the fact that there are LGBT adults. I didn't know how to connect to them. Or if they would want to connect to me. As a young person going through [high school] I was like, I don't really know how to go about doing that. In some ways I very much wish that there had been a way for me to access that kind of network … I do feel like it is very difficult as a young person to find a community here. (Regan)

Neither participant describes the community in St. Marys as non-existent. Rather, they express a perception that some kind of community is out there but note that it is challenging to find out about it, let alone become a part of it. It is interesting to note that Meredith moved to St. Marys as an adult while Regan grew up in St. Marys and has spent most of their life there. Despite the variance in their relationships to St. Marys and their length of residence there, Regan's reflection that they "didn't know how to connect" to that network resonates with Meredith's characterization of such a network or community as "underground". Regan's comments also draw attention to the way that a lack of a more formal LGBTQ+ network leaves youth in particular with a sense of not knowing what to do, how to connect with other LGBTQ+ people, or even if they would want them to. My understanding of this passage is Regan has a sense that LGBTQ+ adults certainly exist in the community but that there is no networking or way to facilitate connections between LGBTQ+ people in the area. Meredith also emphasizes her sense that the community is not well known, meaning that it is not visible, and it is even a bit "underground." In a passage earlier in this section, Alex notes that the community in Stratford is "so

undercover that if I wanted a community like that, it'd be hard to find." Meredith's comments reflect Alex's sense that while they believe a community does or likely exists, it is not necessarily useful to them because they are not able to become part of it.

This sense of there being a community that exists somewhere but that is difficult to access and not known to them is shared by several participants, including phase two participants:

> [D: Do you think that Stratford has an LGBTQ or queer community?] Yeah, I have no idea. I mean, yes. Yes, they do. They did when I was growing up … I can speak to say that there was a community of adults who were queer and that there certainly were that were my age as well. I assume that still exists. But yeah, I don't know right now if there's … who would be part of that community and what sort of things that community would take part in and. [D: It's not something you feel like if you were to visit that you'd be able to be part of that for a weekend or something.] No, I would have absolutely no idea … Not that I wouldn't want to, but I would literally not even know where to find that. (Quinn)

Quinn's reflections emphasize how it is difficult to become temporarily involved in or to temporarily locate LGBTQ+ community in Stratford. While they were aware of the presence of a community of adults and other queer folks during the time they lived in Stratford, they express a sense of not being connected to or in the know about what, where and who comprises that community in the present. Thinking about Quinn and Regan's comments together, there is a sense that when you have a history with a place and are in that place, you know more about the clandestine networks that exist there. Being away from the place, however, can render that knowledge lost.

4.2.2   "Everything we do is an LGBTQ event": Meaningful connections & community

> I also have a lot of queer friends so- [D: You have that community.] Yeah, yeah. [D: You would say that you do feel like you have, in St. Marys and beyond, a queer community?] Yeah, yeah, I have lots of friends from everywhere that I've lived. (Meredith)

[And do you ever attend LGBTQ or queer events?] Occasionally. Most of what I do of it is just revolving around friends because I feel like everything we do is an LGBTQ event. (Jane)

Almost all participants talk about having meaningful connections with at least a couple of LGBTQ+ friends in the Stratford area. As participants' assessments of LGBTQ+ community in the Stratford area suggest, informal connections seem to be one of the primary ways that LGBTQ+ people in the area experience a sense of community, even if such informal connections are not recognized by all participants as community. In the absence of a more visible or locatable LGBTQ+ community in the area, however, informal connections and knowing people and being known become even more important. As Quinn's reflections in the previous section suggest, if they were to visit Stratford now, they would have "absolutely no idea" of where to find a queer community or queer folks. In the above passages, Meredith and Jane talk specifically about the importance of their connections to queer friends. Jane talks about how everything she and her friends do is an LGBTQ event, which suggests that her friends function as her queer community. Again, this means that Jane might not need to look for or attend events in Stratford or elsewhere because she is able to access a sense of community and support through her friends. However, this also means that LGBTQ+ folks living in the Stratford area have to either already have well-developed and sustained connections to other LGBTQ+ folks or have to find or develop ways to foster those connections, which can be challenging and time consuming, particularly in the absence of organized events.

Alex and Regan are the two youngest participants in my study and thus attended high school most recently. They both talk specifically about positive experiences working on LGBTQ+ projects at their high schools and how meaningful gay straight alliances and LGBTQ+ specific events were during their high school experience:

Once I came out, I didn't know there were many other LGBTQ people at school and I thought, but then once I came out a lot of people started talking with me. [D: There were more people than you realized at the time.] Yeah. And in Grade 12 I had to do a bunch of these projects and I kind of focused them on LGBTQ issues.

And I started, those who were comfortable, I'd photograph them and then kind of have their little bio on an Instagram page. It was a great way to kind of connect with people in that sense. (Alex)

We did a grant application to build the e-book library. That process was really special, working on a project like that. And then what was even better was seeing the circulation stats. Once we had it, we got the funding, we got the books, and then seeing that people were using them? I was like, 'Oh my goodness. That is so special.' We did a thing and people like it. Because that's the nice thing about the lending library, the e-book library especially, because the person who access to those stats was [redacted], who everyone knew was an LGBT ally because she helped me run the GSA! And was like, walking around with rainbow pins. I think it was, unlike having to walk around with a physical book that, for someone who was questioning or whatever, that that might be something they're not willing to have out in the open, it was definitely a really good way for people to access resources. (Regan)

Alex talks about how she did not know how many LGBTQ people were at her school before she came out and that the process of doing a social media project focusing on LGBTQ+ experiences allowed her to connect with a variety of students. Alex talks about working on this social media project and how meaningful it was to have the opportunity to connect with other LGBTQ+ students and to raise awareness of LGBTQ+ issues at her school. Alex's description of coming out and then having LGBTQ+ people start to talk to her offers an example of the way that informal queer community might happen. Once Alex becomes somewhat visible or known to be LGBTQ+, other people start to approach her or make themselves visible to her who would not have previously done so. This resonates with my discussions on visibility in the previous chapter and the way that how other people read us matters. Alex needed to come out and become visible in a particular way before she was able to start to see other LGBTQ+ people at her school. Hypothetically, it may have been easier for her to come out if she had seen some of those LGBTQ+ people or had a sense that there was an LGBTQ+ community around her

school. Again, this speaks to the complicated nature of visibility and acceptance that I discussed in the previous chapter.

Regan's discussion about the e-library also speaks to (in)visibility. Specifically, Regan notes that the e-library is important because people who are questioning or for whatever reason do not want to be seen carrying around or reading an LGBTQ+ centric book are still able to access resources. This also suggests that being seen with explicitly LGBTQ+ materials is another way of becoming visible or of opening oneself up to being read as LGBTQ+. Regan's account of the e-library and how special it was to see the statistics on how many people were accessing the library is significant in this discussion about the importance of connections to other LGBTQ+ people. While Regan did not personally interact with and did not even necessarily know the identities of the people who were accessing the e-book library, it is still meaningful for Regan to know there is a demand for the service and that there are other LGBTQ+ people, or people who are questioning or allies, at their school using this service. Regan's experience demonstrates how interpersonal interaction and/or sustained discussion is not required to foster a sense of connection, or for an interaction or moment to contribute to one's comfort zone. The lending statistics provide a sense that there is a much larger group of LGBTQ+, or potentially LGBTQ+, folks out there than Regan already knew or saw is meaningful. Regan expresses a sense that they felt part of an LGBTQ+ community at their high school and that their high school continues to have an LGBTQ+ community, which they still help with sometimes. Regan's experiences suggest that groups such as GSAs that are located within, and supported by, an institutional like a high school may produce an experience of more consistent, accessible, long-term community.

Just as it is significant for Regan to see how many people accessed the LGBTQ+ e-book library, Chris talks about his sense that there are more trans people than we would think there are living in Stratford and the surrounding area:

> I think there's more [trans people living in Stratford] than we'd think. Because I'm starting to learn that. Because you like, at first, you're like, 'I'm the only one.'

And then you're like, 'Oh there's two of us, oh there's four of us,' and then you
start realizing. There's more, if not right in town, then in the area close by. (Chris)

The way that Chris describes feeling like he was the only one then realizing, "oh there's
two of us, oh there's four of us" suggests that there is a sense of solidarity in numbers and
resonates with research on LGBTQ+ wellbeing, which emphasizes the importance of
social connections and community for participants like Chris and Regan. For Chris, the
presence of other trans people makes him feel less isolated and offers a sense of support
or comfort from knowing there are other trans people living nearby. Chris talks about
how there are more gay people and lesbians in the Stratford area than we see but that they
might be uncomfortable or afraid to be visibly out. Again, the belief that there are more
people than we see or know is meaningful in the sense that there is more possibility for
connection than is being realized at any given moment. We can think about how this
operates reparatively to imagine a nurturing community. Part of having a sense of
community or even the sense of the potential for community, then, is about not feeling
alone.

While Chris recognizes that there are more LGBTQ+ people than we know and
that there might be more possibility for connection than is being realized, Steven talks
about what it feels like when that potential is realized:

About a week ago now, someone from the factory had wanted to organize a
purple shirt day for mental health. And I've often worn shirts with rainbow
colours in them, not necessarily a rainbow flag, and things to work. But on purple
shirt day, I pulled out a gay pride t-shirt from Toronto pride and wore that. I
actually had several people compliment me on the shirt, and the management
called us all in at the end of our shift to do a group photo. And I had no push back
from anyone on my shift about this thing, there's a great big 'Gay Pride' on the
chest (laughs). I mean, that says a lot. [D: And the compliments, it's a nice way of
them saying-] Well, it's also finding out or at least confirming that one of our
forklift drivers is a lesbian, on our shift, one of the other people on the shift just
after the purple shirt day came out as transgender. And finding out that our

> forklift driver is dating another employee at the factory who is a transgender male to female. And that says a lot. When in a relatively small workforce, there are that many people that are comfortable in their own skin and don't seem to mind people knowing that they're comfortable in their skin. (Steven)

Steven's reflection on his decision to wear a shirt from Toronto pride is important because it offers an understanding of the way that he had a sense of taking a potential risk by wearing a shirt that made him more visible. The fact that he was included in a group photo and had "no push back" is meaningful because it demonstrates to him that his workplace is LGBTQ+ friendly and that he can expect to be accepted at his work. When I suggest that the compliments in response to Steven's shirt demonstrate that people are LGBTQ+ friendly and are accepting, Steven clarifies that it is more than that. Not only are people LGBTQ+ friendly, but he found out that several people at his work are LGBTQ+. As Steven notes, "that says a lot. When in a relatively small workforce, there are so many people that are comfortable in their own skin and don't mind people knowing." It is not just having the potential interpersonal connection to other LGBTQ+ people at his work but the knowledge that LGBTQ+ people are accepted as part of his workforce and seem to be happily visible makes his work feel more comfortable.

Steven's experience of learning about other LGBTQ+ people at his work reinforces the notion that LGBTQ+ community in the Stratford area tends to happen more through informal connections than through formal LGBTQ+ organizing and/or events. It is also interesting to note that like Alex's experience of coming out in high school and then finding out there were more LGBTQ+ people around than she realized, Steven discovers that there are other LGBTQ+ folks working at his factory after he makes himself visible by wearing a Toronto pride shirt. The way that participants talk about their sense of LGBTQ+ community (or lack thereof) in the area suggests that connections to other LGBTQ+ people in the area seems to be a meaningful way community many participants experience a sense of community.

4.2.3 "We get you": Connections to other LGBTQ+ people

> During pride month, I wore a lot of rainbows as per usual. And in Tim's, I got tons of compliments and they're always like, I love your shirt, I love your bag, and stuff like that. At Tim's, I was always [recognized], by the staff, like yeah. We get you. I don't think I got any like, comments or anything in [the grocery store]. I know there's a few staff that I love, but I'm not entirely sure if they kind of get it. Right? (Meredith)

> You know, you can sort of tell when two people are shopping together that they're together. Do you know? And you just do. (Drew)

Another way that participants talk about their sense of community or connection to other LGBTQ+ people in the area is through moments of subversively seeing and being seen by other LGBTQ+ people. Informed by my theoretical framework on queer space, queer community, and comfort zones, I posit that such moments of recognition are moments of "queer space" in the way that Detamore (2013) discusses. Queer space does not require a totalization or re-territorialization of heterosexualized space but can be produced through recognition and social relations and fleeting moments that have the potential to generate affective responses and energy that extends beyond the present (Detamore, 2013; Muñoz, 2009; Oswin, 2008). As I suggest above in relation to Chris and Steven's accounts, participants have a sense that there are more LGBTQ+ people than they know and the existence of the possibility to connect with them provides a sense of potential community or connection. This moment wherein Meredith is connecting with other people who "get it" is another way that potential can be realized. The way that Drew talks about how he can "sort of tell" when two people are shopping together further illustrates the way that, in some situations, LGBTQ+ folks are able to see and recognize other LGBTQ+ people and couples in ways that may not register for non-LGBTQ+ people. Even if fleeting or distant, the act of recognizing other LGBTQ+ people casually around the area provides another source of connection for participants and contributes to a sense that even in the absence of a formal LGBTQ+ network or community, there are LGBTQ+ people in and around the area.

In the previous chapter, I note that some participants talk about a "live and let live" mentality in the Stratford area. While a "live and let live" mentality can result in ambiguous experiences of visibility and (in)tolerance where participants are neither rejected nor welcomed, another side to a "live and let live" mentality is that people will let you live, to some extent. A "live and let live" mentality means that Meredith is able to wear her rainbows and become visible to other LGBTQ+ people and allies who are looking for those symbols while remaining invisible or off the radar of people who are either ambivalent or unsupportive toward an LGBTQ+ presence in town. In this way, a sense of "you do your thing, I'll do mine" may contribute to the conditions that create an (in)visibility dilemma, but it may also create space for some LGBTQ+ people to live and connect under the radar and for these moments of queer connection that Meredith describes.

4.2.4 "You were kind of my hero in high school": Role models and representation

Often times my name was very clearly associated with the GSA at the school. I was very visible in that way … Sometimes it was good, because young people knew that they could talk to me … One of my best experiences … when I came home from [university] … a student who was currently a student at [my high school] and who was in probably about grade 10 when I graduated hands me a coffee and goes, 'You know, you were kind of my hero in high school.' And I was just like, 'That means so much to me. Like, I'm having a really shitty time right now.' And it was nice to know that that paid off, even when there were sometimes uncomfortable experiences of random strangers coming up to me to and telling me that Jesus loves me. (Regan)

I've had a few people in the last year, I think you were one of them, approach me and be like, 'You were the first person I knew to be in a queer relationship.' And C. at [redacted] and a few of that friend group who are a few years younger than us have come to me and been like, 'I didn't even know that gay people existed before me and [redacted] got together.' And that's been interesting as an adult,

because at the time I was just madly in love with this person and had no idea it was subversive (laughs). (Serena)

As I discussed in the previous chapter, several participants express a sense that being visible might come with risks and potential negative consequences. However, becoming visible also allows them to become a meaningful presence for other LGBTQ+ people in the area as a role model or as an example of LGBTQ+ representation. In the above passage, Regan shares an experience where someone from their high school recognized them at a local coffee shop and told them that they were "kind of [their] hero in high school." This interaction not only suggests how meaningful the presence of visibly LGBTQ+ people like Regan is for other, younger LGBTQ+ people at their school and around town, but also how meaningful this casual interaction with this presumably LGBTQ+ person is for Regan. This anecdote provides an example of a situation where the benefits of being visible are worth it despite the costs, which include "random strangers coming up to [them] and telling [them] that Jesus loves [them]." Regan discusses how they did not have many role models growing up, that there were not really any visible LGBTQ+ people around, and that the one openly LGBTQ+ teacher at a local school is a meaningful presence for other LGBTQ+ and potential LGBTQ+ people around town. These reflections underscore the degree to which individual people matter and speaks to participants' sense that responsibility for change is individualized. I return to this discussion in the next chapter as I discuss participants' perceptions of how change happens.

The way that Serena talks about other LGBTQ+ people she knows telling her how meaningful it was to see her in an openly queer relationship speaks further to way that individual LGBTQ+ people matter in the area. Serena notes that a few people have told her that they did not know gay people existed before seeing her in an openly queer relationship. Relatedly, other participants talk about how they are surprised they figured out they are LGBTQ+ and that a lack of LGBTQ+ representation and education in the area makes it is difficult for people who are potentially questioning their sexuality and/or gender identities. The fact that Serena has had multiple people comment on how she was the first gay/queer representation they came into contact with speaks both to a lack of

representation in the area at the time and the degree to which knowing other LGBTQ+ people is vital and a source of possibility. My understanding of the way that Regan and Serena talk about being perceived as LGBTQ+ role models is informed by critiques of coming out discourses, which emphasize the way that individual LGBTQ+ people are positioned as agents of change, acceptance and representation. Behind the imperative to come out is often an understanding that by coming out and being visible, LGBTQ+ people can transform the people and places around them in ways that make their area a more accepting place. Based on Regan and Serena's account, it seems that coming out and being visible allows them to become role models for people around them, even if it was not their intention to do so. As Serena notes, "I was just madly in love with this person and had no idea it was subversive." In addition to beautifully illustrating the potential for queer desires to create space and possibility, to take us (and others) places, this also supports my earlier discussion about how knowing about other LGBTQ+ people or even the potential for other LGBTQ+ people matters. By existing as an open, confident pansexual person in their high school, for example, Regan becomes part of other people's comfort zones, even if Regan is not aware of this happening at the time. The existence and potential existence of other LGBTQ+ people have the ability to make life in the area feel more liveable. In the final part of this section, I consider how LGBTQ+ symbols; like pride flags and crosswalks, contribute to a sense of LGBTQ+ community in the area and might serve to make the area seem more welcoming and liveable.

4.2.5 "We're here and we support you": The importance of pride flags

The second-hand store that is right beside [the fundamentalist Christian church], it's just up here, they (laughs) they put out pride flags during pride month directly beside this church and I'm like, 'Ohh, you make me happy,' (laughs). Because sometimes it's just those little things where someone's being like, "We're here and we support you." That even if that, this place continues to exist in St. Marys that there are people who think it's ridiculous. (Regan)

It was important for me, and to have the pride flag up, so there was that visibility. If there are young kids who are still like, I don't know what to do, they're like,

okay. There is representation. This are safe people in town. When you have the jacked up pick-up trucks that are going way too fast down our street and stuff, to know that there are people in the community, that there are safe people, I think that's important to me. (Meredith)

For Regan, pride flags are a meaningful symbol of someone saying, "we're here and we support you." Beyond the general existence of pride flags being a demonstration of visibility and support, they can be particularly meaningful if they are placed somewhere like next to an openly anti-LGBTQ+ church to send a message that their anti-LGBTQ+ message is opposed and there are people who support LGBTQ+ folks in St. Marys. While there is not necessarily any direct contact between people putting up flags and those who are seeing and appreciating those flags, the indirect connection still fosters a sense of connection and possibly a sense of community. Particularly for people who do not have as strong of a support network in the area, the fact that they can see flags around town and know that there are supportive, accepting people and potentially other LGBTQ+ people may be comforting and contribute to a sense that LGBTQ+ people can and do live here. In this way, pride flags, the places where people see them and their reactions to and memories of seeing them may become part of people's comfort zones.

Meredith explains that it is important for her to keep her pride flag up to have a level of visibility, particularly for younger people, and to provide some representation in town and reassurance that there are safe people. Both Regan and Meredith live in St. Marys, which means that it is possible that one of the flags that Regan talks about appreciating around town is Meredith's[52]. Reading these two passages together is meaningful because Regan's reflections suggest that Meredith may be successful in her mission to provide visibility for younger people who are looking for signs of support around town. It is important and meaningful for Meredith to fly the flag and it is important and meaningful for Regan and others who see it. In this way, pride flags make

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[52] [D: Do you see a lot of pride flags around town?] Not so much on the businesses in town. Sometimes you'll see it in the apartments that are above, someone will have a pride flag as a curtain. And again, always makes me happy. Things like that. You'll see people with pins or whatever on their backpack and stuff like that is nice. Especially in a small town where we aren't always super visible. So yeah. (Regan)

the area seem more liveable, comfortable, and as a space where LGBTQ+ people are visibly present and able to belong.

Like Meredith and Regan, Steven finds pride flags a meaningful symbol of support:

> I mean, when we looked at the house, the, I don't know if it was after we bought the house or before, but we noticed that one of the other houses here had a rainbow flag in the window. And I've, walking on the other side of Downie St. with the dog, I noticed a house with a much larger rainbow flag in the front (laughs). And there are a number of businesses, we passed a couple of them in the downtown core, that have rainbow stickers on their front doors … You don't hear about those kinds of things in the paper, you don't see anything where those things have been desecrated here in Stratford … I have not seen; the flags haven't been stolen or the flags have been spray painted. You don't see that it's happened. I mean, the businesses thrive, rainbow stickers on their door or not. It's not hurting their business. No one's boycotting them, kind of thing. And that sends a good message. (Steven)

The fact that the location of nearby pride flags is noteworthy speaks to the fact that these symbols matter to him, provide a sense that there is LGBTQ+ visibility and acceptance in Stratford, and may contribute to his comfort zone. For Steven, it is important not only that LGBTQ+ symbols like pride flags are present around Stratford but specifically that he has not seen or heard about these symbols being desecrated or stolen. Steven mentions how other places like Oshawa have had issues with their rainbow crosswalk being vandalized and it is comforting to him that these issues have not come up in Stratford[53]. He is optimistic that Stratford is likely to get a rainbow crosswalk and notes that when the

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[53] As of the time of writing this in January 2021, Stratford does not yet have a rainbow crosswalk and a Google search for "Stratford" and "rainbow crosswalk" retrieves several articles about rainbow crosswalks in nearby places like Chatham, Port Elgin, Cambridge, Woodstock, and Aurora. Multiple of those articles were about the crosswalks being defaced.

issue was raised with council it was not met with "raucous debate" or opposition[54]. Steven perceives a certain level of openness in Stratford toward pride flags and crosswalks, which provides him with a meaningful sense of acceptance and inclusion in the community. Gloria also talks about symbols such as pride flags as significant for her. She connects this specifically to a discourse of being lucky to live in Canada and to have the rights and protections that we have here, referencing a documentary about women who take their lives into their hands by being lesbians in other places like Georgia. For several participants, LGBTQ+ symbols like flags and crosswalks are a reminder not only that there are supportive people and places in the Stratford area but that they are fortunate to live within a context in which their right to exist as LGBTQ+ is protected.

4.3   Conclusion

Throughout this chapter I have considered how participants talk about the Stratford area, their sense of place and community in the area and specifically how particular features of and connections in the area – things I argue make up their "comfort zone" – make it a viable place for them to live. In the next chapter, I continue to think about how participants talk about their sense of LGBTQ+ community in the area as I focus on their discussions about how change happens, barriers to organizing, and the future.

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[54] Stratford's City Council discussed and approved a request to install a "pride crosswalk at an intersection in the downtown core. In order to cover the cost of the installation, the Stratford Pride Committee has expressed an interest in fundraising for the project" (City of Stratford, 2020, p. 6).

Chapter 5

5 How Change Happens and Hopes for the Future

In this chapter, I begin by considering the way participants discuss LGBTQ+ events in the area before moving to the second section where I look at how participants talk about how change happens in the area. In the third section of this chapter, I focus on barriers to organizing, and in the final section, I offer an overview of participants' hopes for the future of LGBTQ+ community and organizing in the area.

5.1 LGBTQ+ events in the Stratford area

I want to preface this discussion by establishing an understanding of LGBTQ+ organizing and events in the Stratford area at the time of this research. In 2018, the group currently known as Infinite Pride Stratford organized a pride week and pride march in Stratford[55]. Around the time of Stratford Pride Week 2018, a second group called Bernard Wescott Productions began organizing events. Both Infinite Pride Stratford and Bernard Wescott Productions continue to operate and organize events in Stratford. Starting in 2019, the Rainbow Optimist Club for Southwestern Ontario[56] also organizes events in the Stratford area. The Rainbow Optimist Club is not explicitly named by participants, but the club organizes the Drag Storytime events in St. Marys and Stratford, which several participants discuss. Several participants also discuss the pride art show at York Lane Art Collective as a notable and/or favourite event that took place in June 2018 and 2019 and that they hope will continue in the future[57].

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[55] This account of the landscape of organizing and events is informed by participants' accounts and my experience living in Stratford and participating in the planning process for Stratford Pride Week 2018. My involvement in Stratford Pride Week 2018 was well known to some participants and not known to others. Unless directly asked by a participant, I did not talk about my experiences or past involvement in Infinite Pride Stratford. I recognize my prior involvement as an organizer of Stratford Pride Week 2018 informs my understanding of the way participants discuss these events.

[56] https://www.rainbowoptimistclub.com/

[57] A few participants talk about how the York Lane Art Collective closed or at least left its prior location between June 2019 and February 2020, which introduces some level of uncertainty about the future of its events and programing.

As I mention above, Stratford's first pride march was organized in 2018. Several participants talk about this as the "beginning" of pride organizing in Stratford. For example, one participant notes that "we only got pride two years ago" as part of their explanation for the state of LGBTQ+ community in Stratford, which is framed by several participants as lacking and/or as lagging behind bigger cities. The 2018 Pride Week, however, is not the earliest example of LGBTQ+ organizing discussed by participants. Patrick recalls a memory of Stratford trying to do something in 2008 for pride but says "it didn't really take off"[58]. Drew, who is the oldest participant, talks about founding an AIDS committee in Stratford[59] and that he was part of an organized, private club for several years, although it has disbanded[60]. Patrick and Drew's perspectives as people who have each lived in Stratford for over 20 years offer a more robust understanding of the history of LGBTQ+ organizing and community in Stratford.

I begin this section by looking at the way that participants talk about how pride events are meaningful for them and the way they perceive pride events to matter in the area. Following this, I consider the way that participants talk about their critiques of Stratford's pride events. Throughout this chapter, my discussion focuses specifically on Stratford rather than the Stratford area and that is because the vast majority of discussion about events and pride focuses on Stratford in particular.

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[58] And I think, I remember Stratford did try to have something in 2008 but it just didn't really take off. (Patrick)

[59] Then I moved to Stratford and there was no AIDS committee here. I helped to found one with two gay men who were not really in the theatre, but who knew lots of theatre people and so on. And we then, obviously, needed to do fundraising. One of the things we did was, on World AIDS Day [December 1], and it may not have been the very first World AIDS Day, but it was sort of early on, we had an auction sale at a pub/bar, which was not what you could call a gay bar, but was very easy and receptive. I mean, the owner was, right? And one of the things we did was to invite quite high-profile theatre people to act as celebrity auctioneers. (Drew)

[60] It was called, this is way back, the Gentleman's Dining Association, I think. And once a month we would have a potluck supper at somebody's house. That was definitely what you would call a kind of an organization. Not one with a President and a Secretary and blah, blah, blah, but nevertheless, there would always be 15 or 18 or 20 people there. And they were men, because they were the Gentleman's. And that kind of faded away after 2 or 3 years maybe. A pity. (Drew)

5.1.1 "It shows that I live in a city that supports who I am": Pride events as meaningful

It's [the pride march] important to me because it shows that I live in a city that supports who I am and people like me and also it gives people in the queer community an idea of the support system that's behind them when they can see that many people showing up to an event like that. I'm going to cry. But, it's just, that felt so good. To see that many people. Like wow, you guys all fucking care. (Chris)

When I went to Stratford pride, there was a lot of people being like, 'I don't know if I belong here, but I'm here. I'm willing to be here even though it kind of scares me a little bit.' But now more and more people are showing up, so it feels a little bit more comfortable, but just slowly kind working on that and stuff. (Sam)

[D: And thinking again about Stratford, being in Stratford, do you think that there is a gay community here?] Oh, I know there is. I mean, I haven't, because of work with the theatre, I usually am working the day of the pride parade and it has been the two years there's been a pride parade. (Steven)

For Chris, who attended Stratford pride in both 2018 and 2019, the pride march is significant because "it shows that [he] live[s] in a city that supports who [he] is" and that it gives "people in the queer community an idea of the support system that's behind them". The way Chris talks about the pride march and the way he thanks people for coming out and showing they care rather than just sitting at home speaks to the way the march and other pride events function as a demonstration of support and acceptance that contributes to his sense of LGBTQ+ community in the area[61]. Other participants like Sam talk about how meaningful the experience of attending a march is not only for them but for other people in the community and youth in particular. For Sam, the march and pride

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[61] It's relevant to note that while Chris talks about pride as meaningful for him, he also notes that he is not able to fully express himself the way he would at Toronto pride, for example, because he has to act a particular, more respectful way in Stratford.

events offer a source of "space and connection" that allows LGBTQ+ people to feel a greater sense of belonging and community in the area. As I consider in Chapter 3, it is difficult for participants to know whether or not people or places will recognize and/or be accepting of who they are. This sense of ambiguous (in)tolerance makes the visibility and collectivity offered by the pride march even more significant. For local LGBTQ+ folks and allies, physically showing up and taking part in or cheering on the pride march is a way of taking up space as a community and demonstrating an LGBTQ+ presence in the area. In this way, the march also functions as a space in which LGBTQ+ people and allies can become known to one another. As I consider in the previous chapter, a sense that there are more LGBTQ+ people in the area than we know or see sustains hope for future connections with more LGBTQ+ people. The pride march provides an opportunity for that potential to be realized as LGBTQ+ people and allies physically congregate. In this way, I understand Chris and Sam's reflections to speak to the way that pride marches and LGBTQ+ specific events can contribute to comfort zones. There is a hopefulness that comes from these events and the potential for more of them in the future, as participants emphasize by expressing a desire for events and specifically for more of the "space and connection" such events have the potential to generate. Participants express a sense that while some people may be afraid they do not belong or might be scared to attend a pride march, having that space available is important and is part of a process toward making Stratford a more comfortable place for more LGBTQ+ people. These LGBTQ+ specific events, then, have the potential to expand people's comfort zones, facilitate connections between LGBTQ+ people and allies, and ultimately make the area feel more liveable.

Sam's comment also indicates a hopefulness that as more pride marches and events happen, they will contribute to a process of supporting LGBTQ+ people in the area and allowing them to feel more comfortable, even if this happens gradually over time. Sam, Chris and several other participants suggest that Stratford is at least several years behind the times and imply that pride marches are one way that Stratford is moving into the present moment where LGBTQ+ people are recognized and respected. This notion of Stratford being behind the times takes on its meaning in contrast to somewhere like Toronto, where pride marches and LGBTQ+ events have been happening for decades. I argue this framing conceptualizes pride marches and explicit pride events as

part of a progress narrative in which we are moving from repression to liberation with visibility being one of the foremost markers of this process. Visibility in the form of marches and events, as suggested by their potential to expand comfort zones, is or can be important. However, as Gray (2009) and other rural queer studies scholars emphasize, using visibility and the presence of visible events like pride marches as a marker of acceptance or modernization is problematic because it reinforces metronormative[62] logics and (re)constructs large cities as the most liveable place for LGBTQ+ folks. Further, such progress narratives are inattentively critical to the way pride marches may not only ignore a variety of systemic inequalities but may actively perpetuate them. Thus, while pride marches and events are meaningful and productive sites of "space and connection" for LGBTQ+ youth, they are also bound up with narratives about visibility and progress that may, paradoxically, reaffirm the Stratford area as somewhere that is a less desirable place for LGBTQ+ people to live, particularly for those who are interested in having access to a visible queer culture.

Chris and Sam's accounts of pride marches suggest such events can also serve as a means through which the Stratford area becomes more accepting of LGBTQ+ people and their presence. Not only are visible marches and events taken as evidence of progress, as suggested above, but they also serve as a demonstration that there is a sizeable community of LGBTQ+ people and allies. The recognizability of pride marches and the media coverage they generate has the potential to make an LGBTQ+ presence visible to a wider heterosexual public. While I problematize any intrinsic connections between visibility and progress or visibility and empowerment, I also recognize that participants frame the kind of visibility generated by pride marches as work that is making their community a better place for them and likely for other LGBTQ+ folks.

Although much of the participants' discussions about Stratford pride events focuses on what they want to see happen or change in the future, 13 of my 15 participants

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[62] Metronormativity "reveals the conflation of 'urban' and 'visible' in many normalizing narratives of gay/lesbian subjectivities" and "maps a story of migration onto the coming out narrative" where cities become the space of sexual expression and tolerance against the rural, which serves as the closet (Halberstam, 2005, 37; Herring, 2010).

also talked about Stratford pride events in 2018 and/or 2019[63]. I had sustained, extensive discussions about pride events in Stratford and several participants took me to the sites of the pride march and/or past events during our walking interviews.

5.1.2   "Are you protesting, or?" Drag Storytime in St. Marys

> My parents went [to the storytime event]. There was an op-ed posted in the newspaper the next week being grumpy about it. I restrained myself from starting a newspaper argument (laughs), but, yeah. I think it's good that that happens, and I think it really shows that the library continues to be an essential part of the St. Marys community in general but will continue to be a safe place for LGBT people in the community. (Regan)

> We did have the Drag Queen Storytime. I went to that even though we don't have kids. I was there with my rainbows and I'm like, yeah, we're going to be here. And I would say there was about 50 people who showed up … and there were people who were outwardly either identifying as queer or allied and there was only one protester. But he sat there, quiet, and listened. He had one of those Jesus signs. He sat at the front and when we, when the queens had everyone stand up and dance, he did it too with his sign. He still participated, he was very polite and ... I'm like, well. Are you protesting, or? (Meredith)

As I mentioned above, the majority of discussion about pride events is centred around Stratford. One notable exception is a Drag Queen Storytime event held at the St. Marys Public Library in September 2019. Both participants who live in St. Marys discuss the Drag Queen Storytime event as a meaningful, public, and visible LGBTQ+ event in town. Regan was not able to attend but expresses a sense that such events are important, which reinforces the notion that explicitly LGBTQ+ events like pride marches and drag storytimes are meaningful on several levels and may contribute to expanding folks'

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[63] The two participants who do not talk about pride events in Stratford are Clay and Regan. Clay spends a lot of time in Toronto and also lives in the country; he does not talk about pride events at all. Regan lives in St. Marys and is currently attending university. They do not talk about Stratford Pride events during our interview, although they do talk about the Drag Storytime in St. Marys.

comfort zones by providing "space and connection". It is notable Regan's parents attended this event because it demonstrates how such events can also be a way for LGBTQ+ folks to come to know their allies in the community. For Regan, the event reinforces that the library is a positive, safe space for LGBTQ+ people in town. For participants connected to St. Marys, this event was a meaningful demonstration of community and support and reinforced the library as a significant community space, through its willingness to hold LGBTQ+ evens and the long-standing presence of a gender-neutral washroom[64]. One way, then, that public spaces like libraries can become a source of support and part of folks' comfort zones is by hosting events like this one. Events like the Drag Storytime create opportunities for space and connection and send a meaningful message that there are spaces and institutions that will not only take part in LGBTQ+ events but, more importantly, will not back down in the face of opposition.

Meredith talks about how it was important for her to attend the storytime event in St. Marys as a way of demonstrating there are people who support LGBTQ+ people in the area. She describes the event as being positive, despite the presence of one quiet protestor who attended with "one of those Jesus signs" but did not interfere with the event. Meredith's account of attending this event provides a useful example of my discussion about the (in)visibility dilemma[65]. The event happened and it went okay; it was an enjoyable event and despite apprehensions, there was only a single protestor who did not disrupt the event. If these events do not happen, the paranoia about the kind of opposition they will be met with lingers as a possibility. When these events happen, there are moments when that possibility is either realized or not. Another way that LGBTQ+ events in the area are meaningful, then, is by providing opportunities for the fear and worry about intolerance to be tested. Even in the case where there is a protestor or some kind of negative response, the opportunity to connect with other LGBTQ+ folks and

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[64] This is even more the case given that the Drag Queen Storytime event created "controversy" around St. Marys and the library reiterated its support for equal opportunity and this event in particular ("Drag Queen Storytime Controversy", 2019).

[65] The (in)visibility dilemma is that LGBTQ+ people avoid taking up space as visibly LGBTQ+ people or couples and remain invisible or less visible to avoid any issues, harassment and/or intolerance. As a consequence, they can never be sure if there is or would have been an issue or not.

allies and to become part of an LGBTQ+ community or space remains meaningful, even if that connection or community is fleeting. If paranoia about potential intolerance exists and affects LGBTQ+ folks in the absence of events and thus the absence of the realization of intolerance, then the sense of community or any benefits accrued from attending an event are a net gain. That there was a religious protester present at the Storytime event and that there was a grumpy op-ed in the local paper reinforces a sense that to be LGBTQ+ in St. Marys is to be aware that there are people who do not accept you and/or do not think LGBTQ+ people belong in the community. However, as Meredith's comments illustrate, the presence of allies and supportive people vastly outnumbered the presence of protestors at the Storytime event and ultimately reinforced a sense of LGBTQ+ presence, community and belonging in St. Marys.

While the Drag Queen Storytime event in St. Marys was meaningful for both Regan and Meredith, Sam talks about how the framing of these events is exclusionary:

> "I actually contacted them, and I was like … I think you guys are going to need to change the name and stuff to rebrand a little bit to just like include some gender diversity and stuff like that … there's a lot of, 'ladies and gentlemen,'" (Sam)

While not specifically commenting on the event in St. Marys but the Drag Queen Storytime events being organized in the area by the Rainbow Optimist Club more generally, Sam talks about how the drag scene in Stratford is "still very queen centric" and that the Drag Queen Storytime events are exclusionary other drag performers[66]. Sam also notes that the use of binary language like "ladies and gentlemen" at local LGBTQ+ events is another way that non-binary people are potentially alienated from the local LGBTQ+ community. While there is an increasing number of events that are LGBTQ+ oriented in Stratford, Sam draws attention to the way that not all LGBTQ+ events are equally accessible or inclusive. Further, events such as the Drag Queen Storytimes can be

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[66] As of October 2020, the Rainbow Optimist Club's Drag Storytime events include a range of performers and no longer advertise using queen-centric language.

meaningful and facilitate a sense of belonging for some LGBTQ+ folks while
contributing to a sense of being excluded among other LGBTQ+ folks.

5.1.3   "They ignore all the stuff where they might learn something": Conceptualizing Pride Events

> Oh god, nothing to do with Stratford pride is in line with any kind of political,
> other than again, lip service. Let's watch a YouTube documentary that's like 10
> minutes and talks a little bit about Marsha P. Johnson or something. And also, it's
> not even part of the main stuff. The stuff people go to is always the spectacle,
> again, which is kind of gross. Again. [D: The drinking, the drag shows-] Exactly.
> They ignore all of the stuff where they might learn something and you know, let's
> go to the drag shit, right? (Skylar)

> I would say, specifically LGBTQ based, it's just Infinite Pride basically. And
> Bernard [Westcott] just by merit of their demographic and what they do, but
> they're not actually like... they're not an education or support or- it's events.
> (Serena)

Although Stratford Pride and LGBTQ+ events are discussed by many participants as
meaningful and as an important source of connection and support in Stratford,
participants also talk about limitations and critiques of such events. Skylar and Serena
raise issues with the way that pride events are conceptualized and organized in Stratford,
suggesting that there is minimal focus on education and support and that events tend to
focus on entertainment, drag shows, and what Skylar refers to as "the spectacle". The
way Skylar describes Stratford's events as more of a "spectacle" than a demonstration of
community is significant and resonates with the accounts of a few other participants. My
understanding of what Skylar means as a "spectacle" is there is a lack of connection
between events and the local context[67]. We might ask, for example, what semi-regular

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[67] I think people in places like Perth County tend to conceive of pride events in a way that's like, they just don't have very much familiarity with it. They don't really know anything to do with the politics behind it at all. They kind of have this idea that they can kind of like, just take what they do in the city and just transpose it into more rural areas and just have it work and it's like, it really ends up just sort of being a sideshow. (Skylar)

drag shows are *doing*. We might also ask if drag shows are necessarily the site where such change needs to be affected. Indeed, I would argue having drag shows and other events that may exist for no other purpose than to congregate, celebrate, and connect is important. However, in the context of Stratford where there are relatively few regular events or activities, an overemphasis on particular events that are not overtly interested in providing support for folks in the form of resources, education, and advocacy may seem frivolous or misguided. Further, there is concern among some participants that an overemphasis on drag shows works in Stratford not just because drag shows are a current pop culture fixture or because of an association with alcohol, but because drag shows appeal to and draw in a heterosexual audience (which the former factors likely contribute to). This is where the idea of "spectacle" comes into play, as drag shows attended by straight people in an area where people are largely assumed to be straight may not feel much like "queer spaces". This is not to argue these shows are not meaningful or even vital for LGBTQ+ folks who attend them. However, for other folks and on a more conceptual level, there is some uncertainty about what these events are *doing* in terms of affecting the conditions for local LGBTQ+ folks and particularly for those who may be experiencing issues. Again, this is not to argue drag shows do not offer support but that there may be more effective ways to make support available to local LGBTQ+ folks, particularly younger folks and/or sober folks, who may not be interested in or able to attend drag shows.

A few participants talk about pride organizing in Stratford in terms of the commodification of queer culture and express a sense that the events being offered prioritize selling tickets over developing sustainable LGBTQ+ community in the area. As I discuss below, the concentration of events during pride month and an absence of them at other times of the year contributes to a sense that events are not necessarily fostering a sense of consistent LGBTQ+ community. When Serena comments, "they're not an education or support- it's events", she is emphasizing that while that particular group [BW] may put on great, entertaining shows, such events are not creating the kind of

network or providing the kind of support that may be lacking for some LGBTQ+ people in the area, as I suggest above in my discussion of drag shows as a "spectacle". Such reflections emphasize that it matters whether events are for profit or not for profit, who is involved in organizing events, who their target audiences are, and what their objectives and motivations are.

Based on my experiences and observations organizing events as part of Stratford Pride Week 2018, the educational events were some of the least attended while being some of the most expensive to put on[68]. The day of workshops held on Saturday, June 9, 2018, at the Stratford Public Library was an interesting and engaging afternoon for those who attended, but there were considerably fewer attendees at this event compared to others in the week, which tended to be during the evening/night and hosted at licensed locations. Because the workshop event was more expensive and involved connecting and collaborating with several organizations, it was one of the last events to come together and as a consequence, was not as well advertised as other events[69]. All of these factors potentially contributed to lower attendance at the workshop event compared to the drag show or the pride music night, for example, which were both held at night in bars. Returning to the above discussion, this is one way that it matters whether events are being organized by a not-for-profit organization, which may be more able to host educational events that do not necessarily have revenue-generating potential, or by for-profit groups which may tend to focus on events that, while still possessing the potential to contribute

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[68] The reason the workshop day was more expensive to run is that many other events took place in spaces that the group was able to secure access for free. For example, York Lane Art Collective organized and hosted the Art Exhibition and provided free space for the Wellness Day events. The Pride Music Night and the Pride Prom were hosted at two separate bars downtown Stratford. Neither bar charged a rental fee, but they also remained open for regular business, which meant the events were (regrettably) not necessarily LGBTQ+ friendly spaces. While this was not an issue to my knowledge at the Pride Music Night, there was an issue at the Pride Prom that would have been avoided if the event was hosted in an LGBTQ+ specific space or if the group had funds to rent a dedicated venue for the event. In both cases, there was an expectation that attendees at these events would purchase food and drink at these establishments. The workshop day and the drag show were the two events that required more expensive venue rentals. While the rental fee at the drag show venue was far more expensive than the costs associated with renting the library space, the drag show had the potential to – and, indeed, did – generate quite a bit of revenue, which was needed to offset other costs associated with putting on the week.

[69] Although I would also note the other event that was the last to come together in 2018 was the drag show, which sold out and saw people who wanted to attend turned away at the door.

to a sense of community and connectedness in the area, are rooted in entertainment value and profit potential. Even if an event is being run by a not-for-profit organization, there is still pressure from funders and stakeholders to demonstrate that the events and initiatives are successful enough to warrant continuation. Part of what I consider throughout the remainder of this section is that building consistent, well-attended events takes time and support and, while the desire for such events and the potential sense of community exists among participants, there is a sense that the conditions to develop and sustain such events and potential community do not currently exist.

Thinking further about how venues matter, in a critique of LGBTQ+ events that is not unique to the Stratford area Chris and Sam talk about their sense that events tend to be alcohol and bar centric:

> I find that it is always centred around alcohol, for the most part. That's what gets people's attention. (Chris)

> Especially for younger queers, that's a big problem in Southwestern Ontario, everything is very alcohol-centric. I'm a person who doesn't drink, so it's really hard. I'm a drag performer. I go to bars all the time, and I don't drink … You're expected to be there, and you're expected to drink and it's like, I don't drink. That's why it's very difficult for me to be able to go to places that are very, pretty overstimulating and stuff like that. Things like, queer bookstores, queer coffee shops, stuff like that. You go to Toronto for that. You have to go, like, you have to go two hours away to do that. (Sam)

Several other participants also talk about not drinking, wanting alternatives to alcohol-centric events, not wanting to spend money on alcohol, and/or the sense that alcohol is an important factor in drawing a crowd to events. Sam's emphasis on the way that alcohol affects not only non-drinkers but also youth is important. While not specific to Stratford, Sam talks about a more general association between queer culture, drag culture, and bar culture that is difficult to navigate as someone who does not drink and particularly for anyone who might struggle with alcohol addiction. In this discussion, it is important to keep in mind the fraught relationship lesbian and gay communities have historically had

to alcohol (Millward, 2015) and research that suggests LGBTQ+ folks continue to use substances like alcohol at higher rates (Scheim, Bauer and Shokoohi, 2016). My understanding of Sam and Chris' reflections about alcohol and LGBTQ+ community is informed by work on LGBTQ+ history, which accounts for the way that bars and bar culture have been integral to LGBTQ+ movements, organizing and gathering (Chamberland, 1993; Chenier, 2004; Kennedy and Davis, 1993; Millward, 2015; Nash, 2006; Podmore, 2006). As Millward (2015) notes in her history of lesbians and community across Canada between 1964 -1984, "beer parlours, taverns, or bars have been described, critiqued, and analyzed more than any other form of place where lesbians congregate" (p. 43). Bars are important sites because they are "forms of territory", a commercial/taxed presence, and a means of generating "physical and political visibility" (Millward, 2015, p. 44). Beyond functioning to create space and connection, bars can also function as sites of exploitation, discrimination, judgment, and violence (Millward, 2015, p. 44). Millward (2015) emphasizes that, while significant to LGBTQ+ and specifically lesbian history, bars are "embattled" spaces (p. 45). Over the last few years, there has been increased coverage of sober queers and sober queer spaces among queer Canadian magazines and press (Hoard, 2020; Small, 2019). Small's (2019) vision for "creating spaces and a community that may be gentler, quieter, inclusive, accessible and alcohol-free, but certainly does not compromise our raging queerness" reflects the kind of future I understand participants like Sam and Chris imagining (n/p). Also reflecting this vision are initiatives like "queeret", which is described as a movement to "craft slower-paced atmospheres, choose substance over flashiness, and believe queer liberation and connection can be achieved without alcohol" (queeret, 2020, n/p; Small 2019). These kinds of events and movements could respond to the hopes for the future that several participants articulate, which includes finding more spaces and ways to connect that do not revolve around bars and alcohol.

In terms of ongoing substance use issues among LGBTQ+ populations, a report from 2012 on substance abuse and problem gambling in Perth and Huron Counties lists "lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgendered people" alongside other groups known to be "more likely to develop an addiction problem" (Moses, 2012, p. 49). Moses (2012) elaborates that: "Many members of the LGBTQ community remain closeted and isolated,

ashamed of who they are and who they love. Coming out may cost them their family and friends, even their employment and housing[70]" (p. 15). Despite this recognition, none of the services or resources recommended in the document pertain specifically to LGBTQ+ people and LGBTQ+ people are absent from the discussion of "new and additional services needed" in the area (Moses, 2012, pp. 46-47). There is an organization in Stratford called Choices for Change that provides alcohol, drug and gambling counselling. While there is no indication on the Choices for Change website that they are an LGBTQ+ friendly space or service, someone working at Choices for Change attended an online talk I presented that was organized by the Huron Perth Health Unit in early December 2020[71]. In practice, it seems Choices for Change is or is working to be an LGBTQ+ friendly organization. While the availability of LGBTQ+ friendly counselling or addictions programs is important, participants specifically talk about desiring spaces, events and community that are not alcohol-centric and not held in a bar. Sam and several other participants talk about the existence of queer bookstores and coffee shops in Toronto and in bigger cities as examples of spaces they wish they had access to in the Stratford area. While there may be LGBTQ+ friendly coffee shops and spaces in the area and in downtown Stratford in particular, many participants articulate that there is a unique quality and importance to knowing a space or event is *for* LGBTQ+ folks and is a place where you are likely to connect with other LGBTQ+ folks. I continue to explore the importance of LGBTQ+ specific spaces and events throughout this chapter.

5.1.4   "And I didn't even know it was pride here": Feeling Disconnected

> There's no consistent queer community, I guess. Other than around pride, essentially. Around pride? There's maybe 2 or 3 drag shows-ish. (Sam)

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[70] This framing of coming out is the precise framing I aim to critique when I talk about how participants' complex experiences of (mis)recognition and (in)visibility are poorly framed by a closeted/out binary that assumes the opposite of visible/out is "closeted and isolated, ashamed of who they are and who they love" (Moses, 2012, p. 15).

[71] Thanks to Bonnie Baynham for organizing this talk, which I discuss further in the coda.

It's definitely more during pride though. Yeah. Which, I think is kind of unfortunate. Waterloo has rainbow sidewalks, and I don't expect that grand of stuff, but why just around this month? (Alex)

Sam and Alex and several other participants talk about how LGBTQ+ events in Stratford are typically limited to pride month in June, which leaves a sense of lack during other points of the year. As Sam describes it, "there's no consistent queer community" other than in June when there are a few events. As a performer, this leaves them with few opportunities to perform. The way Alex asks, "Why around this month?" suggests a desire for more consistent and accessible LGBTQ+ community and events in Stratford. Alex also expresses that it is unfortunate that visible support for LGBTQ+ folks in the form of pride flags and symbols happens primarily during pride month in June rather than existing throughout the year. While I have looked at the way participants talk about pride events as meaningful, their concentration at particular times of the year can leave some LGBTQ+ folks feeling increasingly isolated at other times of the year, especially if pride events are important for you and contribute to or sustain your comfort zone. As I discuss in the previous chapter, several participants talk about LGBTQ+ inclusive symbols like pride flags and rainbow crosswalks as meaningful, visible evidence of support for LGBTQ+ people. Here, Alex is reinforcing the notion a rainbow crosswalk would be a more permanent, year-round symbol of LGBTQ+ visibility in Stratford. Alex notes, however, she does not expect "that grand of stuff" in Stratford. While Waterloo is a place where Alex can expect to see LGBTQ+ visibility in the form of a rainbow crosswalk at any time of the year, Stratford is somewhere where visibility is mostly confined to pride month.

Another way that participants talk about pride events in the area is by expressing frustration over not being able to find out about these events before they happen or in a consistent way. Alex and Drew express a sense that they wish it was easier to find out about events and become involved with LGBTQ+ organizing in the area:

And I didn't even know it was pride here. Someone just kind of passed it on to me, and I was like, oh okay. [D: you're not really connected to a network of these events in Stratford or anything like that] No, no. (Alex)

And I thought that maybe in the years when I did hang out my rather big rainbow flag (laughs), I think it's 5 feet or something, literally when you came in the door it would flap, hit on you on the top of your head. I thought maybe that would, somebody would say, 'Oh, you should know about the pride thing'. (Drew)

Alex and Drew specifically talk about not knowing that events are happening or that pride events were happening in Stratford. While Alex recounts someone passed onto her that it was pride, she did not see any advertising or publicity that allowed her to connect to those events in advance. Based on my involvement with Stratford Pride Week 2018, my sense is that Facebook was the most actively used to share information about Stratford Pride Week 2018. Volunteers put up posters in many physical locations around Stratford, with a focus on public spaces in the downtown core, including coffee shops and the library. I did a radio interview with a local Stratford station in the weeks leading up to Stratford Pride Week 2018 and I also maintained a Word Press website with information about the week[72], including a link to a pride guide that took me hundreds of hours to put together[73]. There was also coverage of pride week events in the Beacon Herald in both 2018 and 2019 (Simmons, 2018; Smith, 2019). While efforts were made by the other organizers and me to make information about Stratford Pride Week 2018 widely available, it is clear from the accounts of participants like Alex and Drew that we were not fully successful. When I ask Alex if she feels like she is part of a network of events through which she would find out about events, she clarifies that she is not. Part of the issue, as Alex emphasizes, is there is a lack of a network through which such information is spread. Although the Facebook page and group grew exponentially during the course

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[72] This site can still be accessed at the following link: https://pride2018.wordpress.com/

[73] The pride guide can still be accessed at the following link: https://pride2018.files.wordpress.com/2018/06/digital-stratford-pride-guide-20182.pdf

of organizing Stratford Pride Week 2018 and the organizers were excited by the level of engagement the events received on social media, it is clear not all LGBTQ+ people in the Stratford area or even those living within Stratford were aware of these events.

While Alex talks about not feeling part of a network to find out about local events or happenings, Drew talks about his wish that someone would see his large pride flag and let him know about "the pride thing" and that this never happened. The way that Drew talks about the size and prominence of the flag he used to hang at his house reinforces an understanding of pride flags as a significant source of LGBTQ+ visibility in Stratford. Drew explains he is no longer able to hang his pride flag for health reasons:

> I used to hang a rainbow flag out the front. I have that little porch like thing over
> the door, there's a socket and you could put the rod in that. And I haven't been
> using it for a few years, because with my dizziness, I can't go up on the ladder and
> put it there. (Drew)

It is not that Drew does not want to or is afraid to put up his pride flag, but that he cannot physically go up on the ladder to put the flag up. Drew's reflections emphasize how visibility is not just affected by our intentions and fears, but also by ability. For Drew, hanging the pride flag was an expression of visibility but also an expression of hope that it would help him connect with local pride events or groups. That he is no longer able to hang the flag means he is no longer as visible but also diminishes the potential someone might think to approach him to tell him about pride events. In this way, Drew's account suggests a sense of longing and an awareness that he is potentially missing out on events or activities about which he does not know. I also pick up on a sense of missing out or potentially missing out from the way Alex talks about not being aware that it was pride in Stratford. While there are no mechanisms in place to facilitate it and it is clearly not the case, there is almost a sense that by virtue of being LGBTQ+ you should just somehow *know* about local pride events. For local LGBTQ+ people who do not find out about events until they are sold out or until right after the event happens, however, there is a feeling of missing out not only in the direct sense of having missed out on a particular event but in a more general sense of there being some kind of "queer community" in the

area of which you are not part. In this context, "queer community" is not something people feel like they are a part of but rather is an abstract and mythical construct that contributes to a sense of not belonging, missing out, or being disconnected. As I discuss in this chapter, the notion of queer community functions more as an abstract idea that exists in the past or the future but remains elusive in the present. At other points in this chapter, I consider how the knowledge that other LGBTQ+ people exist and are gathering can be meaningful for someone even if they do not participate or make contact with such activity. Here, I consider that for some LGBTQ+ folks, a sense of missing or being disconnected from local LGBTQ+ events is alienating and disappointing. Such is the case when despite the visibility of his pride flag, Drew was not made aware of pride events happening in the community.

In addition to Alex and Drew, several participants talk about how pride events in the area are not well-publicized. In particular, some participants express a sense that they do not find out about events because they do not use Facebook or other social media. Three participants who talk specifically about not being on Facebook as potentially affecting their ability to connect with an LGBTQ+ community in Stratford are over the age of 60, which suggests age is likely a factor in folks' access to events. As I mentioned above, social media, and Facebook in particular, was the dominant site of communication and discussion about Stratford Pride Week 2018. While the core organizing group for the week ranged in age from folks in their mid-twenties to their fifties, everyone involved was familiar with and active on social media, which informed our reliance on it as a means of communicating as a group and as a way to publicize events. However, overuse of social media as a communication tool means certain folks are not going to have access to that information and will not know about any LGBTQ+ events being organized. While the organizing committee did utilize alternatives to social media like posters, the newspaper, radio, and Word Press site, a potential generational divide emerges where folks who use social media are more likely to be part of local networks through participation in Stratford-centric Facebook groups, for example, while organizers may not sufficiently consider there are folks who are not on social media regularly or at all. Across my interviews, I got the sense that participants want more transparent, direct, and consistent communications about events and organizing in the area that are available

offline in addition to on social media. As I look specifically at barriers to organizing later in this section, I also recognize the difficulties the people working hard organizing these events experience in doing this organizing work. It is not an unwillingness or a lack of trying to advertise events, but a general lack of networking, institutionalized support, and a lack of resources that sustain this communication issue.

Meredith and Serena also express a sense that they wish it was easier to find out about events and become involved with LGBTQ+ organizing in the area:

> You know there's people. How do you find them? And that's one of the things I noted, that it's really hard to get in touch with the Infinite Pride Group. And I'm telling my clients, 'There's people, I don't know how you get to them'. (Meredith)

> I know I've spoken to multiple people who did want to be involved [with Stratford pride] and either couldn't get through to contact anyone or were told no … And multiple, easily a dozen people. Not just like, my one friend. Easily a dozen if not more people who had real barriers to even communicating, let alone accessing. (Serena)

When Meredith says "it's really hard to get in touch" with a local pride group, my understanding is that messages and emails sent to the group are not receiving any response. Both Meredith and Serena express a clear sense they and other people they know are not easily able to get in contact with local LGBTQ+ groups. Meredith expresses a common sentiment as she notes that "You know there's people. How do you find them?" Beyond how to access the group or find out about events, Serena's comment speaks to a sense there are people who want to become involved in local groups who have been unable to contact the group or have been turned away. Serena emphasizes this is not an isolated issue, but one that "easily a dozen if not more people" experienced where they had "real barriers to even communicating, let alone accessing" a local group. In addition to desiring more advertising and communication about events, participants talk about wanting to be able to contact local groups and for there to be ways to become more actively involved with these groups. I pick back up on this discussion in the final

section of this chapter as I discuss participants' hopes for the future of LGBTQ+ community in the Stratford area.

A contributing factor to a lack of communication and the difficulty folks experience as they attempt to become involved with the local LGBTQ+ group is that the efforts of the group are entirely supported and sustained by volunteers who only have so much time and energy. While this presents particular issues and barriers for local LGBTQ+ folks who are trying to access events, become involved in the group, or who desire a more organized and visible community, many of these issues are not unique to this group and are a function of any volunteer-run organization, which tend to have issues with disorganization, turnover, follow through, and delegating responsibility. Speaking from my own experience with Stratford Pride Week 2018, there was so much to do, and the level of stress was so high that while I know retrospectively there were people, businesses, organizations, and so on who would have been willing to participate and further support these efforts, our group was not connected with them or aware of their intent. It matters who is organizing events and the networks those people are a part of, because that shapes the way they conceptualize and organize events, where those events are held, how and where they advertise those events, who they see as their audience and who they see as their allies in doing this work. As participants' accounts suggest, the creation of events and communities is the product of individual LGBTQ+ people in the area coming together and using their own resources and networks to make things happen. The reflections I offer in this section about my experiences organizing Stratford Pride Week 2020 demonstrate some of the limitations of events and communities that are comprised of individual LGBTQ+ people drawing on their personal resources and networks. It makes sense that the product of such organizing is likely to disproportionately appeal to, be advertised to, and discussed among particular groups, networks and spaces and not others.

5.2   How change happens

As I establish in my theoretical framework, "coming out" is normatively constructed as a process of discovering who one is and making one's "true self" visible to others (Klein et al., 2015; Rasmussen, 2004). As Rasmussen (2004) argues, the imperative to come out is

not only about visibility as an indicator of personal liberation and empowerment but is also an important means of political activism (p. 299). One way this happens, as I have considered so far in this chapter, is that becoming visible allows for LGBTQ+ people to find each other and build communities. Beyond the context of building community, becoming visible as LGBTQ+ is also a way that individual LGBTQ+ people contribute to the fight for LGBTQ+ acceptance. This argument relies on the premise that the general (cis/heterosexual) public becomes more accepting of LGBTQ+ people through personal interaction with LGBTQ+ people who they know, love, respect, and ultimately, who they are willing to see and accept as human. Further, it often asks LGBTQ+ people to engage in various kinds of affective work to educate others and expose themselves to microaggressions in the service of working toward acceptance. As I consider participants' accounts of working to educate others and being role models, for example, critical work on coming out discourses informs the way I make sense of such discussions. Most participants emphasized that access to education as well as exposure to and familiarity with people who are not cis and/or heterosexual is an important factor in the increasing acceptance of LGBTQ+ people.

5.2.1 "Hold your head high, keep a stiff upper lip": Confidence and support networks

As I discuss in the previous section, part of the reason Meredith and her husband attended the drag storytime was not just to support the event but also that they anticipated a potentially negative response and wanted to be there to counter any disruptions if necessary:

> … there was only one protester. But he sat there, quiet, and listened. He had one of those Jesus signs. He sat at the front and when we, when the queens had everyone stand up and dance, he did it too with his sign. He still participated, he was very polite and ... I'm like, well. Are you protesting, or? [D: But there was not any sort of real negative response?] No, and that was one of the reasons why my husband and I went. We're like, alright, we don't want kids to be involved, so if there is something, we'll just make it not so visible. (Meredith)

The motivation for attending LGBTQ+ events is not always simply that someone needs a community or support themselves, but that they are willing and able to be visibly supportive of or confrontational on behalf of other LGBTQ+ people in the community for whom seeing a successful, relatively unopposed LGBTQ+ event happen at the public library is important. Luckily, Meredith and her husband were able to enjoy the event and the one protestor who showed up did not create any disruption beyond his presence and "Jesus sign." However, this account speaks to the way participants understand individual LGBTQ+ people and allies as agents of change in the Stratford area. Most participants suggest anticipating and addressing issues is the responsibility of individual LGBTQ+ people and that to do so, they have to be confident enough and willing to assert themselves or to potentially "deal with assholes" as Skylar puts it:

> [D: And does that [homophobia] change the way that you feel you can express yourself here or the move through downtown-] Not for me anymore. It would have once. At this point I'm pretty much accustomed to it and I'm good at dealing with assholes. But there was certainly a point where it would have bothered me more. At this point, I'm pretty confrontational about things like this. I can hold my head high and the thing is, a lot of the time it's body language. Hold your head high, keep a stiff upper lip, and people don't fuck with you, kind of thing. (Skylar)

In the above passage, Skylar talks about how she does not allow the potential for a backlash to affect the way she lives her life and also details the cost of what that decision entails. Skylar recognizes that, although it would have bothered her more at one point, she has become "accustomed to it" and is "good at dealing with assholes". My understanding of Skylar's remarks is that life becomes more liveable for her by developing tactics that allow her to become "good at dealing with assholes" and to feel less bothered. It is crucial that Skylar's experience is not necessarily one where Stratford has become more accepting, more tolerant of her, or more tolerable for her over time, but rather that she has "become accustomed to it", adapting by developing a capacity to make do in unideal conditions. Participants emphasize that their ability to be confident and to "keep a stiff upper lip" are capacities – forms of affective work – they have developed over time and depend on who they are as a person, their support network, their level of

comfort, and other factors. Some LGBTQ+ people are not in the position to be confrontational or are not good at "dealing with assholes," and that even people who are, like Skylar, have not always been that way and may not always continue to have that ability.

The ability to stand up for yourself and be confident in who you are is discussed by several participants as a resilience strategy that allows them to live more openly in the area:

> The group that he[74] runs is ... is not at all supportive. Will hand out material that is clearly anti-LGBT and have definitely said before that they will pray for me. I am very secure in who I am. I do not, and I mean, I'm also very comfortable with saying that you're on public property, you can't say that, and I will contact authorities if you continue to say that. But I feel bad for people in town who might have had more unpleasant experiences before who may not have supportive families. Like I have an amazing support network that, to fall back on when things like that happen. And a lot of people don't. (Regan)

In this passage, Regan emphasizes they are secure in who they are and comfortable standing up for themselves and that their "amazing support network" makes that possible. Regan draws attention to the complex relationships between having the confidence to stand up for yourself and the level of support they have to fall back on. For people who are less confident and/or do not have a strong support network, it may be more difficult and also riskier to stand up for themselves. As Chris reflects, "You definitely need someone there to not care with you because it's hard to do it on your own. I couldn't before." Regan's account speaks to the way LGBTQ+ folks living in the area have to be confident and comfortable with confrontation and that experiences of and the potential for confrontation and encounters with people who want to harass or evangelize them are part of life in the area. My point here is not that participants are experiencing more

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[74] Regan describes the person they are referring to in the following way: I can't remember the dude's name. But he is a fairly fundamentalist Christian who preaches on street corners and gives out pamphlets. (Regan)

harassment in the Stratford area but that they might be more likely to know the people harassing them or that their encounters with people harassing them are less anonymous. In Toronto, you might be able to go to a different coffee shop or park or grocery store or take a different route home, but in St. Marys, there are only so many places to go and routes to take. While I would argue having to know where to go or when to avoid certain places in order to not encounter trouble is another form of affective work, my point is, as Gray (2009) emphasizes in her work, the need to negotiate (in)visibility and the affective work takes on a particular valence in smaller communities.

As I move to a discussion about participants' hopes for the future of LGBTQ+ community in the final section of this chapter, I remain aware of the way participants talk about support networks as central to their ability to survive and thrive in the area. The way participants talk about the importance of support networks and their ability to be confident and unaffected by potential intolerance informs my understanding of how they perceive themselves and other individual LGBTQ+ people as agents of change in the area.

5.2.2 "It's literally just words, just a little bracket, but it's meaningful": Pronoun talk

> And my Dad actually works in healthcare. He has an office in the thing here and like, he tries really hard. Like, his email signature like you know those standard email things? His thing is [redacted] and then in brackets, (he/him). And, of course, all the underlings, because my Dad's in a managing role, all the underlings, especially the newbies are like, 'Okay, this is how we make you happy!' (Laughs). (Regan)

> Normalizing something like saying pronouns makes someone else comfortable to say what their true pronouns are, definitely. Because if someone doesn't introduce themselves with their pronouns and I introduce myself and they don't respond back with their pronouns, it kind of makes me feel like, I don't know if I can trust you in this space, just because I don't know if you know what I'm talking about. But if someone introduces themselves and has it in their thing, I'm like, 'Okay. I

can trust you. And you know what I'm talking about. You're safe,' kind of thing. It's weird. It's literally just words, just a little bracket, but it's meaningful. (Sam)

As Regan suggests, the practice of including and normalizing the inclusion of pronouns in email signatures is meaningful. In the case of their father, the inclusion of pronouns in his email signature prompted other employees to include pronouns in their email signatures. Spreading awareness about the practice of using pronouns and normalizing pronoun talk among cis people is one way in which change happens. The more that cis people become comfortable with normalizing pronoun talk, the more the work of constantly outing themselves and raising conversations about pronouns is displaced from trans and non-binary people. On a personal level, Regan's father's use of pronouns in his email signature and his willingness to cultivate an inclusive environment at work is another way in which he demonstrates support for Regan. While I emphasize the way that participants' accounts suggest much of the work toward change and acceptance is done by individual LGBTQ+ people, this is an example of a way individual allies can also be meaningful agents of change.

In the above excerpt, Sam provides advice for people about how to talk about pronouns, why it is important to talk about pronouns, and how it is important for cis people to become comfortable with pronoun talk. In another example Sam provides, they are in a room with a straight mother and a trans person and they make a point to ask both people their pronouns. The straight mother is not familiar with this practice, but quickly catches on and adapts by sharing her pronouns. Sam's emphasis on asking the straight mother her pronouns is important to this discussion about how change happens. In a framework where only non-cis people are asked about pronouns and expected to come out or become visible as not cis, cis people remain the (in)visible norm. While cis people are everywhere, their cis-ness remains invisible and unspoken and does not register because it is conceptualized as default. Asking cis people to make themselves visible as cis by talking about their pronouns is part of a paradigm shift that recognizes our mutual inability to accurately read other people's genders. Even if everyone in a room is cis (or perceived to be cis), if they introduce themselves with their pronouns it creates space for trans and/or non-binary folks to introduce themselves with their pronouns without having

to single themselves out and without reinforcing a notion that cis people's pronouns are always obvious.

Thinking in terms of the (in)visibility dilemma, what pronoun talk does is work to shift the conditions underlying the dilemma in such a way that makes it easier and more comfortable for LGBTQ+ people to become visible and, by extension, to potentially connect with one another. Having someone else share their pronouns and create space for you to share yours has the potential to drastically shift the affective work being demanded of a trans and/or non-binary person who may be trying to decide whether or not to initiate pronoun talk. In doing so, they are often considering a range of potential costs, including if it is safe, if it means you are less likely to get a job, or if it will make you the source of trouble. When pronoun talk is already initiated, however, it may feel safer to assume there will be fewer negative costs and less affective work will be necessary. In this way, pronoun talk is not just a way change happens and evidence that change is happening, but it also has the potential to contribute to or expand folks' comfort zones. Sam shares an experience where they noticed that somewhere they applied to work was already using pronouns in their email signatures. For Sam, this was a positive sign about the potential work environment. Knowing that a business, service, or organization is open to or is normalizing pronoun talk indicates that this is a place that is at least working toward allyship. Engaging in these kinds of practices is a strategy for inclusivity and visibility, a means of enacting change, and a way of expanding comfort zones.

5.2.3   "I'm an open book, ask me any questions": Education, exposure and acceptance

Some people will ask, like, 'Oh I haven't seen you in a while and I've noticed some stuff and I've been following you [on social media], like, congratulations.' And they'll be like, 'Oh can you explain some things to me?' And they'll ask me if it's okay. And I'll be like, 'Yeah, I'm an open book, ask me any questions, I'm not easily offended. Whatever you really want to know. Just, you know. Don't be too intrusive'. (Chris)

I've definitely, being a teacher as well, I've had trouble with my pronouns and teaching and stuff like that. Because I have applied for jobs and stuff like that, and they are like, I don't know how to address you.' And I'm like, 'It's okay, I can sit with you and work with you. I can definitely give an LGBT 101 because I've given those before.' I'm very happy to do that with the community members. And it just kind of takes them, it kind of just jars them a little bit. (Sam)

In the above passage, Chris speaks to the kind of work he does by being an open book, being willing to answer questions, and educating people in his life. Throughout my interviews, trans and non-binary participants, in particular, talk about how being open and willing to engage in conversations with people who want to learn more is one way they advocate for change in their communities. Participants talk about being open and allowing people they know to ask them questions if they are curious as a way they make things better for themselves and for other LGBTQ+ people. They do this by educating and providing a chance for non-LGBTQ+ people to gain exposure to and familiarity with an LGBTQ+ person. In another example, Gloria talks about printing out online resources to share with a woman at her church whose grandchild is trans. This is an example of a cis community member stepping up and doing some of the work of educating other cis people about trans existence and issues in a way that hopefully displaces some of the work the grandchild may have to do with their family. Participants' efforts to be supportive of other LGBTQ+ people and to educate cis/heterosexual people are both resilience strategies and ways that they work toward change and acceptance in the area.

Sam offers further reflections on how being an open book serves as a resilience strategy in the above passage as they recount being happy to give "LGBT 101" talks to people and how it takes community members a bit of time to learn and adjust to things. In general, participants frame the work they do to educate others as positive, as something they do not mind doing that has the potential to contribute to change toward acceptance. By giving LGBT 101 talks and being an open book for friends and acquaintances to ask questions, Sam and Chris are actively making the people around them more informed and likely more accepting of LGBTQ+ people and issues. It is interesting to note, however, that in Sam's reflection, the context they are happy to give an LGBT 101 talk in is one

wherein doing that work results in a greater likelihood they will be hired and that if they are hired, there might be a base level of knowledge about LGBT issues in their new workplace. It is not that Sam is unqualified or unhappy to do this work. The issue is that placing the responsibility of doing this work and of creating community and acceptance of individual LGBTQ+ people is unsustainable and draining for many folks. It is also not necessarily the most efficacious path toward building a sustainable sense of acceptance and community.

Regan's reflections illustrate the way they are called to do particular work as an LGBTQ+ person to educate others and to make the community a better place for other LGBTQ+ people:

> And one time a couple of years ago when I was in, he [the doctor] was like, 'I have some questions about the LGBT community.' And he's like, 'I figured you're articulate enough to answer them.' And I was like, 'First of all, I do not speak for the LGBT community (laughs). We don't have telepathy; we don't have a meeting once a year to decide what we're telling people (laughs).' But I was like, 'I can talk to you about my experience and the experiences I have heard about from others.' And I answered a whole bunch of questions for him and,' (sighs). (Regan)

Regan talks about how their doctor asked them if he could ask some questions about the LGBT community during their appointment because he figured they would be able to answer them. As Regan emphasizes, one of the pitfalls of being made to educate others and foster acceptance as an individual is that you are often asked to do the impossible task of being made to speak "for" your community. While Regan is knowledgeable, that their doctor is asking patients to act as an informal resource for his practice is somewhat shocking and speaks to a lack of LGBTQ+ inclusive healthcare available in the area. Generally, participants express a sense that their access to trans-inclusive healthcare in the Stratford area is limited. From participants' accounts, I get a clear sense that regardless of the availability of trans-inclusive and trans-specific healthcare, services and resources in the area, participants do not know that resources exist or how to connect with them, which is an issue. The majority of trans and non-binary participants talk about how

they go other places – London, Guelph, Hamilton, Mississauga, and Toronto to name a few – for their healthcare. However, Chris talks about how he has a family doctor in the area who is actively trans-inclusive and affirming[75]. I return to this discussion of access to healthcare later in this chapter.

While these examples of the way participants talk about being an open book and a resource for educating others about LGBTQ+ issues are forms of meaningful activism, they also reinforce an understanding of the way responsibility to create change falls to individual, and often young, LGBTQ+ people. These discussions about the work participants do to advocate for themselves, be visible for other LGBTQ+ people and educate cis, hetero people about LGBTQ+ issues emphasize not only that participants are engaged in this work but also that they add value to their communities by engaging in this work. In an extension of this discussion, phase two participants Aiden and Quinn discuss their sense that being openly queer in the Stratford area is something to be known for and something that can make the area a better place:

> Well, you're doing a wonderful thing by being gender, sexually variant and living in Perth County because you're like making it more okay there … I guess I just want to already be okay (laughs) … I'm not confronting anyone in Toronto, they don't care. It's the most multicultural city in the world. How could you care about some particular one of them? [D: This sense of anonymity that's not available in Stratford?] Yeah, the smaller the town, the more everyone is a celebrity. And all your doings are news, kind of thing. (Aiden)

> But what's also interesting is that there were specifically queer adults who I knew who they were, and I wouldn't know them for anything other than the fact that they were the queer adults. [D: Yeah, it's a thing to be known for.] Yeah, exactly. And I think that puts a lot of pressure on anybody who actually wants to come

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[75] And then my doctor who took me on after I waited on a list for two years trying to find a doctor that would, that wanted to take on a transgender patient, she was excited about it. She has a nonbinary sister and she, first day, said 'Everyone in my office is aware. If everyone mistreats you or, you know, doesn't call you by the right name or the right pronoun, you let me know because they know better'. (Chris)

out. Or you know, kind of live their life. Because then they're going to become another one of the queer people that people know. (Quinn)

Aiden emphasizes the way LGBTQ+ people living gender, sexually variant lives in the Stratford area contribute to their communities by being there and doing the kind of work in which phase one participants talk about engaging. Based on their experience, being LGBTQ+ in the Stratford area means confronting or potentially confronting people who are either opposed to, confused or offended by your existence, which can be both exhausting and undesirable. For Aiden, living in Toronto means they do not have a sense of being a celebrity and having people know who they are and what they are doing just by virtue of being someone who is noticeably "different" in the sense they are not a cis, heterosexual person. Quinn reinforces Aiden's account of being LGBTQ+ in Stratford as notable and/or confrontational by reflecting on the way they knew particular queer adults around Stratford for no other reason than because they were queer adults. As I discuss in the previous chapter, some phase one participants talk about how a sense of being known and watched provides them with a sense of community and place satisfaction, while others frame being known and watched as a source of anxiety and/or dissatisfaction, as Aiden and Quinn's accounts reinforce. For Aiden and Quinn, being known just for existing as an LGBTQ+ person is undesirable, as is the potential for a confrontation that that knowledge enables. At the same time, they recognize that individual LGBTQ+ people who continue to live in the area are agents of change.

5.2.4   "Why does it have to be me?" Build-it-yourself community

I think a lot of people, and not to sound bad or anything, but people are like, 'Well why don't we have this?' And you try to do it, but they just don't come out, whatever. I think a lot of people need a little more initiative to get stuff going. If you want something, go ahead and start it. If you want to have a queer dance at the high school or an alternative prom. If you want that, go ahead and start it. (Patrick)

There's a lot of people in the places I was living who are like, 'You should bring these queer collectives into Stratford.' And I'm like, 'Yes! Why does it have to be

me?' … You have to build them … You have to build them yourselves. And I think that's the difference, that compared to like, 'I can join this', it's, 'You have to build this'. (Sam)

In this passage, Patrick suggests that people in the area need to take more initiative to get events and programs going if they want to see them happen. While he goes on to recognize it is both a daunting and frustrating task to do such work, he emphasizes that it gets easier with experience and that it is a learning process. However, the expectation of individual LGBTQ+ people to organize community for themselves can be draining and/or inaccessible for many. Sam's reflections provide another perspective on this issue. Having recently moved back to Stratford and being a performer, they talk about a sense of pressure to have to build queer space themselves and that people suggest to them they should start a drag troupe in Stratford. They express several issues with this: "Fuck that! It's been six months I've been doing drag; you can't expect me- I would love to join one." Sam expresses they do not always want to have to create everything from scratch for themselves. They talk at another point about how enriching an experience it is to be backstage with other performers, particularly older performers, and the sense of community and connection that comes from those interactions. My understanding of our conversations is they wish they could join something that already exists; they want to become part of something without necessarily taking on all of the responsibility and leadership of building that thing, particularly as a younger person who has recently returned to the community and wants to leave again as soon as they can.

Like Patrick, Sam expresses a fear that even if they were to organize something that people claim to want, there is no guarantee people are going to attend or put the effort into building a community. My understanding is that the relationship between the lack of formal, visible community and the lack of support for such a community are complexly co-constitutive. Both Patrick and Sam talk about the difficulty of getting people to attend events and emphasize that even when events are requested, turnout is often still low. I return to the issue of the attendance and logistics of events in my discussion about barriers to change below. As someone with experience organizing events, Patrick's comment and near frustration at the need for other people to take

initiative and to plan some of the things they want to see is understandable and I empathize with his perspective. However, the underlying theme of the way both Patrick and Sam talk about the difficulties organizing events and the pressure it puts on individual queer folks to make events and community happen is that the onus is on individual LGBTQ+ people in the area to build the community themselves with limited resources and within, as I discuss in Chapter 3, an ambiguously (in)tolerant environment. Across participants' accounts, there is an overwhelming sense that they are responsible for making change, for being their own representation, for creating their own groups and their own events. The potential for events and community often depends on what can be built from the ground up with next to no support other than what the organizers can personally afford, financially, energy-wise, and in other capacities, to put into it. Furthermore, such initiatives only survive for as long as the folks who started them are willing and able to continue to work to make them happen.

As I considered at the beginning of this chapter, the visibility and existence of LGBTQ+ specific events in the area are important for those who attend the events. Here, I suggest there is also a potential benefit for those people who are aware of the events but who do not attend them. The notion that the mere presence of these events may be enough for some folks is positive in the sense that events may contribute to the comfort zones of people who do not attend them for any number of reasons (they are busy, working, tired, anxious). However, this also makes it difficult for the people who are putting themselves out there and working hard to make these events happen, and who are left potentially feeling like those events are not as successful as they hoped when few people show up. Further, when funding and/or the ability to make a profit are among the primary considerations in planning events and evaluating the success of events, events that do not sell out or attract enough people are deemed unsuccessful and will not be allocated resources in the future. While this is obviously frustrating, an issue for those organizing, and, as I discuss in the next section, a contributing factor to why efforts fizzle out, I point this out with the hope that there is some comfort in the likelihood that their events are having a positive/beneficial effect even on those who are not attending. As Steven discusses in relation to the theatre, visibility is also important in terms of sending a message that there is an LGBTQ+ presence in the area and people who do not like it

will have to learn to at least live and let live. While live and let live can serve to constrain LGBTQ+ people, it can also create space for the kind of lowkey "I see you" moments that I discuss in Chapter 4. In a context where heteronormative or homophobic people are being made to "live with" LGBTQ+ events in a way that constrains their ability to express their discontent with LGBTQ+ existence, "live and let live" takes on a different tone than when it is being used to constrain queer folks within the dictates of heteronormativity. The way that "live and let live" takes on a different valence depending on the context emphasizes that sentiments like "live and let live" do not have enduring meanings but take shape in specific contexts and in relation to power structures like heteronormativity.

5.3   Barriers to organizing

5.3.1   "My resources are already spread pretty thin": Individuals as agents of change

> Especially with most of our jobs being factory. Factory jobs and continental shifts and stuff like that … my resources are already spread pretty thin and now you want me to create something, like create a whole new organization and a whole new system. That's very difficult. (Sam)

> But typically, the place that people meet people is at work, essentially, at this point. Because people have no spoons to go out or all the things to go out for are tourist things. (Sam)

Sam and other participants like Steven and Skylar talk about the prevalence of factory work and shift work as a reason many people do not have the time or energy to invest in or become involved in communities outside of work. Not only is it difficult to make time for events while working rotating shifts, but people are generally "spread pretty thin" to be creating new organizations and systems. Other participants echo Sam's concern that people being spread too thin, being overworked, precariously employed and/or not having access to sufficient resources are barriers to organizing in the Stratford area. As I consider throughout this chapter, participants talk about a sense that individual LGBTQ+ people are responsible for educating others, organizing events and creating change. The

reality that many LGBTQ+ people are spread too thin to do this work might mean that the work does not happen or happens inconsistently.

Sam also notes that even if events or organizations did exist, people are not necessarily able to attend events because they are drained, which Sam explains by referencing spoon theory[76] and how "people have no spoons to go out." Christine Miserandino's "spoon theory" explains that nondisabled people and young, energetic people in particular move through their daily lives with a seemingly unlimited or at least a sufficient number of "spoons", which means they can do most of the things they need to do, maintain a particular pace and not think too much about it (Miserandino, 2003). Disabled people, however, have to be aware they have a limited number of "spoons" and must make decisions about what they can do with the spoons they have on a particular day (Miserandino, 2003). When Sam talks about how "people have no spoons to go out", they are drawing on spoon theory to talk about what they see in terms of queer organizing and socializing. The accounts of Sam and other non-binary and trans participants suggest microaggressive experiences like being misgendered, being deadnamed, having your doctor ask you to educate him, having to educate cis folks and give "trans 101 talks" are all situations that require trans and non-binary folks to use their spoons. Taking into account that spoons are not unlimited (Miserandino, 2003), trans and non-binary people are being asked to use their spoons to navigate microaggressions, which means they have fewer spoons left to do other things like participate in queer organizing and socializing. Sam emphasizes that many people do not have the spoons to create or to access events, regardless of whether those events and community are accessible. Sam also describes the available events as "tourist events" in a way that suggests that these events are not for them and/or that they are not interesting or accessible to them.

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[76] Spoon theory is written/created by Christine Miserandino
https://butyoudontlooksick.com/articles/written-by-christine/the-spoon-theory/

5.3.2 "I'm not entirely sure what space it would be held in": A lack of space

Yeah. I mean, I would love to see that [more events] happening. But yeah, I don't know how it happens because kind of our whole society is set up to be focused on either bars or cafes, like those are the meeting places. … There's no, you can go hang out at the library, but if you want to have a meeting you need to book a room. (Serena)

I would like to see something in St. Marys ... I can kind of picture some people considering organizing something. But now I'm not entirely sure what space it would be held in, because I can always just picture [redacted] and now, I don't know what they're planning on doing. They might still have the space for a venue, I'm not sure what's going on. (Meredith)

Serena talks about how many potential venues in the area have costs associated with renting them and/or that they require insurance, which means that smaller and less formal groups do not have the means to access these spaces consistently. In this way, a lack of space is directly tied to a lack of funding and/or support by established organizations. Spaces like the Stratford Public Library are discussed as LGBTQ+ friendly spaces that would be optimal for holding events if groups or people had the funds and insurance required to book space there. It is not that there is an absence of will for events, but that there are barriers to making it come together; often, it is difficult to even know where to start. Serena talks specifically about what types of places are available to meet in and that it is difficult to organize events outside of bars or cafes because those are the most common meeting places for people. This resonates with the way participants like Sam talk about their frustration with how, particularly during the colder months of the year when outdoor spaces become less viable for socializing, there are few spaces where people can just exist without having to pay. Finding space for events is complicated because there are so many considerations. Is the space accessible? Is it easy to walk to or to access by public transportation? How public or private is the space? How expensive is the space to book? How much insurance is required to book the space? These are some of the questions that participants raise concerning the difficulty of finding space for events.

Several participants discuss one of the affirming churches in Stratford as a notably LGBTQ+ friendly and accessible space that is available to host meetings and events. Organizing becomes a task of making use of what is available in ways that work with community norms and expectations. However, a couple of participants also acknowledge that some people may have issues with going to an event in a church, even if it is an LGBTQ+ friendly church. Furthermore, it is conceivable that there are some conditions or limitations to what a church may allow or the kinds of events they can facilitate. Conversely, there may be other folks who are more comfortable attending an event associated with an affirming church, which highlights how different events serve different populations of LGBTQ+ folks and we do not have to search for one size fits all solutions. The space that events happen in matters in a variety of ways, but what is constant in these discussions is that the lack of space makes it difficult to plan consistent events and to foster a consistent sense of community.

Like Serena, Meredith expresses that she would like to see more events happen but she is not sure where they would happen or who would organize them. She can think of a few people and a particular place that might come together to organize an event, but again, the creation of events and communities is the product of individual LGBTQ+ people in the area coming together and using their own resources and networks to make things happen. Meredith mentions a particular coffee shop in St. Marys as the location that she imagined an event might potentially host an event. However, the coffee shop recently closed, and its future was uncertain at the time of our interview. Similarly, Serena talks about several specific venues in Stratford that closed between the time of our first interview in July 2019 and our second interview in February 2020. Both Serena and Meredith's sense of having a lack of space to hold events may be punctuated by the recent loss of spaces they considered important and that either held or had the potential to hold LGBTQ+ events and contribute to a sense of LGBTQ+ community.

5.3.3   "A lot of trans people just aren't even comfortable leaving the house": Barriers to attending events

I think there are a lot of weird logistical issues to this. Because of course, as I've said before, a lot of trans people just aren't even comfortable leaving the house …

> I would be down for coffee hangouts and stuff like that, or even getting a drink.
> Beers and queers kind of shit. But I know that's not everyone's cup of tea and
> again, I think we need to have ways of being inclusive, ways of reaching out to
> people who are quote-unquote closeted, who are a little more hesitant to leave the
> house, ways of really reaching out. (Skylar)

In this passage, Skylar talks about the "weird logistical issues" involved in planning events that include but also extend beyond the venue. For example, Skylar would be interested in attending a "beers and queers" event but recognizes not everyone would be, as my earlier discussion of critiques of alcohol-centric events supports. Skylar's reflection raises another point that several participants discuss in relation to barriers to organizing in the area: there are only so many LGBTQ+ people in the area, and many of them will not share the same interests or qualities other than identifying as part of the LGBTQ+ community. However, as Skylar emphasizes, even if it is challenging, there is a need to create events and build community accessible to people who are not comfortable leaving the house. I pick back up on this discussion as I consider the way participants talk about the future of LGBTQ+ events and community in the area in the next section of this chapter.

Skylar and other participants like Sam and Chris talk specifically about how people being afraid to come out[77] or to attend public or semi-public LGBTQ+ events is an issue in the area. If, as Skylar suggests, a lot of trans people are not even comfortable leaving the house, it makes it difficult and potentially disappointing to organize events that people do not attend. Earlier in this section, I note that Patrick and Sam talk about concern and/or frustration that even if they plan events, people will not actually come out to attend the events. Part of the explanation for lower attendance at events may be that people are not comfortable leaving the house or appearing publicly at an LGBTQ+ event for any number of reasons. There is a dilemma of needing to be visible so queer folks can find out about an event or initiative, but still being discreet enough that the event is not

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[77] Here, I mean "come out" both in the sense of coming out to events and "coming out of the closet", as they are often difficult to separate.

vulnerable to homophobic attack or that it necessitates becoming or risking becoming visibly LGBTQ+ to attend. As I discuss earlier in this chapter, participants' accounts suggest that events may still be meaningful for people who are not comfortable to actually coming out and attending them. Skylar reinforces this as she expresses a sentiment that we have to start somewhere and that as a movement gains momentum and begins to transform the local environment, more people may become more comfortable attending events. It is challenging to find ways for people to come together that are visible enough to advertise, but not too visible or so visible that it makes people uncomfortable, puts them in unsafe situations, or makes it so they cannot attend. Due to concerns about people who may not feel comfortable attending a public LGBTQ+ event, there is a need to secure centrally located venues that are as accessible as possible and also provide some level of privacy. The way that participants talk about various barriers to organizing makes it clear how many of these factors like a lack of space, fear or discomfort attending events, and a lack of institutional support for events are interconnected.

5.4   Hopes for the future

5.4.1   "Are we doing enough as a city to invite people in?" Institutional support

> I wish that there was groups but that it was organized by the city or by someone of power so that it actually, you know ... gets attention, and is consistent and stuff. But it would be nice to have a group for like queer people to get together. (Chris)

> But if we're trying to invite more people to come to this place as a tourist city, how do we make it so that people feel welcome to be whoever they are in a place where the main industry is mostly catering to really old, really rich, really white people? (Laughs). And I think that's where Stratford is right now, is this really awkward transition from these, this clientele that's been coming for 50 years, who now is getting to the age where they can't come … But are we doing enough as a city to invite people in? That's a genuine question like, I don't, I don't know what the steps are to make sure that that happens. I do think there are a lot of people

really passionate about making [change] happen. Which is cool ... But how long can we sustain it without explicit, honestly, financial support, from the major players in town? There's a lot of symbolic support, but there needs to be a different momentum behind it. (Serena)

It's a lot of assumed inclusivity just based off of the culture that we have here rather than like, it actually doing it. I feel like Stratford's just a little bit pretentious in that way, and cocky in that way and it's like, 'We're inclusive!' And it's like, 'No, you haven't done anything. You really haven't. You're just assuming that of yourself basically just based off of the communities that you happen to have here.' But you have to engage those communities specifically, basically, rather than being like, 'They're here!' You also have to engage them, as well. (Sam)

Earlier in this chapter, I discuss how participants talk about their desires for more consistent LGBTQ+ events, space, and community in the Stratford area. In the above passage, Serena talks about how she does not know if enough is happening in the area to invite LGBTQ+ people in as residents and as tourists. As Serena notes, it is economically important for the city to become more inviting to a range of people, including LGBTQ+ folks, given the changing demographics at the Festival. Serena's reflection that there are people who are passionate about making Stratford a more LGBTQ+ friendly place, but it may not be sustainable without financial support from major players is important. When efforts are entirely volunteer-driven and rely on the passion and energy of individual LGBTQ+ folks and allies, it is less likely that such efforts will be sustained over time as organizers burn out, events do not attract enough attendees, groups splinter, people move away, and so on. Serena substantiates multiple reasons it is important to support efforts to make Stratford a more LGBTQ+ friendly place and also emphasizes that more tangible, actionable support is required from local "major players", which could include local municipal governments, the Festival, and/or well-established organizations like the United Way. As Sam suggests, there is a sense Stratford wants to be LGBTQ+ inclusive and wants to be somewhere known as being LGBTQ+ friendly, but the city is not necessarily actively doing work to engage the LGBTQ+ community or to support events

and/or spaces specifically geared toward the LGBTQ+ community. Sam notes "Stratford's just a little bit pretentious in that way, and cocky in that way and it's like, 'We're inclusive!' And it's like, 'No, you haven't done anything.'" When Sam says, "you haven't done anything" part of what they are pointing out is that they do not know of any official LGBTQ+ initiatives being supported by local governments or established organizations in the area.

Part of the conversation about the lack of engagement and the inconsistency of events is framed by participants as connected to a lack of funding. Serena emphasizes how much passion there is from people in the community for organizing and running events, but questions, "how long can we sustain it without explicit, honestly, financial support, from the major players in town?" As Serena suggests, if the city or another "major player" around Stratford were to step up and provide a platform for local LGBTQ+ organizers to work with consistent access to some funding and/or space, a much more visible and consistent community could thrive. Several participants emphasized that there is important work underway to support LGBTQ+ people in the community and that many people either do not know about such initiatives and/or initiatives are limited by a lack of resources and the fact that their efforts tend to be volunteer-driven. These participants talk about how either they or someone they know has the skills, knowledge, training and desire to be developing events and community in the area, but there is no clear support system or infrastructure to make that possible. While this reality is marked by frustration, it is also indicative of a hopefulness not only that things can change but that there are local people with the ability and desire to continue to engage in this work.

Chris' comment emphasizes the sense of frustration multiple participants express about the lack of availability of consistent groups or spaces for LGBTQ+ people to meet and to access information, support and/or resources. Chris specifically notes that he wishes someone like the city would organize a group for LGBTQ+ people rather than having individual LGBTQ+ people working to organize events that happen inconsistently and/or are not well advertised or supported because those individual people have to rely

on their own resources and networks to put the events together[78]. Several participants talk about a perceived lack of material support from the city or any major, established organizations in the area as a contributing factor to inconsistent events, a lack of advertising and inaccessible venues[79]. Support from the city or another more institutionalized organization in the Stratford area could potentially provide more access to resources and contacts in the area to help with locating space for events, planning events, advertising events, and creating a more consistent, accessible sense of community.

5.4.2 "There needs to be somewhere for people to know they can go": The importance of consistent community

But I think just fun little events where people can just see each other and be like, 'Oh you're gay! Nice!' I think that's definitely a big problem is people being like, 'What are you?' Kind of thing. [D: And not having those venues to connect.] To connect and being able to be like, 'Are you gay? Or are you going to beat me up?' Like, what's going on here? Kind of thing. Compared to you going to a gay bar and being like, 'Yeah, obviously you're probably gay'. (Sam)

Even like a hotline. Anything. But it'd be better if there was like a centre, somewhere even like once a week or once a month where people could go in case they are dealing with an issue or they need help coming out or they need advice on where to get trans products. Like, I came out and I live in a town like, you can't buy a binder here. Unless you have access to online shopping, which I didn't have until recently. I have to buy everything online. (Chris)

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[78] I can't emphasize enough that I am not trying to critique the efforts and successes of the people working to organize LGBTQ+ events in the Stratford area. In fact, what I am trying to emphasize and what comes across in the accounts of multiple participants is that the people doing LGBTQ+ community work in the Stratford area need to be better supported by the city and by other established organizations in the community that have an interest in promoting the wellbeing of LGBTQ+ people in the area, so those doing the work can further develop the work they are doing.

[79] I mean accessibility in terms of access to gender-neutral washrooms, ramps, the sensory environment and other factors as well as where events are physically located. For example, a couple participants talk about how they could not attend the Drag Storytime in Stratford because it was held at the high schools, which are a substantial walk from the downtown area.

In the above passages, Sam and Chris speak further to some of the ways that consistent LGBTQ+ events are important. For Sam, queer-specific events provide a place for people to see each other with the understanding that other people at the event are also likely to be LGBTQ+ compared to events that are not queer-specific where it is much more difficult and potentially risky to find out if someone is gay. As Sam jokes, "Are you gay? Or are you going to beat me up?" In Chapter 3, I consider how the potential for intolerance or negative consequences to becoming visible as LGBTQ+ affects the way participants exist in and move around the area. Sam's comment speaks to the way some of the worry and potential intolerance/consequence to becoming visible and/or inquiring as to whether someone else is LGBTQ+ is mitigated in a queer-specific space. Thinking in terms of the (in)visibility dilemma, having access to LGBTQ+ specific spaces and events may shift the conditions underlying the dilemma in such a way that makes it easier and more comfortable for LGBTQ+ people to become visible and, by extension, to potentially connect with other LGBTQ+ folks. The way Sam imagines the potential for queer-specific spaces and events to allow LGBTQ+ folks to come together, to meet each other and connect resonates with the way participants talk about there being more LGBTQ+ people than we see or know in the area. Steven's experience with the purple shirt day at his work and Alex's experience becoming aware of many more LGBTQ+ folks at her school after coming out herself are further examples of this. The potential for connection that participants imagine to be made possible by queer-specific spaces is one way they are optimistic about the future of LGBTQ+ community in the area. If there is a way to create these spaces, participants like Sam feel they will have a meaningful impact.

Almost all participants indicate they would be interested in attending more LGBTQ+ events and express particular interest in events focused on connecting and learning, and which are not necessarily centred around drinking and partying. Several participants suggest events like board game nights, a monthly coffee meet-up, or a film festival. Other participants, however, specifically note they are not interested in board game nights or coffee shop meet-ups. The point is not to create an LGBTQ+ community or a series of events that appeals to any and every LGBTQ+ person in the Stratford area, but to create more space and connection for people who are actively looking for a sense of community or who are looking for support. As several of my participants express,

"there needs to be somewhere for people to know they can go" (Alex). While many of the events suggested by participants are social in nature, the importance of these spaces cannot be reduced to a desire for social spaces. Rather, the need for LGBTQ+ specific space is underwritten with urgency and seriousness. Having "somewhere for people to know they can go" carries a sense of seeking refuge and resources, which are especially salient given the suicide rate among LGBTQ+ youth (Bauer et al., 2013; Casey, 2019). Chris articulates a need for any kind of LGBTQ+ specific services, like a hotline or a weekly or monthly meeting, where people could go for help and/or support. Chris emphasizes that it is difficult to access services, to get advice on what kind of trans products to buy, and that having a group or space where he could talk with other trans people would be helpful. Chris also notes that until recently, he did not have access to online shopping to buy items he needs like chest binders. While access to online shopping may seem ubiquitous to middle-class adults, for anyone too young or too poor to have access to a credit card or for anyone sharing an account with someone they are not out to or who is not supportive of them, there may be no way to access the supplies they want and/or need. Thinking in these terms, it becomes clear how a lack of resources and services makes the area less liveable for some LGBTQ+ participants. Other participants emphasized that the presence of specific LGBTQ+ events and spaces may be particularly important for people who are new to the area, who are lacking a support network, who do not know many or any other LGBTQ+ people, who are questioning, who need access to specific services and/or education, and/or lack spaces that feel comfortable, safe and/or where their name and gender are respected. While not all participants express a personal need for LGBTQ+ specific spaces, there is a clear sense that some LGBTQ+ people do need access to more LGBTQ+ specific spaces and services, and that it is something participants want to see made available in the area. Access to LGBTQ+ spaces and awareness of their existence is an important way people can develop and extend their comfort zones and find people, strategies, places and things to make the area more liveable for them.

Alex and Chris express their frustration at the lack of community and resources currently available:

I don't know. Even just an Instagram page or something. That's what I was trying to do with my Instagram is just connect people. [D: And is that still active?] No, it's not as active. But it just kind of, there needs to be somewhere for people to know they can go and if there were events, there's no group here outside of school that exists. (Alex)

But you have to get everything online. There's just no resources. It'd be nice, even if there was someone to help you, direct you where to go. (Chris)

Chris and other participants talk about how most of the information they access is either online from sources like social media or organizations based in large cities like the 519 Centre[80] in Toronto. Alex does not seem to be aware of any of the local LGBTQ+ groups other participants mention in their interviews. Participants like Drew and Robert also express a sense that they know some events are taking place but that they have no way to find out about them to even consider attending. Several participants expressed hope that LGBTQ+ organizing will become not only more consistent but more organized and networked in a way that is known and accessible to them. Additional support from local governments and/or organizations could make a substantial difference in this regard. For example, the creation of a page associated with the City of Stratford's website that acts as a centralized, easily searchable directory of up-to-date information about services available, events, and LGBTQ+ friendly places in the area would provide LGBTQ+ people living or considering living in the area with an entry point to access community. Further, it would let non-LGBTQ+ people around Stratford know that queer folks exist in the area. The Facebook page for Infinite Pride Stratford is discussed by several participants as a significant source of online community and support in the area and how they connect to local LGBTQ+ events. However, as I discussed in the previous section, several other participants are anti-Facebook and do not use social media to connect. Given that almost all participants talk about not feeling like they know when events are

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[80] The 519 Centre is a city agency and registered charity that is "committed to the health, happiness and full participation of the LGBTQ2S communities" in Toronto (The 519, 2021).

happening or how to find out about events, the need for more centralized, accessible information about LGBTQ+ community in the area seems to be a priority.

Sam suggests that another benefit that comes from consistent LGBTQ+ community is the potential for intergenerational connections and interactions:

> Because there is no generational talk, we don't even know that there are older queers there and that we can live past 25 (laughs) kind of thing. (Sam)

Several of the younger participants, including Sam, emphasize the importance of connecting with older LGBTQ+ people. Beyond accessing resources, services, and a general sense of support, consistent events and community give younger LGBTQ+ people the chance to meet and interact with older LGBTQ+ people. This is meaningful not only because older LGBTQ+ people have interesting and important experiences and stories to share but also because it provides younger LGBTQ+ people with an image or representation of what queer aging looks like and that they can survive and thrive "past 25." Almost all participants express a sense that they lacked positive LGBTQ+ role models growing up, and while Sam's tone is light as they suggest "we don't even know… that we can live past 25", this speaks to a real desire for more and meaningful representations of queer futures. While other participants either are older queers themselves or mention being aware of queer adults in the community or the presence of older queer folks, there is a desire for more spaces that facilitate intergenerational interaction.

5.4.3 "I just didn't ask because I didn't think she'd have anything to say about it": Access to resources

In terms of the availability of LGBTQ+ services, both Chris and Sam express a clear sense that help is more readily available in Toronto and if there is an LGBTQ+ person in the Stratford area who needs help or who needs to access services, they should go to Toronto:

> There is help to be had, it's just you have to get to it … at the end of the day, if you can't do anything else, then get to Toronto and just go there and they will help you.

They will. … There should be options here for trans people that want to come out. There should be somewhere they can go like, there's no, like all the psychiatrists and stuff here are not eligible to deal with transgender people, like, there should just be some sort of resource to help queer people or transgender people to come out. (Chris)

There's no psychiatrists or anything like that, there's nobody to diagnose gender identity disorder or anything like that. You basically just going to have to figure it out on your own. Or go to your GP, or go to Toronto, or go to your GP and hope that they listen to you, basically. [D: And you're not confident that doctors here would necessarily-] Not all of them. Definitely not all of them. Definitely some of them would be like, 'Okay, that's fucking weird. Um, bye!' Kind of thing (laughs). … no training of how to deal with gender inclusivity and stuff like that. Or even just like, sexuality, stuff like that. Like, 'Is there a possibility you could be pregnant?' It's like, 'No' 'Are you sexually active? That's impossible'. (Sam)

In this passage and throughout our interview, Chris expresses a desire for resources for queer and trans folks who are coming out, questioning, and/or looking for support. As Chris suggests, "there should be somewhere they can go" but there really is not. This sense that there is a lack of LGBTQ+ services, or at least a lack of awareness of the availability of such services, resonates across the accounts of my participants. Sam talks about how they are skeptical all doctors in the area are trained to competently deal with LGBTQ+ patients. While some doctors might be okay or knowledgeable, they expect others would not have the training to deal with gender inclusivity. That Chris and Sam urge people who are looking for help to go to Toronto is significant not only because it emphasizes a sense that help is not available in Stratford, but also because of many conversations with participants, including Chris and Sam, about how inconvenient and expensive it can be to travel to Toronto, especially for participants who do not drive or do not have access to their own vehicle. Not having access to a vehicle in the Stratford area where many services, resources and events folks need to access are not located within the area is a serious issue, particularly for trans and non-binary youth who may, as Chris and Sam suggest, have a particular need to access out-of-region services. Multiple participants talk about either relying on family/friends for rides or taking the VIA train to

other cities to access services, which requires a network of supportive family/friends and/or the material resources to take the train[81]. As Sam, Chris and several other participants note, they are not aware of a clear place for LGBTQ+ people in the Stratford area to get information about LGBTQ+ friendly services in the area. While some information may be available through internet research, participants express a sense of not having access to a network or hub that provides LGBTQ+ specific information about healthcare and other services. An increase in accessible and LGBTQ+ friendly healthcare services coupled with more effective communication about the existence of such services would contribute to making the area more liveable for these participants and likely for many LGBTQ+ people.

Regan's experience obtaining a driver's license with an X on it speaks to how even when services are available, they might not be easily accessible:

> I have my full G and a driver's license that has an X on it. I can tell you that was an adventure, getting that done at the Service Ontario in town … The person didn't look surprised when I said that, which was nice. But then it's, 'Oh I don't think I can do that here.' And I was pre-prepared for this. I had my laptop and the form out that was like, 'No, it says right here that you can do it and it won't cost me anything.' (Laughs) … It involved eventually calling their support line so that someone could tell her how to do it because clearly no one had requested this before. (Regan)

In addition to talking about their hopes for more consistent LGBTQ+ events and community in the area, participants also discuss changes they want to see happen in the area in terms of their access to resources and services. Regan's account of being prepared for the Service Ontario employee telling them they are not able to issue a license with an

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[81] A service called Perth County (PC) Connect launched in 2020 (Perth County, 2021). "PC Connect is a reliable and affordable bus system that has been designed to provide residents with affordable transportation options within Perth County, and surrounding areas, including Stratford, St. Marys, Kitchener/Waterloo, and London" (Perth County, 2021). While the availability of such a service does not guarantee folks will always experience the buses as LGBTQ+ friendly spaces, it does provide a much more cost-effective option for moving around the area and may increase some folks' mobility.

X on it resonates with my earlier discussion of the way participants have to be confident and willing to constantly advocate for themselves. While the Service Ontario employee did not think they could "do that *here*" Regan was prepared, and the employee learned how to issue the card and now will be prepared to do so again for any future non-binary folks needing licenses at that location. In many ways, this experience is emblematic of how many participants express a sense of having to be a trailblazer in a way that allows them to contribute to their local community and to the LGBTQ+ community, but also demands they be informed, confident and willing to advocate for themselves regularly.

While Regan talks about having a license with an X on it as something that makes them happy, Chris expresses frustration and anger that he cannot have his gender reflected on his health card and that the incorrect gender marker is displayed for everyone to see:

> I can't have the proper gender on my ... even on my health card, it could just say X ... Why does it have to be displayed publicly for everyone to see? Why does everyone need to know what's below my fucking belt? That is degrading. Like it's dehumanizing. Why do you have to do that to us? (Chris)

For Chris, this is "degrading" and "dehumanizing", and he expresses frustration that a province that claims to be supportive would put trans people in this situation, asking, "In a province where we're supposed to be supportive, why would you offer a genderization on one source of ID but then not on any of the others?" Chris expresses a desire for Ontario to update its procedures so trans people do not have to deal with having an incorrect gender listed on their ID. Chris notes this makes things awkward when he goes places because people "double look" when the gender on his ID does not match the way he presents[82]. Chris is clear he does not want to have to be outed every time someone needs to see his ID. When identification is required at a bar, for example, having to show

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[82] They gave my Ontario ID card and my health card. They both say female. Which is awkward. Like when I go places. People are like, have to like, double look. (Chris)

an ID card that misgenders you is not only frustrating but could put someone in an unsafe position depending on how accepting the bartender is or who else sees your ID.

Both Sam and Regan talk about the importance of gender-neutral washrooms. Sam and other participants talk about how awkward and uncomfortable it is to be in a situation where they either do not know which washroom to use or they are questioned by someone about their presence in a washroom:

> Accessibility and knowledge is the two main things that Stratford needs to work on. Like, accessible washrooms that are also gender-neutral. Easy peasy. Like, Red Rabbit has a gender-neutral washroom. I don't know if Okazu does. I'm pretty sure Okazu does as well, I wouldn't be surprised if they do. Where else has a gender-neutral washroom? There's a couple places I've seen. There are very, very few, but there's a couple I have seen. And it's something very simple as just saying, stalls and stalls and urinals. That's a, I went to a bar and performed in a bar once that was like that. It was like, stalls, stalls and urinals. Make your choice. Standing in front of a washroom in full drag, you're like, 'Where do I go?' (Sam)

> Since the time I was in high school, the public library has had gender-neutral washrooms. Because (redacted), who was one of the librarians at the time, his wife had babies and he was infuriated that the only change table was in the women's washroom. Because he was like, 'I just need to change my kid's diaper,' (laughs). And so that was the end of gendered bathrooms at the public library. (Regan)

In this passage, Sam notes how easy it can be for a business to offer a gender-neutral washroom and that it often is as simple as adjusting the labels on the doors of the washrooms. Sam names a couple of restaurants in downtown Stratford they know that offer gender-neutral washrooms, such as Red Rabbit and Okazu. Revel Café is also named by several participants as a notably queer-friendly space with gender-neutral washrooms. The way that participants talk about specific businesses with gender-neutral washrooms as places that are known in various ways to be LGBTQ+ friendly is meaningful. The degree to which these locations are known among participants as

LGBTQ+ friendly is striking and speaks to the way that, while there may be a desire and a need for more networking in the Stratford area, there is some level of networking happening in the sense that many participants are "in the know" about particular places and people. Somewhat paradoxically, however, this reiterates just how visible and notable it is for a person or place to be LGBTQ+ friendly in the area. Moreover, it means people who are not "in the know" may not be aware of where to go to find a gender-neutral bathroom or an LGBTQ+ friendly space without spending time and energy doing research and/or relying on their instincts. Nonetheless, for Sam and other participants, the presence of a gender-neutral washroom is one way that businesses come to be known as LGBTQ+ friendly.

At this point, I want to return to Serena's earlier comment about how Stratford needs to do more to respond to the changing clientele at the Festival and to make Stratford known as a place where LGBTQ+ folks and other people who are not "really old, really rich, really white people" can exist comfortably. Notably, the Festival does not offer gender-neutral washrooms, which means any patrons needing to use a gender-neutral washroom need to know where else in Stratford they can go. One actionable step that would make Stratford more accessible and comfortable for some LGBTQ+ folks is an easily accessible, up-to-date map showing gender-neutral washrooms in the area. The organization Refuge Restrooms is an example of a platform striving to provide such a service. Refuge Restrooms is a "web application that seeks to provide safe restroom access for transgender, intersex, and gender non-conforming individuals. Users can search for restrooms by proximity to a search location, add new restroom listings, as well as comment and rate existing listings" (Refuge Restrooms, 2021). While the only entry listed for Stratford, Ontario is Coffee Culture in downtown Stratford, this kind of service or a local iteration of this kind of service would support folks who need to find a washroom they feel safe and comfortable using. Regan draws attention to the ways gender-neutral washrooms can be beneficial for other reasons than providing trans and/or non-binary folks comfortable access to washrooms. Beyond that, Regan's example and the way they talk about the library and its gender-neutral washrooms illustrates how the presence of gender-neutral washrooms can create a sense of belonging and inclusion for trans and non-binary people. Regan's comment is also an example of a moment when

they got to appreciate and enjoy a sense of being included and comfortable without having to advocate for or work to make it happen. A map of existing gender-neutral washrooms located around the Stratford area becomes another way that LGBTQ+ folks see themselves reflected and present in the area.

Another way that participants talk about their access to resources and services in the area is in terms of their concern that service providers will not be knowledgeable or gender-affirming:

> I also wanted to know kind of like, if I'm taking, there's more estrogen in birth control and I want to know what that would do to me, gender-wise, and I just didn't ask her because I didn't think she'd have anything to say about it. (Alex)

> I had an ovarian cyst. If I'd been here, I would not have been able to get people to try to use as much gender-neutral language as possible. I could in London. I didn't have to sit through discussion about women's health. That, to me, just makes me feel really crappy and anxious and I would not have been able to get that kind of awareness in [town]. Other things, and this is just a problem with the Ontario health care system, I don't want to go on hormones, but I do want top surgery. You cannot get that funded unless you go on hormones. (Regan)

In both of these examples, participants express uncertainty about whether or not their healthcare professionals will be able to provide them with the kind of information they are looking for and/or whether or not they will be respectful of their identity and pronouns. A few participants recount stories of healthcare professionals assuming they are heterosexual and then not being able to provide them with non-heterosexual sexual health advice, which is unacceptable. Health care professionals need more training to competently treat LGBTQ+ patients in the area. Further, more outreach from local healthcare organizations about available programs and services specifically targeting LGBTQ+ populations could be better advertised. As I discussed at several points in this thesis, multiple participants express there are no or few mental health professionals available to see them in the Stratford area. Whether or not that is the case, these participants feel they are unable to access help in Stratford and at several points urge

anyone seeking help to go to Toronto or to reach out to organizations like the 519 Centre in Toronto.

Given that multiple participants talk about the 519 Centre in Toronto as a notable LGBTQ+ space that provides support and services, it would be beneficial if there was a page on the 519 Centre website that provided links to LGBTQ+ friendly services available closer to the Stratford area. Based on my participants not being aware of LGBTQ+ friendly services in the area, there seems to be a pervasive issue regarding how to locate LGBTQ+ friendly services in the area. It is not that such services do not exist, nor that there are no LGBTQ+ friendly service providers in the Stratford area, but that participants lack awareness about those services and how to find out about them. One way of addressing this is to find sources where my participants and other LGBTQ+ folks are currently going to look for information and resources, like the 519 Centre website. The task, then, becomes finding ways to make those sources more relevant to more participants, as I will consider an example of below, and also either directing participants to existing directories of LGBTQ+ friendly services or developing such directories. One example of how to make Toronto-based LGBTQ+ resources more relevant on a local level to LGBTQ+ people living outside of Toronto is offered by the organization LGBT YouthLine (YouthLine). YouthLine is a "Queer, Trans, Two-Spirit* youth-led organization that affirms and supports the experiences of youth (29 and under) across Ontario" (YouthLine, 2021a). By virtue of offering peer support by phone, text and online chat, YouthLine is accessible to LGBTQ+ youth beyond Toronto. Beyond that, the website for YouthLine offers a "database of services and organizations serving 2SLGBTQ youth across Ontario" (YouthLine, 2021b). Figure 4 shows what the results for Stratford, Ontario retrieves on YouthLine's resource map:
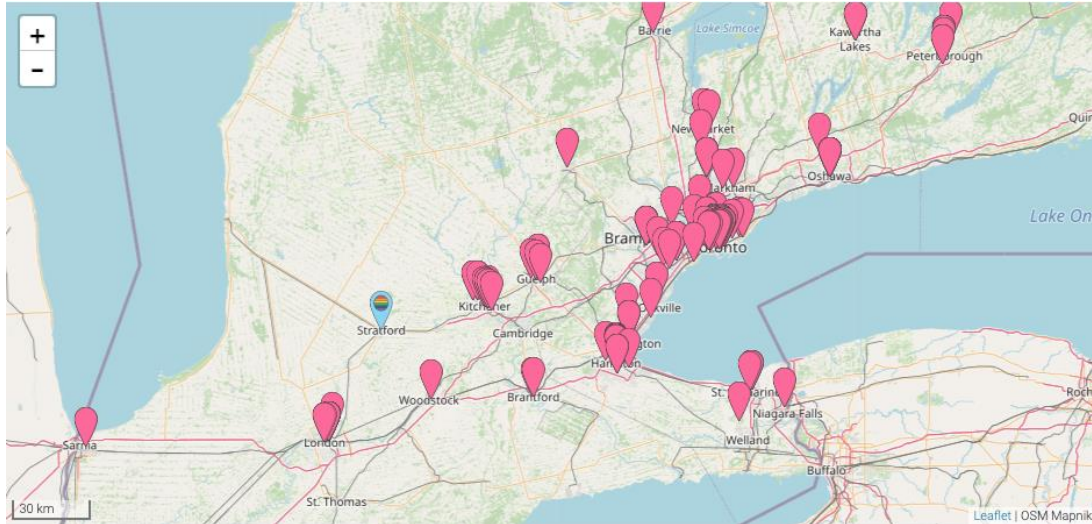
Figure 3: Resource Map results for "Stratford, Ontario" (YouthLine, 2021).

The blue rainbow decal represents the search location. As is apparent on the map, there are no resources registered in the Stratford area. If local service providers were to engage with services like YouthLine's resource map, this would become another avenue for LGBTQ+ folks in the Stratford area to become connected with local LGBTQ+ friendly services and resources. Youthline also sent two people to participate in the Picnic in the Park event that was held at the end of the pride march in Upper Queen's Park in June 2018. The vision behind the picnic event was not only to celebrate the end of the march with a small party and refreshments, but also to provide a space for LGBTQ+ friendly services and organizations to set up a table where local LGBTQ+ folks could interact with them, ask questions, and gather information. This kind of event provides an opportunity for LGBTQ+ folks to see that there are people, organizations and services that support them and are there for them in the area. The space created at the Picnic in the Park event was also important in that it allowed a sizable crowd of LGBTQ+ folks and allies to gather in a public space, to celebrate, to connect and network, and to tangibly see a demonstration of and celebration of LGBTQ+ existence in Stratford. YouthLine was the only non-local organization to attend this event and the only specifically LGBTQ+ organization to attend this event. While none of my participants talk about YouthLine, it is important that such services exist and are working to provide additional support and resources for LGBTQ+ folks living outside of Toronto, where YouthLine is located.

5.5   Conclusion

While the way participants spoke about their hopes for the future tend to be couched in an understanding of the way that they are responsible for working toward change and acceptance, almost all participants expressed a sense that attitudes toward LGBTQ+ people in the area are generally improving and that there is hope that the Stratford area will be a place where more LGBTQ+ people can access a sense of belonging and community in the future.

Chapter 6

6   Vulnerable Recognition, Comfort Zones and Liveability

> In thinking through the idea of a liveable life, we must not assume that securing recognition is always and necessarily the answer. Rather, a liveable life involves negotiating the continual struggles over the antinomies within our identity and the various, often incompatible ways, in which we are recognized by others in the various social spheres that we inhabit. A liveable life, therefore, becomes a matter of managing the inescapable agonism of identity and the ambivalence of recognition. (McQueen, 2015, 174)

As I discussed in Chapter 3, participants talk in complicated ways about their negotiations of (in)visibility and (in)tolerance in the Stratford area and about what I term the (in)visibility dilemma. I understand the negotiations, ambiguities, frustrations, but also the pleasures, possibilities, and other affect surrounding the dilemma as part of what McQueen (2015) describes as "'the inescapable agonism[83]' of identity and the ambivalence of recognition" (p. 174). In this chapter, I turn to a discussion of vulnerable recognition and liveability as I consider how participants manage affective work and their comfort zones. Before moving to discuss agonism and Schick's (2020) notion of "vulnerable recognition" in more detail, I want to begin by addressing Schick's (2020) critiques of recognition theory.

6.1   Critiques of Recognition Theory

According to Schick (2020), "recognition theory highlights the ongoing injustice that arises from persistent failures to extend understanding and respect to members of other social groups" (p. 1048). Schick (2020) critiques recognition theory for its "pursuit of an unachievable world" and "narrow focus on recognition of other's identities" (p. 1048;

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[83] Agonism is a "philosophical outlook emphasizing the importance of conflict to politics" (Fisken, 2014, para. 1). My understanding of agonism is informed by Mouffe's (2005) work, which is grounded in critiques of liberalism and understands the political as "conflict between adversaries who may disagree, but who ultimately respect one another's right to exist" (Fisken, 2014, para. 4).

Markell, 2003). Schick (2020) emphasizes how recognition theory seeks to pursue "an impossible world – 'a world of mutual transparency, a world without alienation, a world in which we can be confident of our own invulnerability to all powers that we do not ourselves control'" (Markell, 2003, p. 3; cited in Schick, 2020, p. 1049). For Schick (2020), the "rationalist pursuit of an unachievable world" is characterized by "universality, stability and predictability" (Beattie and Schick, 2013, p. 2). Among the foremost issues with recognition theory, then, is its reliance on a "moral rationalist approach to ethics", which involves assuming that "the world can be known and that its failings can be addressed by the accumulation of expert knowledge" (Schick, 2020, 1048). The limitation of recognition theory that is most relevant to this discussion is that recognition theory is narrowly conceived as "being primarily about seeing and respecting the *identity* of the other – focusing primarily on the dyad of recognizer and recognized" (Schick, 2020, p. 1049).

In making this argument, Schick draws on Markell (2003), who emphasizes that the issue is not just some people's systematic failure to recognize others, but rather "ways of patterning and arranging the world that allow some people and groups to enjoy a semblance of sovereign agency at others' expense" (p. 5; cited in Schick, 2020, p. 1049). In the context of this thesis, this means that the issue is not just cis and/or heterosexual people's systematic failure to recognize LGBTQ+ folks, but rather "ways of patterning and arranging the world that allow [cis and hetero] people and groups to enjoy a semblance of sovereign agency at others' expense" (Markell, 2003, p. 5; cited in Schick, 2020, p. 1049). Recognition theory, then, overemphasizes the level and role of the individual and fails to account for systemic issues like heteronormativity and cisnormativity. The problem, as framed by recognition theory, is that cis, hetero people are failing to "see and respect identities" (Schick, 2020, 1049) of non-cis, non-hetero people and that the solution involves finding ways to allow LGBTQ+ folks more respect and more recognition. However, this ignores the systemic conditions sustaining both chronic misrecognition for LGBTQ+ folks and a sense of invulnerability or achieved recognition among cis, hetero folks. Central to Schick's (2020) argument is a concern that recognition theory frames recognition as a "resource that you can have 'more' of" or a "a tool that can be wielded in the pursuit of justice" (p. 1049; Markell, 2003). Schick

(2020) posits that when framed this way, it is easy to overlook "a deeper understanding of the desires and structures that support misrecognition and oppression" (p. 1049; Markell, 2003) as well as the kind of affective work that participants are engaging in as they navigate (mis)recognitions.

One way of thinking about this is in relation to microaggressions. Microaggressions are often framed as moments of misrecognition – whether intentional or unintentional – in which there is some kind of failure or refusal to see and respect the identity of the other. Thinking with recognition theory, the response to microaggressions is more or better recognition. Here, microaggressions are conceptualized as experiences of mis- or non-recognition by "marginalized" groups in a way that does not implicate those who are consistently or pervasively properly recognized and who remain concerned with microaggressions only in the sense that they have the capacity to act in microaggressive ways. In other words, thinking about microaggressions in terms of recognition theory emphasizes the way the misrecognized is affected rather than thinking about how both the misrecognized and the misrecognizer are potentially and varyingly affected and vulnerable to misrecognition. A shift from recognition theory to vulnerable recognition, then, can draw attention to the way that microaggressive experiences are not just individual interactions but are grounded in and part of systems like heteronormativity that sustain the recognition of some at the expense of others. Schick (2020) emphasizes the importance of what vulnerable recognition does by inviting a "'turn toward the subject' that asks us to be less self-certain and more open to asking difficult questions of ourselves and our location in oppressive norms and practices" (Adorno, 1986, p. 128; cited in Schick, 2020, p. 1051).

6.2   Vulnerable Recognition

Schick's (2020) work on vulnerable recognition emphasizes the "ambivalent potentiality" of vulnerability (p. 1050). Rather than thinking about vulnerability as potentially negative and unwelcome, Schick (2020) understands vulnerability as "a basic kind of openness to being affected and affecting in both positive and negative ways" (Gilson, 2011, p. 310, cited in Schick, 2020, p. 1050). While rationalist perspectives and approaches that pursue "epistemic certainty" conceive of vulnerability as negative and unwelcome, Schick

(2020) calls us to embrace uncertainty. In this way, becoming vulnerable involves acknowledging our epistemic uncertainty and our "radical interdependence" and also accepting that the kind of openness that such vulnerability demands can be "unsettling and risky" (Schick, 2020, pp. 1050-1051). Agonism is central to Schick's (2020) understanding of vulnerable recognition. Schick (2020) suggests that "a vulnerable conception of recognition has an agonistic relation to knowledge" in the sense that "recognition implies an initial cognition followed by a realization that what we know is flawed or partial and so requires knowing again, or re-cognizing" (p. 1051). Thinking about "coming-to-know" as an ongoing and multilayered journey allows for a comprehension that extends beyond the "narrow dyad of recognizer and recognized" by situating recognition in the context of institutions, social, political and economic structures, and historical processes (Schick, 2020, p. 1051). By questioning how we participate in perpetuating misrecognition and injustice, we become vulnerable. While Schick's (2016, 2020) work establishes vulnerable recognition and its potentiality, Schick's focus is less on *how* vulnerable recognition happens or what kinds of conditions might sustain vulnerable recognition. Based on my participants' accounts, networking with and having relationships with people with different experiences is an important part of this process. Participants draw on their friends' experiences and anecdotes as a way to emphasize the context and boundaries of their own experiences as people who are, for example, white, cis, healthy, young or old, homeowners, financially secure, enmeshed in a strong local support network, and so on. Most often, these recognitions are framed in a way that reflects participants' perceptions of the ways they are "privileged" or the ways in which their experiences might not be available or relatable to other LGBTQ+ people. Such reflections are part of vulnerable recognition as participants work to account for the ways that they are located in relation to "structures that privilege some and oppress many" (p. 1053). Part of what vulnerable recognition does is draw attention to the way we are unequally vulnerable (Beausoleil, 2020; Schick, 2020).

Returning to a discussion of microaggressions, there are possibilities generated by becoming vulnerable, by extending beyond the "narrow dyad of recognizer and recognized" (Schick, 2020). When thinking with recognition theory, microaggressions are often conceptualized as some combination of a failure to be (properly) recognized

and/or a failure to (properly) recognize. Often, microaggressions and coming out are framed in terms of ameliorating and eliminating instances of misrecognition. However, embracing vulnerable recognition and agonism, as Schick (2020) advocates, recognizes that eliminating the potential for misrecognition and finding ways to "properly" recognize each other all the time is not a productive or achievable goal. This is not to suggest that microaggressions do not matter or that the instances of misrecognition or non-recognition that constitute microaggressions are not impactful and potentially harmful. Rather, I draw on Schick (2020) to argue that, framed by recognition theory, we tend to insufficiently attend to the conditions and systemic factors that sustain recognition and misrecognition**.** The issue when someone is misgendered, particularly if the person doing the misgendering is doing so unintentionally, is not just about a failure of recognition in that moment between two people. What vulnerable recognition can do is direct us to attend to the underlying conditions that sustain the legibility and easy recognizability of the misrecognizer, not just the factors that contribute to misrecognition and/or an apologetic recognition of misrecognition. As Beausoleil (2020) and Schick's (2020) work suggests, moving beyond recognition theory can facilitate further understandings of and engagements with systemic factors and can move beyond misrecognition as something that happens between two individuals to misrecognition as an inevitable and potentially generative reality of social life. Embracing agonism and epistemic uncertainty opens up possibilities where the ideal outcome is not for LGBTQ+ people, for example, to become able to be consistently properly recognized in an extension of the privilege of epistemic certainty that is enjoyed by many gender-conforming cis, hetero people. Rather, embracing agonism and vulnerable recognition enables us to live with or to become more comfortable with the idea that we can and will misrecognize people just as we can and will be misrecognized ourselves. Rather than expecting we can know and recognize in particular ways, we shift instead to a recognition that we are all engaged in processes of re-cognizing, of coming to know and re-know. In this way, there are also other possibilities to explore such as the fluidity or flexibility that are offered in a conception of recognition, self and identity that is not premised on our ability to be recognized consistently but rather leaves space and potential for change and

for re-cognizing, which is an openness we can direct not only toward others but also toward ourselves.

Thinking in relation to my discussion near the end of Chapter 5, one way that Schick's (2020) call for a "willingness to be uncertain" manifests is in a willingness to engage in pronoun talk, for example. For many gender-conforming cis people, the act of engaging in and even more so of initiating pronoun talk requires the kind of "countercultural willingness to be vulnerable and to challenge the internalized ignorance and indifference that work so empathetically against recognition" (Schick, 2020, p. 1052). If you are accustomed to having people correctly assume your pronouns and tend to believe that you can correctly assume other's pronouns (whether explicitly as a belief or implicitly in practice), engaging in pronoun work may serve as a way of becoming more vulnerable. Thinking with vulnerable recognition offers an understanding of why some people react so strongly to gender-neutral pronouns, for example. If someone is really psychically invested in the gender binary, then accepting and using gender-neutral pronouns and being open to ways of being and identifying that do not fit within, or that may challenge how they understand themselves, might be unsettling or feel disruptive or uncomfortable. The refusal to recognize gender-neutral pronouns and/or recognize non-binary identities, then, may be conceptualized as a refusal of vulnerable recognition.

Schick (2020) posits that "one of the primary tasks of vulnerable recognition is to work against ignorance – whereby ignorance is not primarily of positive social knowledge or facts, but of our location in oppressive structures and relations" (p. 1052). For people who benefit from oppressive structures and relations, embracing vulnerable recognition may seem more difficult and unsettling. It is important to recognize that we will come to vulnerable recognition in different ways and with different stakes. For people who are consistently misrecognized, for example, there may be more embodied awareness of a sense of epistemic uncertainty compared to someone who is typically or even always consistently recognized. Schick (2020) emphasizes that vulnerable recognition understands that "what we know is partial and requires re-knowing or re-cognizing" and focuses "not on what we can do for others but on what we have already done (and continue to do) to others and to ourselves" (pp. 1052-1053). Taking this up in

relation to my discussion of participants' accounts, there are several moments in interviews where participants engage in a kind of "vulnerable recognition" as they recognize that even though they feel like their fight is over, it might not feel that way for everyone else. This is an example of the kind of reflexive and empathetic positioning participants do to recognize that their experiences are products of who they are and of their contexts, and that while they may experience downtown Stratford and/or most places in the area as a space of comfort and safety, others do not necessarily share that experience. Specifically, several cis participants recognize that their experiences are likely different from hypothetical trans folks in the area and are different than the way they witness and perceive their trans friends' experiences in the area.

As I consider in Chapter 4, participants do not discuss the ambivalence of recognition as wholly negative; rather, they recognize how it can facilitate a range of peaceful co-existences and/or subversive recognitions (McQueen, 2005; Sedgwick, 2003). Thinking about the potential reparative functions (Sedgwick, 2003) of the ambivalence of recognition, I understand participants' accounts as suggesting that, while certainly part of their experiences, ambivalence is not necessarily a bad thing. The way that Meredith talks about her ability to wear rainbow gear and be read as queer by other LGBTQ+ folks and notably the employees at her local Tim Horton's is an example of how ambivalent recognition is not necessarily negative. The space created through ambivalent recognition in this case allows Meredith to be read simultaneously in multiple ways. Whether the older men at Tim Horton's are entirely unaware of her presence, are quietly homophobic, or are quietly gay themselves, Meredith recognizes that she cannot determine or control how she is being read. Instead of feeling stressed, closeted or undone by this ambivalence, however, Meredith expresses that it sustains her ability to be recognized in affirming ways by specific people while peacefully co-existing in what she perceives to be a generally heteronormative space.

It is not just the potential for the ambivalence of recognition to function in reparative ways that is noteworthy, but also that clarifying or resolving the ambivalence of recognition – becoming visible, in other words – does not necessarily or inherently produce positive or liberatory effects. In reality, as my participants' accounts and a range

of research recognizes, coming out or becoming definitively visible as LGBTQ+ can have a range of consequences including the loss of friends, family and/or a place to live (Higa et al., 2014; Klein et al., 2015). My point here is that visibility and recognition are, as McQueen (2015) argues, *not* the end all be all of liveability. As I account for in the remainder of this chapter, having some spaces or people or moments in which you are or have been visible and recognized is important for participants' perceptions of the area as somewhere that is liveable for them. However, in terms of thinking through participants' sense of place in the Stratford area, among many participants, the ambivalence of recognition does not necessarily make life in the area unliveable or even uncomfortable. One potential explanation is that some participants are able to access belonging in other ways (shared whiteness, respected profession, home ownership), which frames their comfort with ambivalence as reflecting a homonormative position wherein they do not want to be or do not need to be known as gay but are content to be known and accepted as respectable members of the community. Another component of any explanation of the way that participants relate to ambivalent recognition is also *how* they are being ambivalently recognized. For gender conforming cis lesbian, gay, bi participants, the experience of being ambivalently recognized or even misrecognized as heterosexual might not be something that affects them in the same way that trans and non-binary participants are affected by experiences of being misgendered. As I suggest in my discussion of participants' sense of place in Chapter 4, most of my cis participants express a sense of feeling generally comfortable, safe, and happy in the area. Trans and non-binary participants, however, express a sense of being significantly less at ease in the area. I point this out not to make a generalizable claim that all trans and non-binary folks are likely to be less comfortable in the area, but rather to highlight that this is a notable trend and that future research and action in the Stratford area needs to be attentive to how trans and non-binary people may have distinct issues, needs and desires compared to cis people.

6.3   Coming Out and Vulnerable Recognition

Another question that I want to consider at this point in relation to vulnerable recognition is whether or not we do ourselves a disservice by framing experiences in terms of

"outness" when outness is both unachievable and beyond our control. Much of my focus throughout this thesis is on the inadequacy of coming out discourses. An overemphasis on being or becoming "out" feels frustrating because of the way that we can never "achieve" visibility or control how we become visible/invisible. An example of this, which I discuss in Chapter 3, is Clay and his co-worker. Clay does not feel the need to correct a coworker who overhears him talking at work and assumes he is talking about his girlfriend instead of his boyfriend. Thinking with Schick's (2020) work on vulnerable recognition, it might be the case that Clay's co-worker is not just randomly, ignorantly misrecognizing him, but is actively invested in a cisnormative, heteronormative status quo. In this framing, and in a heteronormative culture, it makes sense that heterosexual people are constantly interpellating others as heterosexual. To do otherwise would be to recognize that heterosexuality is not ubiquitous or given but might also work toward a shift in conditions wherein one's own heterosexuality will no longer be assumed as the norm. Ideally, this is what vulnerable recognition brings about (Schick, 2020). In this way, I argue that embracing vulnerable recognition shifts the conditions that sustain normative coming out discourses by challenging the taken-for-grantedness of heterosexuality's natural and neutral status. As I establish in my theoretical framework, normative coming out discourses are steeped in heteronormativity as they actively reaffirm heterosexuality as always already out, the default state against which anyone not heterosexual must laboriously make themselves visible. Vulnerable recognition, however, demands that we acknowledge that no one's identity is necessarily self-evident or epistemically certain. Rather, we are all interdependently enmeshed in processes of re-cognizing (Schick, 2020) and coming to know and re-know is a necessary part of life as we encounter new people and as we, and the people we already know, change over time.

Just as engaging in pronoun talk can be considered a practice of vulnerable recognition that disrupts the taken-for-granted assumptions that gender conforming cis people's pronouns are self-evident and easily recognized, resisting the urge to compulsively assume everyone is heterosexual *does* something. This is not to argue that vulnerable recognition sparks an undoing of heterosexuality. Rather, as Beausoleil (2020) suggests, it denaturalizes structures like heteronormativity on which expected (non-vulnerable) recognition rests. Beausoleil (2020) argues that "the naturalization of power

begins to explain a lack of or mis-recognition in terms of consistent patterns of epistemic blindness, but also the affective resistances provoked by rare moments when demands for recognition break through" (p. 1061). Beausoleil (2020) offers the example of the "defensive refrain of 'All Lives Matter' in response to the Black Lives Matter movement in the U.S." and the presence of "'straight pride' parades worldwide" as examples of the kind of backlash that happens when the naturalization of power that sustains white supremacy or heteronormativity is revealed or challenged (p. 1061). Beausoleil (2020) explains how this happens concisely:

> When privilege affords itself the luxury of ignorance regarding the penalties on which it is based, and advantage is experienced as the neutral position, demands for recognition of marginalized claims and address of deeply entrenched systems of privileged and penalty – even in minor ways – are too easily perceived as threatening. (p. 1061)

The kinds of reactions that Beausoleil (2020) describes sustain an unwillingness to recognize others and certainly an unwillingness to become vulnerable in the way that Schick (2020) imagines. Thinking about this discussion in the context of vulnerable recognition provides a way of making sense of resistance to vulnerable recognition practices and also why people cling to their unnamed, but properly recognized, positions (Beausoleil, 2020). Moving toward or advocating for practices like vulnerable recognition is a promising reframing of more conventional recognition theory and notions of toleration, which leave systems like heteronormativity intact (Beausoleil, 2020; Schick, 2020). In terms of the utility of outness, then, it seems that moving away from discourses of outness and visibility and toward frameworks like vulnerable recognition opens up interesting and exciting possibilities that rest on an acknowledgement of "our radical interdependence", epistemic uncertainty, and that "what we know is flawed or partial and so requires knowing again, or re-cognizing" (Schick, 2020, p. 1051; Beausoleil, 2020). Further, vulnerable recognition facilitates an awareness of the way that cis, heterosexual people are often able to experience a sense of invulnerable recognition. Such invulnerable recognition depends on structures like heteronormativity and cisnormativity, which sustain the conditions of invulnerable recognition for some while

making others *more* vulnerable. When people who can or do experience invulnerable recognition recognize and embrace vulnerable recognition, they do so by coming to know how their invulnerable recognition relies on structures like heteronormativity, for example. Of course, this does not mean that everyone is equal or that this is some kind of "resolution". Rather, recognizing and embracing agonism shifts the discussion from being about why LGBTQ+ people, for example, experience misrecognition to a discussion about what sustains the conditions for some cis, hetero people to be consistently legible or "properly" recognized.

6.4 Vulnerable Recognition and Liveability

Returning to my discussion of comfort zones and the way that comfort zones can sustain a range of outcomes from feeling just safe to a sense of thriving and flourishing, I consider how liveability encompasses what we need to not feel like we are living in a hostile environment and also what we need to thrive and succeed. Liveability requires being able to live our daily lives without feeling like we are constantly on guard as well as having access to places and networks that actively nourish our queer selves. Heteronormativity is a central part of this discussion on liveability in that heteronormativity is part of what sustains conditions that are hostile to queer life. In my theoretical framework, I talk about comfort zones as providing a reprieve from the affective work involved in living in a heteronormative society. As Schick (2020) emphasizes, part of embracing vulnerable recognition involves "a deeper understanding of the desires and structures that support misrecognition and oppression" such as heteronormativity (p. 1049; Markell, 2003). A shift toward vulnerable recognition undermines heteronormative assumptions about recognition and has the potential to increase or create more space for liveability.

McQueen's (2015) work informs my overall argument that it is necessary to challenge the notion that LGBTQ+ people ought to be "out" and visible in particular ways to live a liveable life. A liveable life is not necessarily an out life and an out life is not necessarily a liveable life. Discussions about liveability are not about (and, again, cannot be about) becoming permanently out or visible. Rather, I posit that more fruitful discussions about liveability may center on embracing vulnerable recognition and

developing large enough comfort zones for folks to feel sustained and supported. Thinking about the (in)visibility dilemma and participants' descriptions of outness as unachievable and visibility as ambiguous, I argue that putting aside notions of outness and focusing instead on the conditions of (in)visibility and vulnerable recognition may be more productive. As I establish in my theoretical framework, and illustrate through my participants' accounts, living in a heteronormative society places a continuous burden on non-cis, non-hetero folks to constantly out themselves or make themselves visible *as* what they are *because* they are pervasively misread as cis and/or hetero. Again, as Gray (2009), Schweighofer (2016) and other queer scholars recognize, this is not to say that coming out narratives are not useful devices for LGBTQ+ people who are making sense of themselves or as a way of bonding and sharing experiences amongst LGBTQ+ folks. However, structurally and theoretically, the injunction to become "out" created by the closet is an impossible and a politically limited one. Further, as I argue throughout this thesis, the idea of being or becoming visible is almost a misnomer because of the irrelevance of intentionality. Rather than focusing on whether or not someone is (willing to be) visible as queer or trans or whether or not other people properly recognize them as such, vulnerable recognition asks us to acknowledge our inability to easily be known or to know others, and to "embark on an agonistic journey of coming to know – of re-cognizing or knowing again" (Schick, 2020, p. 1052). Schick (2020) elaborates that, "vulnerable recognition focuses not only what we can do for others but on what we have already done (and continue to do) to others and to ourselves" (pp. 1052-1053). In terms of gender and pronouns, thinking about "what we have already done (and continue to do) to others and ourselves" (Schick, 2020, p. 1052-1053) demands a reflexive examination of not only why, for example, a gender conforming cis, hetero person may reject or mock pronoun talk but also of the way they have already come to know their own and other (presumably cis) people's genders in particular ways that might inform their misrecognition of a trans person.

Thinking with vulnerable recognition, I argue that a sense of being at least ambivalently recognized is required for the area to remain somewhere that meets a minimum level of comfort or safety required to support the conditions of everyday life. The second component of liveability, however, is that participants have access to places,

networks and archives that allow them to thrive. The entire area does not necessarily need to become part of a participants' comfort zone in the sense that they can express themselves fully or be actively affirmed at all times. Drawing on scholars like McQueen (2015) and Schick (2020), I posit that achieving such sustained, active affirmation and recognition is likely a rationalist fantasy. However, what is necessary is that the area provides some level of basic comfort and safety while also sustaining the conditions for moments of connection with networks or archives that not only support but actively nourish queerness. Again, much of this conversation depends on participants' subjectivities and contexts. For participants who have a strong support network and well-established comfort zones in the area, they are able to flourish. For those who own a house, have a long-term partner, and are on good terms with their family, friends and other important people in their lives, they may already have what they need to flourish in the Stratford area.

6.5   The Limits of Live and Let Live

Moving forward in this chapter, I examine how live and let live philosophies are insufficient, particularly for trans and non-binary participants, and how the framework of vulnerable recognition serves to challenge the kind of tolerance on which live and let live relies. One particular way that participants talk about having to negotiate their (in)visibility is in relation to a "live and let live" mentality, in which tolerance is garnered through an understanding that one adheres to particular community standards and that they do not publicly disrupt the hegemony of heteronormativity. As Gray (2009) notes in her study of rural youth in Kentucky, "… youth threaten an unspoken agreement to 'live and let live' when they visibly assert themselves as readable gay subjects" (p. 110). This seems to be the case for many of my participants as well, as is suggested by moments when they express a sense that being themselves might be risky, that they are aware of their visibility and also when and where to downplay their displays of affection like handholding. While liveable for some participants, others find themselves stifled by the demands and conditions of "live and let live". Further, the ways in which these different responses or relationships to a "live and let live" philosophy happen are not coincidental

but shaped by a multitude of structural factors that also depend on participants' embodiments and histories in the area.

As Gray (2009) suggests, politics of visibility are "part of social systems of identification that purchase the privilege of recognition for some at a cost to others" (p. 92). Gray's (2009) analysis is central to my understanding of the way that my participants negotiate their (in)visibility and how this process is affected by their embodiments as well as the places and social contexts they are traversing. Among cis LGBQ+ participants, for example, it is common to talk about feeling comfortable in spaces and with people who probably do not know they are LGBQ+. As Jane remarks:

> As much as I do identify somewhere in the queer spectrum, I wouldn't say it's a huge part of my personality. If that makes any sense ... Like if I were to describe me, I would say like, I am an introvert, but I really like my friends. I like being in the county. I like animals. It wouldn't be an, I like boys and girls. That wouldn't be one of my top describers of me. (Jane)

While Jane knows she likes men and women and this is not something she is actively hiding or ashamed of, it is also not something she organizes her life or socializing around. Although it seems counterintuitive that someone could be part of your comfort zone and not know you are not heterosexual, this is the case for some participants. Again, this points to the limits of coming out as a way of framing participants' experiences. As Schweighofer (2016) suggests, some lesbian and gay folks, while aware they are lesbian or gay, "choose to identify themselves primarily as something else – farmers, mothers, church deacons, writers, land owners, and so on" (p. 235; Gray, 2009). In doing so, they "actively resist 'coming out' because they see sexuality as private, because they do not identify with urban, gender non-normative stereotypes of gay and lesbian identity, or because other parts of their identities are much more central" (Schweighofer, 2016, p. 235; Gray, 2009). Schweighofer's (2016) analysis informs my understanding of Jane's account and of how such appeals to belonging are dependent on an ability to successfully "identify themselves primarily as something else" and to be accepted as such. In this

case, acceptance and belonging may depend on a kind of ambivalent recognition that sustains an ability to live and let live.

My trans and non-binary participants, however, talk about how living and letting live does not work for them for multiple reasons. Particularly for participants who exist outside of the gender binary, who are read as gender ambiguous, and/or for those who use gender-neutral pronouns, being recognized, misrecognized, not recognized, and/or hostilely recognized is a frustrating and common experience. Part of the explanation for this is that pronouns are a crucial site of visibility. For gender conforming cis lesbian, gay, bi, and queer folks, this typically looks like having to correct the pronoun someone uses to talk about your partner(s) or hypothetical partner(s) or making yourself visible by using a gendered pronoun to make it clear you are in a "same pronoun" or "same gender" relationship (Ahmed, 2014). For some trans and non-binary folks, this can mean having to initiate pronoun talk or risk being misgendered, which, as Schick's (2020) work on vulnerable recognition emphasizes, is a consequence of the way that cis, gender conforming folks' genders and pronouns are assumed to be self-evident and invulnerable. One way of understanding this, then, is that many trans and non-binary folks are well aware of the realities of vulnerable recognition. Part of what vulnerable recognition does is draw attention to the way we are unequally vulnerable (Beausoleil, 2020; Schick, 2020). An anecdote Sam offers of being in a room with a straight mother and a trans person and making a point to ask both the straight mother and the trans person their pronouns is useful in thinking this through. By sharing their pronouns and asking others their pronouns, Sam is engaging in vulnerable recognition by acknowledging that their pronouns are not necessarily known in advance and that they cannot know someone's pronouns in advance. As Sam notes, it should not be insulting to ask about someone's pronoun or to clarify what someone's pronouns are if you do not know and do not want to misgender them. The notion that we should be able to recognize someone's pronouns or gender based on their appearance, behaviour or on characteristics like their voice is part of what vulnerable recognition challenges. Vulnerable recognition problematizes the assumption that the way one recognizes oneself can be predictably or consistently known by others (Schick, 2020, p. 1048). For cis people who have always enjoyed the ease of being legible and properly recognized, pronoun talk may be perceived as undermining the

self-evidentiary status of their pronouns (Beausoleil, 2020). Part of my argument, then, is that by virtue of their relation to power structures and norms, some people (trans and non-binary folks) are likely to experience vulnerable recognition while for others (cis, gender conforming folks), the façade of recognizability is unchallenged to the point where they have not considered vulnerable recognition or may be resistant to the notion of vulnerable recognition *because* it challenges that façade.

Although a risk of pronoun talk might be that it puts non-cis folks and/or anyone who is questioning their gender or pronoun in a position where they have to make a decision about what pronouns to use, what pronouns feel safe in that moment, who is present and how comfortable and safe those people feel, a risk of not initiating pronoun talk is that people make cisnormative, heteronormative assumptions about people's pronouns. Another risk of pronoun talk is that cis people will be unwilling to participate or will participate in ways that clearly mock or undermine the practice. This is not only potentially hostile to any trans, non-binary, or questioning folks present but also is a way of resisting vulnerable recognition (Schick, 2020). While vulnerable recognition is a promising framework, it is also one that is often resisted by those who occupy unmarked or "neutral" subject positions (Beausoleil, 2020; Schick, 2020).

While engaging in vulnerable recognition through pronoun talk is potentially risky or costly for trans and non-binary folks in particular, these examples also provide an understanding of the potentiality of vulnerable recognition in positive ways. By asking the straight mother her pronouns in the above example, Sam disrupts heteronormative assumptions that allow for the straight mother's pronouns to be self-evident, or to be properly assumed, recognized and known. This example demonstrates how for LGBTQ+ folks, ambivalent recognition is interpreted as part of a discussion about not being seen for what you are while in relation to cis and heterosexual folks, ambivalent recognition might mean letting go of a sense that you are consistently recognizable and recognized or, in other words, letting go of a sense of invulnerability. Drawing on Beausoleil (2020), Schick (2020) argues that in becoming vulnerable, "we open ourselves to the contestation and potential reworking of those matters most closely tied to our sense of self and place" (p. 1051).

Pronoun work is a form of affective work that is bound up with negotiations of (in)visibility[84]. It is important to note, however, that affective work is not necessarily negative, draining, or bad and further, that consistent recognition is not necessarily *the* ideal outcome. I do not mean to imply that all trans and non-binary people are opposed to being read in ambiguous ways or that the experience of being misgendered is necessarily a traumatic one. In fact, genderqueering and fucking with the way people think about gender can be empowering if the conditions to sustain it as such exist and continue to exist, as I consider further below. I do not want to reify either the trans person who is negatively affected by being misgendered *or* the trans person who seeks out such moments to fuck with the system – it is likely that they are often the same trans person in different contexts at different times. Significantly, such transgressive or genderqueering practices often challenge a live and let live mentality. My point here is that while it is easy to read the experience of being misgendered or being ambivalently or hostilely recognized as a negative and potentially traumatic experience, it is also possible that these experiences can be and do more than that and, drawing on Sedgwick (2003), may have reparative functions.

As Skylar demonstrates in the following example, which I also consider in Chapter 3, participants employ a variety of strategies and tactics such as "looking back" in ways that counter the notion that moments of ambivalent recognition – such as when someone is continuously turning around to stare at you in an attempt to figure you out – are not necessarily sites of harm or trauma for participants but also potentially sites of resistance:

> …there was this guy in front of me and he kept on kind of slowly kind of looking around and just sort of looking as if he was looking at something other than obviously, he was looking at, trying to look at me because he was trying to figure out what the fuck was going on. (Skylar)

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[84] Although, it is necessary to trouble any deterministic relationship between pronouns and identity. For example, Alex is non-binary and uses she/her pronouns.

Skylar's response to this experience is to "stare back. I would be staring at him before he was staring at me and he'd just sort of avert his gaze and eventually I think he got the message." Of course, not everyone is going to have the confidence or the ability to "stare back" in the way that Skylar describes. As I discuss in Chapter 5, several participants, including Skylar, talk about how they have developed the ability to "keep a stiff upper lip" and to not be bothered by other people over time (Skylar). Being put in the position where one has to engage in tactics like "staring back" has affective effects and may constitute a bad or upsetting experience for some people. However, looking back can also work in reparative ways. The act of looking back, of meeting the person's gaze, not allowing his stare to make you uncomfortable, and being the "kind of person who likes to have fun with people's perceptions" can be meaningful (Skylar). Standing your ground and looking back are certainly reparative practices and examples of ways that participants talk about taking up space in the area. Of course, this move of not being affected by another's unwillingness to recognize you may well be a survivalist one. But it can also be a move that embraces agonism and "the ambivalence of recognition" (McQueen, 2015, p. 174). If, indeed, there is no way to escape or move beyond the contested nature of identity and there is no way to resolve the ambivalence of recognition, then it is useful to focus on what it looks like and means to live with ambivalence. Skylar's anecdote suggests that embracing the vulnerability of recognition and becoming comfortable with being "epistemically uncertain" opens up possibilities beyond a paranoid or tolerated position (Schick, 2020, pp. 1051; Sedgwick, 2003). It is not that embracing vulnerable recognition means that one is less affected by moments of ambivalent recognition or misrecognition. Rather, by acknowledging the conditions of vulnerable recognition, one is not disappointed by such moments but aware of the ways in which we are all, to varying degrees, affected by the conditions of vulnerable recognition, both as recognizers and recognized (Schick, 2020).

Another example that resonates with this discussion is how Aiden talks about experiences of people questioning their gender:

When I was in a child in Stratford everyone used to always ask me, 'Are you a girl or a boy?' And I didn't know what to tell them because I didn't care. And then

> when I became an adolescent, I started growing facial hair and everyone shut up
> about it and just assumed I was a dude. I kind of forgot about my non-binary-ness
> for a period. And then it just registered again relatively recently when I started
> meeting other non-binary people and going like, 'Oh right.' (Aiden)

Aiden's account reflects an awareness of the way that other people, at times, have worked to recognize or to make sense of their gender. By saying "I didn't know what to tell them because I didn't care", Aiden draws attention to the way that ambivalent recognition – expressed here in the form of the question "Are you a girl or a boy?" – is not necessarily a negative or traumatic experience. In fact, the question "Are you a girl or a boy?" can facilitate moments of ambivalent recognition that can feel joyful, pleasurable, affirming or any range of more positive emotions that are not typically associated with the ambivalent recognition this question suggests. In another example of children speculating on gender in public, Chris shares an experience on a train:

> I had not been out for very long either, so it was really awkward. And I was
> sitting on the train and there was two little kids and their mom, and they asked
> their mom, they were like, 'Is that a boy or a girl?' And she looked at me and
> mouthed the word 'I'm sorry' … the one kid was like, 'I think it's both.' And then
> the mom was like, 'Stop it! Stop it! … I wish the mom would have just been like,
> 'They identify as a boy. Or maybe you should ask them.' … instead of just letting
> them sit there and kind of like, go on about it, because it just made it more
> awkward than it already was. (Chris)

In this example, Chris suggests that the mother's reaction made the situation more awkward and uncomfortable. While Chris expresses a desire to be properly recognized ("I wish they mom would have just been like, 'They identify as a boy'"), he is aware that such recognition is not always possible and that in such cases, "maybe you should ask" instead of openly speculating. Although Chris might desire recognition, it is not the experience of ambivalent recognition or the fact that he is not clearly legible to these children that bothers Chris most. Rather, what bothers him is the mother's reaction and the way she immediately becomes flustered, apologetic, embarrassed and does not know

how to respond to the situation. In this case, the mother's reaction functions as an aversion to vulnerable recognition. Chris emphasizes that by being open, direct, and respectful about trans existence with kids, kids learn to be trans friendly and affirming. Working toward a framework of understanding or everyday language that allows for more open, direct, and respectful conversations about gender could invite an ongoing process of re-cognizing that contends with our inability to properly recognize others (Schick, 2020, p. 1050). Being open to a process of "re-cognizing" creates possibilities for those being (mis)recognized to respond to the ways in which they are (mis)recognized (Schick, 2020). Thinking back to my earlier example with Sam and pronoun talk, if those involved in an encounter are open to embracing vulnerable recognition (through respectful participation in pronoun talk, for example), this can become a site of "coming-to-know" or "re-cognizing" (Schick, 2020, p. 1050).

As I mention earlier in this section, trans and non-binary people are often very aware of both the way that people are looking at them and of a sense of vulnerable recognition. People who occupy often unmarked or neutral positions, however, such as the mother on the train, seem more likely to be uncomfortable with the notion of vulnerable recognition because they are invested in their easy, knowable and sustained recognition, which is only ever a product of heteronormativity (Schick, 2020). The mother on the train understands the "are you a boy or a girl" question as something that is offensive or something that she should be embarrassed her children are asking. If the mother or her children were to ask Chris if he is a boy or a girl, however, he would have the opportunity to answer as he chooses. While I do not necessarily want to advocate for a situation in which (just) trans folks have to constantly field questions about their gender and pronouns, I also recognize that the alternative is often being misgendered and/or publicly speculated about and discussed. As Schick (2020) suggests, the more ideal situation is one wherein people mutually embrace vulnerable recognition and do not assume that they are able to properly recognize most people on an everyday basis. Perhaps in such a context, it might not occur to or be relevant to kids on a train to speculate over one particular stranger's gender. By embracing vulnerable recognition, questions about gender are not necessarily unwelcome or offensive sites of negative affect but potentially welcome, generative moments, particularly if it is not just trans

identities or other "marginalized" identities that are understood as vulnerable. As McQueen (2015) advocates, and as several of my participants suggest, resisting understandings of ambivalent recognition and even misrecognition as sites where we are undone or traumatized can be a reparative and empowering move. Of course, in making this argument I do not want to deny that experiences of misrecognition can undo us, traumatize us or affect us in other damaging and difficult ways, but rather that they do not necessarily or just do these things (Butler, 2004; Cvetkovich, 2003; McQueen, 2005 Muñoz, 2009; Sedgwick, 2003). Drawing further on Cvetkovich (2003), I consider how experiences of ambivalent or vulnerable recognition are not just familiar for trans and non-binary people but can serve as shared experiences that allow for a kind of bonding or formation of community around experiences that, even if initially traumatic, can become reparative as they become sites of connection with other trans and non-binary folks, for example (Muñoz, 2009; Sedgwick, 2003). Cvetkovich (2003) writes that "negotiations of the violence of heteronormativity (and patriarchy, white supremacy, and the annihilating practices of fluid transnational capitalism) become a site of/for radical inventions of desire, resistance and community" (Meiners, 2004, p. 224; Cvetkovich, 2003). Similarly, Ahmed (2010) provides an understanding of the way that queer unhappiness can offer a form of queer kinship: "you share not simply unhappiness but the unhappy consequences of being the cause of social and familial unhappiness" and, further, that "to narrate unhappiness can be affirmative; it can gesture toward another world, even if we are not given a vision of the world as it might exist after the walls of misery are brought down" (pp. 100-101, 106). I explore this throughout the remainder of this chapter

6.6   A Queer History of Stratford

> And I would go out on the town. I went dancing. I still love all the time that I spent in the discos in Montreal. They're great. They were such a fun time and there's all these great venues in Montreal that I used to go to. And all the disco music from the '70s and '80s and stuff. Ah … When I'm doing housework today, I put my earphones in and that's what I'm listening to when I'm doing housework. It makes the time go by. [D: It takes you back to those-] It does, yeah it does. (Robert)

At this point in the chapter, I further consider how memories, stories and artifacts from the past become part of our comfort zones in the sense that they sustain us and make life feel more liveable in the present (Cvetkovich, 2003; Sedgwick, 2003). Cvetkovich (2003) emphasizes the importance of ephemera to gay and lesbian archives and notes that such archives are often composed of donations from "private collectors who have saved the ephemeral evidence of gay and lesbian life – both personal and public – because it might otherwise disappear" (p. 243). Thinking about this passage in relation to my interviews, I am interested in the way that ephemeral materials and events and places that no longer exist as such function in the accounts of my participants. The way that Robert talks about feeling connected to and sustained by his memories of Montreal and his return to that time through music is one example of this. However, it is not just our own memories or encounters with traces of queerness that have the potential to affect and sustain us in the present. In what follows, I consider how participants' sense of place is also affected by their knowledge of a "queer history of Stratford". Thinking about the places that make up participants' comfort zones, it is interesting to note that participants tend to talk about a few specific places around Stratford as notably LGBTQ+ friendly spaces. For example, when Drew talks about organizing events in the early 1990s, he notes that they held their fundraisers at a particular bar that no longer exists called Down the Street. Drew and other participants discuss Down the Street as somewhere those "in the know" recognize(d) as a gay/lesbian friendly bar. It is significant that the memory of places like Down the Street provide participants with a sense that establishments have existed in Stratford that are, to some degree, "known" around the area as an LGBTQ+ friendly spaces. Beyond having provided physical space for people to congregate and/or serving as some kind of recognition of LGBTQ+ friendliness and presence in the area, Down the Street was also a venue for LGBTQ+ related events in the past. Even though the bar itself is no longer in operation, the fact that multiple participants brought it up as a notable place speaks to its lingering effects. The memories and sense of recognition or inclusion that this bar provided contributed to some folks' comfort zones in the past and continues to exist as part of some participants' comfort zones in the present.

In both the process of doing these interviews and doing outreach and organizing for Stratford Pride Week 2018, I had the opportunity to learn more about what I call "the

queer history of Stratford" and the locations that people have used to congregate over the years. Being privy to snippets of such history is not just interesting or relevant to what I am writing about but is a way of accessing a sense of connection and comfort. Knowing that these traces and histories of queerness exist undermines the attempts of some folks to make LGBTQ+ people feel out of place in the area. Thinking about what memories of Down the Street continue to do, as well as how Robert's memories sustain him in the present, I want to consider how a queer history of Stratford might offer a kind of sustenance both to those who lived it at the time and those who did not. Cvetkovich's (2003) work on the "power of archives in community formation" (Doylen, 2006, 553) informs my understanding of how collecting moments, events, memories, and other traces of LGBTQ+ life and networking in the area can contribute to a sense of community and belonging that extends beyond the "here and now" (Muñoz, 2009). Collecting these archives makes it possible to imagine a trajectory of queerness through time and space in a way that fosters a sense of connection and belonging among LGBTQ+ people who currently live in the Stratford area. Based on the potential significance and reparative functions of a "queer history of Stratford", one of my suggestions for future work and action is to work on building a collective and accessible archive that documents and explores such a history. Collecting these histories and memories raises awareness that there were LGBTQ+ bodies here in the past, and they had some kind of connection to one another. As I discuss in Chapter 4 in particular, moments of connection to and the possibility of moments of future connection with other LGBTQ+ people are exciting and, indeed, sustaining for many participants. These moments, which include experiences of subversively seeing and being seen by other LGBTQ+ people in ways that are not necessarily legible to cis, heterosexual people matter to participants and can function as part of their comfort zones, part of what sustains them. Following from this, it makes sense that connections with the past and traces of queerness in the past matter for and potentially serve to sustain LGBTQ+ folks in the present.

6.7   Queer(ing) Spaces

The way that several participants talk specifically about how particular places are owned or run by LGBTQ+ people reinforces that knowing people and being known is central to

LGBTQ+ experiences in the Stratford area. While this does not necessarily mean that participants are frequenting these places on a regular basis, they often make note of specific places they know are either LGBTQ+ owned, run or notably LGBTQ+ friendly by virtue of practice, vibe, having a gender-neutral bathroom or simply being a place where LGBTQ+ folks gather or have gathered in the past. Like a shared knowledge of Down the Street, this comes with its own affective charge – being "in the know" about queer owned and LGBTQ+ friendly spaces both marks one as part of a local LGBTQ+ network and also reaffirms those spaces as known LGBTQ+ friendly spaces. Against this shared knowledge of LGBTQ+ friendly spaces, however, it is interesting to observe that participants do not frame any spaces in the area as explicitly or enduringly queer-specific. I want to consider how "queer space" is being conceptualized in these discussions because, as I examine in my theoretical framework, the question of what makes a space queer is not a simple one.

Based on the way that particular "LGBTQ+ friendly" bars or cafes are discussed by participants as safe, comfortable and run by LGBTQ+ people or allies suggests that these factors alone do not qualify a space to be explicitly "queer". Drawing on my theoretical framework and work on what it might mean to talk about a "queer space", I contend that the way participants tend to use "queer space" in our conversations often refers to an enduring, visibly LGBTQ+ space that might look like Glad Day Bookstore in Toronto, which is mentioned explicitly by several participants. Within literature on queer space and human geography, conceptualizations of queer space as enduring and visible – as successful reterritorializations of heterosexual space – are considered limited (Oswin, 2008). One of the ways in which such conceptualizations are limited is that they make it more difficult to recognize the kinds of "little circles" and networks that participants talk about belonging to as queer spaces or queer communities.

In Chapter 4, I consider how Patrick talks about how he does not think there is necessarily a gay community in the area because everyone "socializes in their own little circle" and there is no specific area where gay people hang out. Gray's (2009) work on her participants' use of strategies of "circulation rather than congregation" informs my understanding of queer space as made up not of enduring, identifiable, physical spaces,

but of shifting and unfixed comfort zones and the ways, times, places and moments in which comfort zones coalesce. Patrick's comment, which is reinforced by other participants, suggests that while there is a lack of visible, permanent space that is easily mapped and found, there are many informal networks which characterize LGBTQ+ social life and community in the area. As I suggest in Chapters 4 and 5 and in this chapter, "little circles" of queerness sustain life in the area or create a sense of liveability in the area both among people who participate in them and also potentially to people who are aware and affected by knowledge of their current or past existence. Further, these "little circles" and groups of queer folks who congregate in different places around the area has the potential to *queer* space as they encounter and exist in it as a group. Such queering practices may look like LGBTQ+ people collecting and taking up space in public and/or private places around the Stratford area; for example, the Masonic Hall becomes queer on the nights that it is rented as a venue for a drag show. Again, the lack of clarity about whether or not, or to what extent, the area and Stratford in particular has "queer space" or "queer community" is bound up with theoretical discussions about how we conceptualize places. Drawing on Oswin (2008) and queer geographers who argue that spaces are not heterosexual or queer but are constantly in the process of becoming or being claimed as heterosexual or queer, for example, opens up possibilities for locating all kinds of spaces that become, temporally and temporarily, queer.

When I discussed some of my findings from this research at a talk in early December 2020[85], one of the attendees, during the question-and-answer period, expressed a desire to see the Stratford area become a space that is safer and more comfortable for all LGBTQ+ folks. I understand the notion of the entirety of the Stratford area being or becoming a safe or comfortable space for LGBTQ+ people as utopic (Muñoz, 2009). Such a vision is a formulation of a "then and there" that is a divergent from a "here and now" (Muñoz, 2009) where participants and particularly trans and non-binary participants do *not* feel comfortable and safe everywhere and at all times in the Stratford area. In articulating a vision of a "there and then" wherein LGBTQ+ people feel

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[85] I discuss this presentation in more detail in the coda.

comfortable and safe in the Stratford area, we are presented with the task of trying to understand the sources of discomfort and what sustains a sense of feeling unsafe among LGBTQ+ people, what needs to change, and what kind of action will bring about that change. As I consider throughout this thesis, this is not a simple task. Further, while there is a sense among my participants that sexuality and gender affect their experiences in complicated ways, it is paramount to recognize the concomitant ways that other facets of participants' subjectivities, contexts and experiences affect their sexuality and gender as well as their sense of place, belonging, comfort and safety.

6.8   Conclusion

Thinking further and more concretely about what makes the area liveable for participants, I consider how several participants talk about their desire for more centralized information about LGBTQ+ friendly spaces and services in the area. Steven talks frequently about his church and his connection to the church, including how researching churches and assessing how open and welcoming they seem factored into his discussions about where to move before choosing Stratford. The way that Steven talks about consulting church webpages to assess how open and welcoming they appear points to the way that, for many LGBTQ+ folks, doing research and deliberately thinking about which places seem more likely to be safe and comfortable is an important strategy of resilience. This not only speaks to the kind of work that LGBTQ+ folks engage in to find places where they can thrive and belong, but also to the importance of being an active and visible ally. If churches and other community organizations and service providers are LGBTQ+ friendly and are engaged in work that includes and/or supports LGBTQ+ people, it is meaningful and useful for them to be explicit about this in their websites and outreach materials. Several participants express that it is difficult and sometimes stressful not knowing if people or places are going to be accepting. One place to start in terms of making the area more liveable is to look for ways to make it as clear as possible that an organization, space or service is LGBTQ+ friendly and more importantly, making it as clear as possible what that means: whether that is being gender affirming, non-judgmental, working to normalize pronoun talk, the presence of gender-neutral bathrooms, ongoing education and awareness of LGBTQ+ issues, or working to be aware

of how heteronormativity and other systems shape experiences and practices. Further, it is also important to think about how to find ways and spaces to educate straight and/or folks about what their role in creating more LGBTQ+ friendly spaces and communities might be, and/or what it might look like to become open to vulnerable recognition. This focus on finding meaningful, consistent ways to communicate information about LGBTQ+ friendly services and spaces is paramount because of the inconsistency with which participants know about services, spaces, organizations, events that are geared toward LGBTQ+ people in the area. While some participants are tapped into informal networks and may have reliable ways of locating information about events, services and organizations, other participants clearly are not and are in particular need of a more centralized, accessible way of accessing this type of information.

While my focus in this thesis is on what makes the area liveable, some participants, including the phase two participants, do not want to continue to live in the area. Notably, while a few participants do talk about how being LGBTQ+ factors into their decision to not live in the Stratford area, that is not the only motivating reason to leave. Furthermore, other participants talk about how being LGBTQ+ is part of the reason why they moved *to* the Stratford area. As I hope is apparent in my discussion of participants' accounts, it is far more complicated than "this area is liveable for LGBTQ+ people" or that it is not. Significantly, among the majority of participants who grew up in the area and left at some point to live elsewhere, their initial move elsewhere was typically motivated, at least in part, by the desire to go to post-secondary education, which often requires that one leaves the area or has the ability to regularly commute to a nearby city like London or Kitchener/Waterloo. While some of these participants talk to varying degrees about how their being LGBTQ+ also affected their decision to leave, it is not the sole driving factor. Further, several participants returned to the Stratford area after finishing school for reasons including wanting to be closer to family and needing to live with family.

Finally, a sense that LGBTQ+ people are lucky to be in Canada informs the way we are allowed to ask for community. The very notion that, as Robert articulates, "we're not fighting for our rights" speaks to a level of security and protection afforded to at least

cis gay men, in Canada. Of course, it is important that LGBTQ+ people have many legal rights in Canada. It is important that there are protections that ensure we can have jobs and housing, that we are not subject to discrimination and (in most places) conversion therapy. As several of my participants emphasized, "we are lucky to live in Canada". However, I think putting into context the reality that we are told to be grateful to have basic rights and protections is vital in conversations about acceptance and community. We are lucky, but does that mean we cannot be critical? I know very well the vitriol with which some people respond to Canadian pride parades and academic or journalistic interrogations of LGBTQ+ acceptance in Canada through my experiences doing this research. In response to interviews I have done with local newspapers and in any local coverage of LGBTQ+ related events or pride parades in local communities, commenters focus on the fact that LGBTQ+ people are "complaining" about our experiences. The way that this bolsters the common discourse of "you are so lucky to live here, why do you need pride?" is tricky and more importantly, underwrites the "live and let live" constructs I discuss throughout this thesis. I do not want to minimize that there are legal protections in Canada and that does make us lucky to live here compared to elsewhere where LGBTQ+ people have few or no legal protections. However, I think maintaining the context of this discussion and the unequal liberal humanist framework from which it stems is important. Further, the notion that LGBTQ+ folks are lucky to live in Canada can reinforce homonationalist discourses about the state of homophobia elsewhere (Puar, 2007, 2013). Without discounting the (unevenly distributed and accessed) privilege that comes with living in Canada, I suggest that we should be able to envision more radical, queerer futures where tolerance and grudging acceptance are not the end goal.

7   Coda

On December 3, 2020 I had the opportunity to present an overview of this research to a group of approximately 35 people who work in the Huron Perth region in the social services, healthcare and public service industries during a talk organized by the Huron Perth Health Alliance. In that presentation, I provided an overview of this research with a focus on heteronormativity, complicating our understanding of coming out or being out, identifying microaggressions, and the way that participants talk about how change happens in the area and the kind of change they want to see in the area. This presentation gave me a sense that many people working in social services, healthcare and the public service are committed to showing up for LGBTQ+ people, want to be active allies, and are working to provide services and create spaces that are LGBTQ+ friendly. However, my participants' accounts suggest that they are not necessarily aware of such friendliness, are unwilling to assume it, and that they do not have a clear way to find out about LGBTQ+ friendly services and spaces in the area.

Thinking about this presentation in relation to vulnerable recognition, I posit that this talk serves as an example of how vulnerable recognition happens in practice. In the space of our Zoom meeting, these professionals and service providers, many of whom are in positions of authority and are experienced and knowledgeable in their fields, recognized that there are gaps in their knowledge and service provision when it comes to LGBTQ+ people. As a presenter, I was not attempting to speak for all LGBTQ+ people in the Stratford area, but rather to start conversations about heteronormativity and to initiate discussions about pronoun talk and other practices that encourage a shift toward vulnerable recognition. Those who attended the talk engaged in pronoun talk and asked questions that took them out of their comfort zones. By being open to becoming vulnerable and by recognizing that the process of shifting their practices and policies to be trans-inclusive, for example, is a process that requires not only more and/or better recognition of trans folks, but also implicates the professionals and service providers themselves as they engage in pronoun talk and challenges their own assumptions about gender expression and the ease with which they can make assumptions about people's genders, bodies, sexualities and concomitant health needs.

So much has changed since I did my first interview for this research in June 2019. As society continues to adapt to the pandemic and as our connections to others become disproportionately digital, our sense of place, community, and the ways in which we organize and network are changing. It is perhaps more important than ever to find ways to support local LGBTQ+ folks' ability to connect to the communities, (online) events, services, resources and so forth that are available for them. In December 2020, the London Community Foundation and the United Way Elgin Middlesex announced funding for a variety of initiatives to support the wellbeing of people in the London area, several of which service the Stratford area (Richmond, 2020). One of the organizations that received funds is the Rainbow Optimist Club of Southwestern Ontario (Richmond, 2020). The funds will support online community for LGBTQ folks in the area in the form of online panels and events like the "Drag Queen Story Time", which the club previously hosted in Stratford and St. Marys. Again, the challenge becomes finding ways to connect folks with these events. A focus on communication and finding meaningful, consistent ways to share information about LGBTQ+ friendly services and spaces is paramount because of the inconsistent and minimal knowledge among my participants of services, spaces, organizations and events that are geared toward LGBTQ+ people in the area. While some participants are tapped into informal networks and may have reliable ways of locating information about events, services and organizations, other participants are not and often are in more need of a centralized, accessible way of accessing this type of information. Older participants in particular talked about not being tech-savvy and not accessing online community, which may result in increased isolation as most organizing moves online during the pandemic.

My findings reveal that sense of place is meaningfully affected by gender and sexuality and that trans and non-binary participants express feeling less at ease than cis participants. Further findings indicate participants express a desire for more consistent and supported services and spaces in the area as well as more space to connect with other LGBTQ+ people. My findings also suggest that dominant coming out discourses inadequately encapsulate my participants' experiences, which involve continually negotiating their (in)visibility and (in)tolerance in a heteronormative society. Further, this work helps to counter an overemphasis on urban space in research on LGBTQ+

experiences (Stone, 2018). In closing, I suggest that future research would valuably look at communication practices with the goal of identifying strategies for communicating and networking more effectively with and among LGBTQ2S+ people in the area[86]. Future research should also work to include a more diverse sample and to center the effects of cisnormativity on LGBTQ2S+ folks' experiences of sense of place, community, belonging and wellbeing in the area.

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[86] I've deliberately written LGBTQ2S+ here because while my research did not include two-spirit folks, future research ideally would.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Phase 1 interview guide

MOBILE INTERVIEW GUIDE

Beginning of the interview:

Question: Why did you choose to start the interview in this particular place?

Prompt: What does this place mean to you? How would you describe this place? Why is this place significant to you? What does this place evoke for you?

Question: Do you come here often? Where are you usually going?

Prompt: What are some of your memories of walking here or being here? What does this place mean to you? How do you usually move through this place (car, walking, etc.)?

Question: How would you describe life in Perth County?

Prompt: Or more specifically in X? (the location/town we are specifically in within Perth County)

Question: Can you tell me about where you grew up?

Prompt: What was the street you grew up on like?

Middle of the interview:

Question: What is it like to live here?

Question: Why did you move here? OR Why do you choose to continue living here?

Prompt: What do you like about living here?

Question: Tell me about the places you've lived throughout your life?

Prompt: What was the best place you've ever lived? What was the worst place you've ever lived? Where did you go to high school?

Question: How do you feel about living here?

Prompt: Why do you live here? What do you like about living here? What do
               you dislike about living here? Would you want to live elsewhere?

Question: Tell me about the places you go throughout your week

Prompt: Where do you go? Where do you not go? Where might you meet
               people you know? Where do you grocery shop? Where do you go
               to the bank? Where do you meet people and socialize?

Question: Do you work in Perth County?

Prompt: What kind of work do you do? Do you travel for work? Is where you
               work part of the reason you live in Perth County?

Question: Do you use or access services in this area?

Prompt: Services could mean health care services, community centre,
               classes, etc. What are your experiences accessing services? Do
               you have to travel to access them/are they accessible for you? Are
               you satisfied with your experience?
               If you don't access services, why not? Are there services you wish
               you could access?

Question: Thinking about some of the places we just discussed, do you
               consider yourself out in those places?

Prompt: In all of those places? In many/some/none? What does being out
               mean to you?

Question: Which places do you like to go to the most?

Prompt: Where is your favourite place in this area?

Question: Tell me about how you get to the places you go

Prompt: Do you drive? Does someone else drive you? Do you take public
               transportation? Can you get to the places you need/want to go? Is it
               expensive?

Question: Do you spend most of your time in Perth County? Where else do
               you go?

Prompt: Do you travel? Do you visit other cities/towns nearby? Frequently?
               Why?

Question: Do you ever attend LGBTQ or queer events?

Prompt: What kind of events? Did you travel to attend these events? Can you tell me what those experiences were like?

Question: Are you a part of online LGBTQ communities or groups?

Prompt: What kind of groups/communities? What do these groups/communities mean to you or provide for you? If not, why might that be?

Place-Specific Questions:

Question: Do you feel comfortable here?

Prompt: Why? Why not? What do you think would make you more comfortable?

Question: What does being here make you think of?

Prompt: Do you like being here?

Question: What do you think it means to belong to a community? Do you belong to a community or to communities?

Prompt: Do you think there are communities that you are not a part of? Do you want to be a part of a community?

Question: Do you think Perth County has an LGBTQ or queer community?

Prompt: If it exists, how would you define or characterize such a community? Do you feel like you're a part of it?

Question: Would you feel comfortable holding a partner's hand here?

Prompts: Are there places around here where you would/would not hold a partner's hand or engage in other displays of affection?

Question: What is your opinion of the way that LGBTQ folks are perceived here?

Prompt: Do you think there are differences in the way that gay or lesbian folks are perceived here compared to trans folks?

Question: Do you think that this area is tolerant of difference?

Prompt: What do you think it means to be tolerant of difference?

Final questions:

Question: What makes a place meaningful for you?

Question: Is there anything else you want to add about what do you think about living in Perth County or your experiences living in Perth County?

Question: What did you think about the mobile interview method?

Question: Is there anything else you want to talk about?

Prompt: Is there anywhere we couldn't go? Is there anything you thought we might talk about that we didn't? Is there anything you want to say?

Question: Would you be willing to take a copy of the Letter of Information and Consent for this project to give to someone you know who might be interested in participating?

Appendix B: Phase 1 letter of information and consent

Western
LETTER OF INFORMATION

Study Title:
Sense of Place Among the LGBTQ Population in Rural Ontario: A Case Study of Perth County

Name of Principal Investigator:
Dr. Susan Knabe

Contact Information:

Dr. Susan Knabe – Phone: [redacted] Email: [redacted]
Dayna Prest - Phone: [redacted] Email: [redacted]

Name of Sponsor:
Department of Women's Studies and Feminist Research, Faculty of Arts, Western University

Conflict of Interest:
None declared

What is the purpose of this study?
You are invited to participate in a research study on lesbian, gay, bi, trans and queer (LGBTQ) folks' sense of place in Perth County. Within academic literature and popular representations of small towns and rural areas, there remains an assumption that these spaces are less tolerant of diversity.

The purpose of the current study is to examine LGBTQ folks' sense of place in Perth County, which is measured by how attached one is to a place, how satisfied one is with a place, and one's sense of community in relation to a place. This study seeks to understand how LGBTQ folks relate to their everyday places, how their identities are affected by places, and how they experience belonging or a lack of belonging in relation to local places and communities. By thinking about sense of place among LGBTQ folks in this way, this study engages with perceptions of areas like Perth County as heterosexual, white and conservative and is interested in how belonging operates in relation to place.

What Are Mobile Interviews?
The purpose of a mobile interview is to have participants take a researcher on a tour of their neighbourhood, their street, their town, or any other place that is

important to them within Perth County. As the interview progresses, the researcher will ask questions to further understand what participants have to say about places and what places mean to them. In an area like Perth County, it is possible that the places people visit on an everyday basis or that are significant to them are not within walking distance or that some folks are not able to walk long distances. Mobile interviews can also involve participants being driven by the researcher between locations.

How long will I be involved in this study?
You will be required to participate in one mobile interview between January – February 2020 and one additional mobile interview between May 2020 – June 2020. Each interview will last between 45 minutes – 1.5 hours.

What will happen during this study?
As previously stated, the study involves ten participants completing two mobile interviews each. Due to the focus of this study being on LGBTQ folks' sense of place in Perth County, some of the questions asked will focus on gender and sexuality. With mobile interviews, parts of the interview will happen in more public places. If at any time a participant feels uncomfortable discussing interview content in a particular place, they can request to move to a less public location, including the car. Participants are never required to respond to any question and can request to move to another topic at any point.

Each interview will be audio recorded to allow the researcher to transcribe the interviews. Participants will have the opportunity to review the transcripts of their interviews. OWL will be used to provide participants secure access to their transcripts for review.

What are the study procedures?
If you decide to participate in this project, the researcher will contact you by phone or email to determine a date, time and meeting point for our first interview. On the day of the interview, you will meet at the predetermined location, review this document, and the researcher will answer any questions you have about mobile interviews and this study before beginning the mobile interview.

In May 2020, you will receive a follow up call to set up your second walking interview. The second interview will take place between May 2020 – June 2020.

What are the risks of participating in this study?
Due the nature of mobile interviews, information will be collected about the route taken during the interview and the places discussed during the interview. While pseudonyms will be used in place of names, places and identifying features to protect anonymity, indirectly identifiable information will be elicited in these interviews. Participants will have the opportunity to review their transcripts following the interview.

Further, participation in any research process involves being asked to reflect on one's experiences in a way that can cause discomfort for some people.

There are no serious risks involved in participating in this study.

Resources and Supports:
If you do experience any discomfort, the following resources are available:

Family Services Perth Huron
Website: https://familyservicesperth-huron.ca/
Phone Number: [redacted]

Spectrum (Waterloo Region's Rainbow Community Space):
Website: ourspectrum.com
Phone Number: [redacted]

Transgender Communities Health Services at the London InterCommunity health Centre:
Website: http://lihc.on.ca/programs/transhealthcare/
Phone: [redacted]

Youthline (serves folks age 29 & under):
Website: https://www.youthline.ca/
Text: [redacted]
Call: [redacted]

For more resources (including social support) available in the London area, visit this website:

http://lihc.on.ca/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/2018-12-LGBTQ2S-Community-Resource-List-for-London.pdf

What are the benefits of participating in this study?
The benefits to participating in this study include contributing to knowledge production about the lives of rural and small-town LGBTQ folks, who remain underrepresented in academic and popular discourse. This study also offers participants the opportunity to share their experiences in Perth County and to contribute to a research process that aims to make policy recommendations based on findings about LGBTQ folks' experiences of belonging and not belonging in Perth County.

Can participants choose to leave the study?
If you decide to withdraw from the study, you have the right to request withdrawal of information collected about you. If you wish to have your information removed please let the researcher know and your information will be destroyed from our

records. Once the study has been published, we will not be able to withdraw your information.

How will participants' information be kept confidential?
Transcripts and any data collected through the research process, including participant's names and contact information, will be accessible only to the Principal Investigator, the Research Assistant, and to the participants themselves upon request.

If the results of the study are published, your name will not be used. Pseudonyms will be used to preserve anonymity and any identifying personal details will be altered to preserve anonymity. Direct quotes from transcripts may be used in publications or presentations, but any identifying details will be altered, and participants will have the opportunity to review transcripts once they are completed. OWL will be used to provide participants secure access to their transcripts for review.

The researcher will keep all personal information about participants in a secure and confidential location for 7 years. A list linking pseudonyms with participant's names and contact information will be kept by the researcher in a secure place, separate from the study file. All data will be stored using standard safety measures, including password protection and secure devices.

This is a study of Perth County and because it is a smaller area, there is a chance that you may be identified by someone as a participant in this study. While we will do our best to protect your information and anonymity, there is no guarantee that we will be able to do so. Representatives of Western University's Non-Medical Research Ethics Board may require access to study-related records to monitor the conduct of the research.

Dissemination of Study Results:
At the end of this study, the researchers will publish a whitepaper directed at local governments and service providers that will address any issues that emerge and that will make recommendations on ways to facilitate stronger community belonging or sense of place in Perth County among the LGBTQ population. The researchers will share any final products with participants.

What are the rights of participants?
Your participation in this study is voluntary. You may decide not to be in this study. Even if you consent to participate you have the right to not answer individual questions or to withdraw from the study at any time. You do not waive any legal right by consenting to this study.

Whom do participants contact for questions?

If you have any questions about the study, please contact the Principal Investigator, Dr. Susan Knabe, [redacted], email: [redacted] or the Research Assistant, Dayna Prest, [redacted], [redacted].

If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant or the conduct of this study, you may contact The Office of Human Research Ethics ([redacted], email: [redacted]. This office oversees the ethical conduct of research studies and is not part of the study team. Everything that you discuss will be kept confidential.

This letter is yours to keep for future reference.

Western

CONSENT FORM

Study Title: Sense of Place Among the LGBTQ Population in Rural Ontario: A Case Study of Perth County

Principal Investigator: Dr. Susan Knabe, Associate Professor in the Department of Women's Studies and Feminist Research at Western University - Phone: [redacted] Email: [redacted]
Research Assistant: Dayna Prest, PhD Candidate in the Department of Women's Studies and Feminist Research at Western University - Phone: [redacted] Email: [redacted]

I _____, agree to participate in this research study conducted by Dayna Prest and the Department of Women's Studies and Feminist Research, Faculty of Arts, at Western University, under the supervision of Dr. Susan Knabe.

If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant or the conduct of this study, you may contact The Office of Human Research Ethics [redacted], email: [redacted]. This office oversees the ethical conduct of research studies and is not part of the study team. Everything you discuss will be kept confidential.

There are two copies of the consent form, one of which is mine to keep.

I have read the Letter of Information, have had the nature of the study explained to me and I agree to participate. All questions have been answered to my satisfaction.

I agree to allow anonymized direct quotes to be used in publications resulting from this study.

YES ☐ NO ☐

I agree to be driven by the researcher as part of this study.
YES ☐ NO ☐

_____   _____
_____
Participant's Name (print)   Participant's signature   Date

My signature means that I have explained the study to the participant named above. I have answered all questions.

_____   _____
_____
Researcher's Name (print)   Researcher's signature   Date

Appendix C: Phase 1 recruitment poster

PARTICIPANTS NEEDED FOR A STUDY

**Sense of Place Among the LGBTQ Population in Rural Ontario:
A Case Study of Perth County**

- Do you identify as LGBTQ?
- Are you a minimum of 18 years of age?
- Do you currently live in Perth County?

If you are interested and agree to participate you would be asked to participate in one mobile interview between January – February 2020 and one mobile interview between May 2020 – June 2020. Instead of meeting in a room to conduct the interview, we will meet at a location in your neighbourhood and will conduct the interview on the move.

Your participation would involve two sessions and each session will run from 45 minutes – 1.5 hours.
Interviews will be audio-recorded.

For more information about this study, or to volunteer for this study, please contact:
Dayna Prest, PhD Candidate
Department of Women's Studies and Feminist Research
[redacted] or
[redacted]

Appendix D: Phase 2 letter of information and consent

LETTER OF INFORMATION

Study Title:
Sense of Place Among the LGBTQ Population in Rural Ontario: A Case Study

Name of Principal Investigator:
Dr. Susan Knabe

Contact Information:

Dr. Susan Knabe – Phone: [redacted] Email: [redacted]
Dayna Prest - Phone: [redacted] Email: [redacted]

Name of Sponsor:
Department of Women's Studies and Feminist Research, Faculty of Arts,
Western University

Conflict of Interest:
None declared

What is the purpose of this study?
You are invited to participate in a research study on lesbian, gay, bi, trans and queer (LGBTQ) folks' sense of place in Perth County. Within academic literature and popular representations of small towns and rural areas, there remains an assumption that these spaces are less tolerant of diversity.

The purpose of the current study is to examine LGBTQ folks' sense of place in Perth County, which is measured by how attached one is to a place, how satisfied one is with a place, and one's sense of community in relation to a place. This study seeks to understand how LGBTQ folks relate to their everyday places, how their identities are affected by places, and how they experience belonging or a lack of belonging in relation to local places and communities. By thinking about sense of place among LGBTQ folks in this way, this study engages with perceptions of areas like Perth County as heterosexual, white and conservative and is interested in how belonging operates in relation to place.

During the first phase of this study, I conducted walking interviews with LGBTQ folks living in Perth County. For this phase of the study, I am conducting interviews with LGBTQ folks who have lived in Perth County, but do not currently

live there. By incorporating the perspectives of people who have moved away, I aim to offer a range of perspectives on LGBTQ sense of place in Perth County.

How long will I be involved in this study?
You will be required to participate in one interview between December 2019 – February 2020. Each interview will last between 45 minutes – 1.5 hours.

What will happen during this study?
This study involves two phases. The first phase of the study involved participants completing two mobile interviews each. This phase of the study involves participants completing one interview each.

Each interview will be audio recorded to allow the researcher to transcribe the interviews. Participants will have the opportunity to review the transcripts of their interviews. OWL will be used to provide participants secure access to their transcripts for review.

What are the study procedures?
If you decide to participate in this project, the researcher will contact you by phone or email to determine a date, time and location for our interview. On the day of the interview, you will meet at the predetermined location, review this document, and the researcher will answer any questions you have about the study before beginning the interview.

What are the risks of participating in this study?
While pseudonyms will be used in place of names, places and identifying features to protect anonymity, indirectly identifiable information could be elicited in these interviews. Participants will have the opportunity to review their transcripts following the interview.

Further, participation in any research process involves being asked to reflect on one's experiences in a way that can cause discomfort for some people.

There are no serious risks involved in participating in this study.

Resources and Supports:
If you do experience any discomfort, the following resources are available:

Family Services Perth Huron
Website: https://familyservicesperth-huron.ca/
Phone Number: [redacted]

Spectrum (Waterloo Region's Rainbow Community Space):
Website: ourspectrum.com
Phone Number: [redacted]

Transgender Communities Health Services at the London InterCommunity health Centre:
Website: http://lihc.on.ca/programs/transhealthcare/
Phone: [redacted]

Youthline (serves folks age 29 & under):
Website: https://www.youthline.ca/
Text: [redacted]
Call: [redacted]

For more resources (including social support) available in the London area, visit this website:

http://lihc.on.ca/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/2018-12-LGBTQ2S-Community-Resource-List-for-London.pdf

For more resources available in the Toronto area, visit this website:

https://www.the519.org/programs/category/resources

What are the benefits of participating in this study?
The benefits to participating in this study include contributing to knowledge production about LGBTQ sense of place in a rural/small town area. This study also offers participants the opportunity to share their experiences in Perth County and to contribute to a research process that aims to make policy recommendations based on findings about LGBTQ folks' experiences of belonging and not belonging.

Can participants choose to leave the study?
If you decide to withdraw from the study, you have the right to request withdrawal of information collected about you. If you wish to have your information removed please let the researcher know and your information will be destroyed from our records. Once the study has been published, we will not be able to withdraw your information.

How will participants' information be kept confidential?
Transcripts and any data collected through the research process, including participant's names and contact information, will be accessible only to the Principal Investigator, the Research Assistant, and to the participants themselves upon request.

If the results of the study are published, your name will not be used. Pseudonyms will be used to preserve anonymity and any identifying personal details will be altered to preserve anonymity. Direct quotes from transcripts may be used in publications or presentations, but any identifying details will be altered, and participants will have the opportunity to review transcripts once they are completed. OWL will be used to provide participants secure access to their transcripts for review.

The researcher will keep all personal information about participants in a secure and confidential location for 7 years. A list linking pseudonyms with participant's names and contact information will be kept by the researcher in a secure place, separate from the study file. All data will be stored using standard safety measures, including password protection and secure devices.

This is a study of Perth County and because they are smaller areas, there is a chance that you may be identified by someone as a participant in this study. While we will do our best to protect your information and anonymity, there is no guarantee that we will be able to do so. Representatives of Western University's Non-Medical Research Ethics Board may require access to study-related records to monitor the conduct of the research.

Dissemination of Study Results:
At the end of this study, the researchers will publish a whitepaper directed at local governments and service providers that will address any issues that emerge and that will make recommendations on ways to facilitate stronger community belonging or sense of place in Perth County among the LGBTQ population. The researchers will share any final products with participants.

What are the rights of participants?
Your participation in this study is voluntary. You may decide not to be in this study. Even if you consent to participate you have the right to not answer individual questions or to withdraw from the study at any time. You do not waive any legal right by consenting to this study.

Whom do participants contact for questions?

If you have any questions about the study, please contact the Principal Investigator, Dr. Susan Knabe, [redacted], email: [redacted] or the Research Assistant, Dayna Prest, [redacted], [redacted]

If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant or the conduct of this study, you may contact The Office of Human Research Ethics [redacted], email: [redacted]. This office oversees the ethical conduct of research studies and is not part of the study team. Everything that you discuss will be kept confidential.

This letter is yours to keep for future reference.

Western

CONSENT FORM

Study Title: Sense of Place Among the LGBTQ Population in Rural Ontario: A Case Study

Principal Investigator: Dr. Susan Knabe, Associate Professor in the Department of Women's Studies and Feminist Research at Western University - Phone: [redacted] Email: [redacted]
Research Assistant: Dayna Prest, PhD Candidate in the Department of Women's Studies and Feminist Research at Western University - Phone: [redacted] Email: [redacted]

I _____, agree to participate in this research study conducted by Dayna Prest and the Department of Women's Studies and Feminist Research, Faculty of Arts, at Western University, under the supervision of Dr. Susan Knabe.

If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant or the conduct of this study, you may contact The Office of Human Research Ethics [redacted], email: [redacted]. This office oversees the ethical conduct of research studies and is not part of the study team. Everything you discuss will be kept confidential.

There are two copies of the consent form, one of which is mine to keep.

I have read the Letter of Information, have had the nature of the study explained to me and I agree to participate. All questions have been answered to my satisfaction.

I agree to allow anonymized direct quotes to be used in publications resulting from this study.
 YES ☐ NO☐

_____   _____
Participant's Name (print)   Participant's signature   Date

My signature means that I have explained the study to the participant named above. I have answered all questions.

_____   _____
Researcher's Name (print)   Researcher's signature   Date

Appendix E: Phase 2 interview guide

INTERVIEW GUIDE

Perth County "Then":

Question: Where in Perth County did you live?

Question: When and for how long did you live there?

Prompt: Were you born there? When did you move there? During which years did you live there?

Question: Can you tell me about X [their specific location within Perth County]?

Prompt: What did you think about your neighbourhood? What are your strongest memories of living there?

Question: How would you describe life in Perth County while you were living there?

Prompt: What is it like to live there? What are your strongest memories of living in Perth County? What did it feel like? If someone said they were thinking of moving there and wanted to know more about it, what would you tell them?

Question: What was your experience like in high school?

Prompt: Where did you go to high school? What are your strongest memories of high school? Would you consider your high school experience a positive one?

Question: How would you describe your process of "coming out"?

Prompt: Do you prefer to use language other than "coming out"? How/when did you "come out"?

Question: Did you consider yourself "out" while you were living in Perth County?

Prompt: What does this mean to you? How did you identify? How do you identify now?

Question: What does being "out" mean to you?

Prompt: Do you think about being "out" or being visible? Does that change depending on where you are- here or Perth County for example?

Question: Did you know many other LGBTQ+ folks in Perth County while you were living there?

Prompt: What did the presence/lack of other LGBTQ+ folks mean to you?

Question: When did you move out of Perth County?

              If you have moved back and forth more than once, can you elaborate further on that?

Question: Why did you move out of Perth County?

Prompt: What were the motivating factors for your move? What was the process of deciding to move like? Was there a particular reason you chose to move to where you did? Did being LGBTQ affect this decision?

Question: How do you feel about having moved away?

Prompt: Do you regret moving away at all? What are your feelings about it?

Question: How do you think moving elsewhere changed who you are?

Prompt: Do you think this? If so, what kinds of changes have you observed and how might you explain them? If not, do you think there's a reason for that?

Question: Is there anything you miss about living in Perth County?

Prompt: What do you miss about it? This could be people, specific locations, activities, etc.

Perth County "Now":

Question: within)?   How often do you visit Perth County (or their specific location

Prompt: there   If you visit, what motivates your visits? Do you enjoy them? If not, is a particular reason?

Question: specific   How do you think things have changed in Perth County (or their location within) since you lived there?

Prompt: What do you think Perth County is like now?

Question: How do you think you've changed since you moved away from
Perth   County?

Prompt: Are you in a significantly different life stage now compared to then?
How   have things changed in your life?

Question: Do you consider yourself "out" in Perth County now?

Prompt: Do you consider yourself out in other places? What does it mean to you to be "out" in Perth County?

Question: What is your opinion of the way that LGBTQ folks are perceived in Perth County (or their specific location within)?

Prompt: Do you think there might be differences in the way that gay or lesbian folks are perceived there compared to trans folks?

Question: What is your opinion of the way that LGBTQ folks are perceived in Perth County now (or their specific location within) compared to when you lived there?

Question: What is your opinion of the way that LGBTQ folks are perceived in Perth County now (or their specific location within) compared to where you live now?

Question: Do you think Perth County (or their specific location within) has an LGBTQ or queer community?

Prompt: If community exists, how would you define or characterize such a community? Do you feel like you're a part of it or have been a part of it?

Question: Would you feel comfortable holding a partner's hand in Perth County (or their specific location within)?

Prompts: Would you think about PDA differently when you're in Perth County compared to when you're here?

Question: Do you think that Perth County (or their specific location within) is tolerant of difference?

Prompt: What do you think it means to be tolerant of difference?

Question: Would you consider moving back to Perth County?

Prompt: Is this something you want to do? Why or why not? What factors into this decision?

Question: What would have to change in order for you to move back?

LGBTQ Community:

Question: Do you ever attend LGBTQ events?

Prompt: What kind of events? Where do you go to these events? Can you tell me what those experiences were like?

Question: Have you attended any LGBTQ events in Perth County?

Prompt: If so, what was your experience? If not, have you heard about events there?

Question: Are you a part of online LGBTQ communities or groups?

Prompt: What kind of groups/communities? What do these groups/communities mean to you or provide for you? If not, why might that be?

Question: Do you feel like you are part of a queer or LGBTQ community?

Prompt: What does that mean for you? Do you think you have been in the past? Is this something you want?

Question: What do you think it means to belong to a community?

Question: Do you feel like there is an LGBTQ community (or communities) in Perth County?

Prompt: Do you feel like you are or have been part of such a community? What are the characteristics of such a community? If not, why do you think that is?

Final questions:

Question: What makes a place meaningful for you?

Prompt: Is Perth County meaningful for you?

Question: What does home mean to you?

Prompt: Is it a place? How specific of a place? Is it about the place or the people or something else? Where do you consider to be your home?

Question: Is there anything else you want to add about what do you think
              about Perth County or your experiences living in Perth County (or
              their specific location within)?

Question: Is there anything else you want to talk about?

Prompt: Is there anything you thought we might talk about that we didn't? Is
              there anything you want to say?

Appendix F: Phase 1 codebook

Name	Files	References
'being careful'	7	11
'if you know who's there & how to look for things'	4	11
'rural' or rural things	6	11
'small town'	10	25
'the country'	1	2
'too gay to function'	1	2
'unable to be myself'	5	11
'vibe' of a place	2	3
'we're just regular people'	2	2
'you do your thing, I'll do mine'	4	4
access to education	9	21
sex ed curriculum	4	9
access to entertainment or 'things to do'	13	27
access to health or medical info	7	17
access to services	18	95
help being 'elsewhere'	1	5
accessibility	9	22
activism	8	14
advice for others	3	4
age & LGBTQ+ acceptance	12	29
aging & getting older	9	20
alcohol or drug use	9	22
allies, discussions of allyship	8	12
animals	8	20
dogs!	4	13

Name	Files	References
awareness of visibility	16	48
awareness that 'being themselves' is 'risky'	14	37
barriers to organizing	6	17
lack of space for events	6	17
bars, queer bars as queer space or community	13	21
bathroom access issues	5	7
being 'self-sufficient'	2	3
being a feminist	2	2
being affected by violence, second hand	2	2
being identified properly	7	20
being read as 'young'	1	2
being known	4	12
bodily interruptions	4	8
body, embodiment	15	45
fat shaming	1	1
gay sitting	1	3
bullying, experience of	13	27
Canadian politics	4	6
changes perceived in Stratford	11	31
changing perceptions in Perth County	2	3
church	5	12
affirming church	2	4
church as community	3	7
cisnormativity	5	18
coming out, outness,	19	102

Name	Files	References
discussions around outness		
being outed against their will	3	10
passing, discussions of	5	11
communism and Marxism	2	10
comparing Calgary and Stratford	2	5
Comparing Toronto & Perth County	12	33
comparisons between Stratford and Guelph	2	7
comparisons between Stratford and Perth County	5	5
connection to community	15	110
connection to friends	18	97
'finding your people'	1	1
connection to land	2	3
connection to neighbourhood	12	30
connection to place, complicated	10	14
connections to family	17	105
importance of sibling connection	2	5
connections to other LGBTQ+ folks	20	127
consent, discussions about	3	10
conservative-ness of rural areas	4	6
creating space for questioning	2	2
cruising, discussions about	1	2

Name	Files	References
dating apps	8	11
dating experiences	12	28
relationship, discussions of their	14	41
de-politicization	2	3
death, loss	5	14
descriptions of intimate connections	3	3
desire	4	6
desire for community	16	68
desire for connection	7	18
desired events	12	34
discourses of choice or control	3	5
discussion about doing interviews	1	2
discussion of 'culture'	9	12
discussions about St. Marys	6	42
'St. Marys person'	3	4
walkability of St. Marys	1	1
discussions about the 'city'	8	19
discussions of other places they've lived	16	58
drag, discussions about drag	10	31
driving moments	6	12
driving, the ability to drive	19	38
eco issues	5	12
educating others about LGBTQ+ issues	4	19
elementary school, discussions of	5	5

Name	Files	References
embracing individuality, being confident	3	7
emotions in the interview	2	4
uncertainty	1	1
encounters with other people	8	11
events being alcohol centric	7	13
exclusivity of events	3	14
experiences of assault	1	2
experiences of being misgendered	6	26
exposure = acceptance	7	14
expression via clothing and style	5	19
haircuts, gender	2	2
family history	7	12
family support	14	46
farming, discussions of	3	24
fear of change	4	9
feeling alone because of gender identity	2	4
feeling alone because of sexuality	3	3
feeling comfortable	18	43
feeling fearful	4	8
fear of being read as predatory	1	1
feeling frustrated	7	20
feeling happy	3	4
feeling monitored	11	23
feeling relaxed, relieved	1	1

Name	Files	References
surveillance	7	12
feeling politicized	4	6
feeling dehumanized	1	1
feeling proud	2	3
feeling safe	12	19
feeling stressed	3	4
feeling supported	16	39
feeling surprised	7	7
feeling uncomfortable	10	33
feeling unsupported	7	14
French, bilingualism	3	3
gay straight alliances	10	15
gender discrimination	4	5
femme issues	1	1
gender theory	6	12
gender roles	2	2
going to University	10	17
growing up, experiences	16	49
Guelph	3	12
Hamilton	4	5
healthiness, discussions of	11	33
heteronormativity	16	39
high school experiences	19	72
changes perceived at their high school	9	12
history of Stratford	5	10
history of their home	5	7
HIV&AIDS	7	12

Name	Files	References
hobbies, discussions of	13	38
biking for lesiure	3	4
hockey, hockey kids	1	2
home	9	16
homelessness	2	5
homophobia	14	44
biphobia	1	1
homophobic and transphobic language	9	17
hopes for the future	11	19
how change happens	12	37
how long they've lived where they live	7	8
how people respond to difference	11	21
identity discussions	16	33
asexuality, mentions of	1	1
bisexuality	2	2
lesbian identity or politics	6	12
importance of context	5	9
importance of lgbtq visual cues (flags, etc.)	12	32
rainbow crosswalk	5	8
importance of sound, sound memories	2	2
Indigenous peoples, issues	3	5
Infinite Pride Stratford	6	19
intergenerational contact	7	9
internalized homophobia	5	6

Name	Files	References
invisibility	8	27
issues around mobility	10	27
issues with ID	2	7
issues with neighbours	6	6
Kitchener, Waterloo, Cambridge	8	16
lack of family support	2	5
lack of support network	6	9
LGBTQ+ community in the Perth County area	16	65
LGBTQ+ events in the Stratford area	17	63
lifestyle and place	17	57
pace of life	10	14
Perth County as 'quiet'	1	2
linking acceptance to space	7	13
linking acceptance to time	9	20
links between gender & sexuality	3	5
local community acceptance of LGBTQ folks	19	86
'open-minded'	2	2
backlash	1	1
protestors	2	2
London, references to	12	27
losing friends & family over being LGBTQ+	3	7
lucky to live in Canada	3	8
human rights, rights	1	1

Name	Files	References
making others uncomfortable	4	7
marriage laws	5	9
marriage, experiences of	5	14
media representations	9	19
celebrities	3	3
mental health	11	28
personal wellbeing	2	7
mentions of abusive relationship	3	4
mentions of relationship styles, polyamory, monogamy, etc.	3	4
mentions of self harm or suicide	3	4
mic awareness or worry	10	18
moments of misunderstanding	2	2
money, spending	14	55
multiculturalism	2	5
multiple communities or cultures within Stratford	6	18
business owners in Stratford	5	12
naming specific 'queer spaces' in the Stratford area	3	4
navigating around the Perth County area	16	35
navigating names & pronouns	7	42
need for change	11	22
need for queer space	4	15
normalizing pronouns	2	6

Name	Files	References
noteable language choice or use	6	7
online LGBTQ+ community	15	32
Ontario politics	8	18
parade experiences	8	17
PDA	11	17
pedophilia	1	1
perceptions of Perth County	8	22
perceptions of Stratford	15	131
'everybody kind of looks the same'	1	1
everyday experiences of Stratford	7	21
Stratford as 'behind the times'	4	5
place & gender	8	31
place & sexuality	12	22
place attachment	18	81
emotional connections to place	8	13
favourite places	12	19
hometown	4	4
lack of place attachment	3	7
'I'm just not really made for this place'	1	1
nostalgia, missing a place	8	11
rooted-ness	2	4

Name	Files	References
significant places	15	32
supporting local	4	4
place meaning	15	28
place satisfaction	14	44
employment opportunities	9	16
place dis-satisfaction	8	23
'fuck being a gay in Stratford'	1	2
feeling stuck	2	7
feeling trapped	3	6
wanting to leave the area	3	4
police, experiences with, discussions of	5	8
political issues, tensions	4	7
politics of pride	8	24
commodification of pride	2	3
possibilities, imagining differently	6	12
privilege	7	16
public transit	10	19
queer history	5	9
race, discussions of	13	25
anti-racism	2	2
racism	9	15

Name	Files	References
whiteness, discussions about	10	17
redirected by environment	12	39
reference to a specific LGBTQ+ person or ally in the area	11	20
reference to a specific place in Stratford, St. Marys, Perth County	18	72
Avondale United Church	3	24
coffee shop discussions	11	23
reframing that we're in an interview & recording	14	33
religion, discussions of	12	43
Jehovah's Witnesses	2	2
Mennonites	4	8
research relationship dynamics	15	58
researcher positioning	18	68
resilience strategies	9	23
retirement, mentions of	4	6
rodeo	1	5
role models	9	11
route negotiations	13	56
routine, discussion of	9	14
sacrifice	1	5
safe space	11	19
seasons, importance of seasons, seasonal change	10	23

Name	Files	References
tourist season or cycle of Stratford life	7	14
sense of achievement	2	2
sense of belonging	18	64
'my kind of space'	1	1
feeling connected	11	22
sense of community	17	86
lack of community	9	23
sense of not belonging	11	24
'in their space'	1	1
feeling disconnected	10	15
not feeling accepted or included	4	10
out of place	3	5
significance of memories	12	47
significance of nature	6	10
social media use	14	34
solidarity	1	6
stalking, experiences of	1	4
staying in or 'being a hermit'	3	4
being an introvert	5	8
stereotypes	2	2
'looking gay'	2	3
strategies for dealing with harassment and related issues	8	14

Name	Files	References
Stratford Pride, discussions about	16	49
support network	12	42
TERFs	3	4
The United States, references to	8	13
theatre, Stratford Festival	12	40
time spent in driveways	4	6
time, references to time or temporality	12	36
'gay time'	1	1
Toronto, references to	17	87
Toronto Pride	7	16
wanting to move to Toronto	1	1
trans community	4	11
transphobia, experiences of	7	18
travel, references to	9	19
urban, urbanites	2	3
vandalism	1	2
stolen pride flag	1	4
violence against LGBTQ+ folks	7	11
violent threats	3	4
volunteering	6	14
charity work	2	6
walkability of Stratford	5	7
walking interview moments	15	96
weather	14	34

Name	Files	References
what accepting actually means	6	7
'lip service' or conditional acceptance	4	6
what is community	14	38
what it means to be queer	4	8
where they currently live [their house or apartment]	12	22
where they live now	12	15
why they live where they do	9	20
Woodstock, references to	1	2
work, discussions of work	19	97
privacy, work related concerns	2	7
working-class and factories	11	30
labour conditions or exploitative labour	1	1

Appendix G: Phase 2 codebook

Name	Files	References
'being careful'	2	2
'don't ask, don't tell'	1	2
'it's not just progress, it's more complicated than that'	1	4
'rural' or rural things	2	4
'small town'	6	16
'the country'	2	3
'the hick'	1	3
'unable to be myself'	3	6
'vibe' of a place	1	1
access to education	2	3
sex-ed curriculum	1	1
access to entertainment or 'things to do'	5	15
access to opportunities	3	7
access to services	2	5
activism	1	1
advice for others	3	3
age & LGBTQ+ acceptance	2	2
aging & getting older	3	4
alcohol or drug use	2	4
allies, discussions of allyship	1	1
animals	3	3
awareness of visibility	4	16
awareness that 'being themselves' is 'risky'	3	12
bars, queer bars as queer space or community	3	4
being known	3	5

Name	Files	References
biphobia	2	6
body, embodiment	1	2
bullying, experience of	4	10
changes perceived in Stratford	1	2
changing perceptions in Perth County	2	2
church	2	4
cisnormativity	3	7
coming out, outness, discussions around outness	6	28
being outed against their will	1	2
passing, discussions of	1	1
Comparing Toronto & Perth County	3	11
comparisons between Stratford and Perth County	2	2
connection to friends	4	18
connection to neighbourhood	3	3
connection to place, complicated	4	7
connections to family	6	26
connections to other LGBTQ+ folks	6	18
conservative-ness of rural areas	2	2
creating space for questioning	1	1
cruising, discussions about	1	1
dating apps	2	2

Name	Files	References
death, loss	1	2
desire	2	2
desire for community	3	7
desired events	4	5
discussion of 'culture'	3	4
discussions about St. Marys	3	10
walkability of St. Marys	1	1
discussions about the 'city'	3	3
discussions of other places they've lived	3	7
drag, discussions about drag	1	1
elementary school	1	2
embracing individuality, being confidet	1	1
emotions in the interview	1	1
events being alcohol centric	2	2
exposure = acceptance	3	4
expression via clothing and style	2	2
haircuts, gender	1	1
family history	1	1
family support	2	8
farming, discussions of	2	6
feeling alone because of gender identity	1	1
feeling alone because of sexuality	1	1
feeling comfortable	2	6
feeling fearful	1	1

Name	Files	References
feeling frustrated	2	2
feeling happy	1	1
feeling monitored	4	5
feeling relaxed, relieved	2	2
surveillance	2	2
feeling politicized	2	3
feeling safe	4	13
feeling stifled	1	1
feeling supported	4	7
feeling surprised	1	1
feeling uncomfortable	3	4
feeling unsupported	1	1
gay straight alliances	2	4
gender discrimination	1	1
gender roles	1	4
going to University	5	13
growing up	5	14
heteronormativity	5	15
high school experiences	6	27
changes perceived at their high school	2	4
history of the area	1	1
hobbies, discussions of	3	8
hockey, hockey kids	1	4
home	4	4
homophobia	3	4
homophobic & transphobic language	2	3
hopes for the future	2	6
how change happens	4	10

Name	Files	References
how long they lived in Perth County	5	6
how people respond to difference	6	15
identity discussions	6	19
importance of lgbtq visual cues (flags, etc.)	1	1
intergenerational contact	1	2
internalized homophobia	2	2
invisibility	1	1
Kitchener, Waterloo, Cambridge	2	2
knowing people	2	2
leaving the area allowing them to grow as a person	3	3
letting go of bitterness	2	2
LGBTQ+ community in the Perth County area	5	9
LGBTQ+ events in the Stratford area	3	7
lifestyle and place	6	22
pace of life	4	6
Perth County as 'quiet'	2	2
linking acceptance to space	3	5
linking acceptance to time	3	5
local community acceptance of LGBTQ folks	6	24
London	1	1
making others uncomfortable	2	2
marriage, experiences of	1	1

Name	Files	References
media representations	2	2
celebrities	2	2
mental health	2	5
mentions of relationship styles, polyamory, monogamy, etc.	2	2
money, spending	4	5
navigating names & pronouns	1	1
need for change	1	1
need for queer space	1	1
online LGBTQ+ community	3	6
Ontario politics	1	2
parade experiences	1	2
PDA	3	4
perceptions of Perth County	5	17
perceptions of Stratford	4	26
everyday experiences of Stratford	1	2
place & gender	5	12
place & sexuality	6	17
place attachment	4	14
favourite places	3	3
lack of place attachment	4	6
nostalgia, missing a place	4	6
significant places	4	7
place meaning	3	6

Name	Files	References
place satisfaction	5	14
employment opportunities	3	4
feeling stuck	1	1
politics of pride	1	1
privilege	2	3
queer history	1	1
queer space	1	1
race, discussions of	4	6
racism	1	1
whiteness, discussions about	5	8
reference to a specific LGBTQ+ person or ally in the area	2	2
reference to a specific place in Stratford, St. Marys, Perth County	4	8
relationship, discussions of their	4	6
religion, discussions of	4	9
Mennonites	1	2
research relationship dynamics	4	7
researcher positioning	4	8
resiliance strategies	3	5
retirement, mentions of	1	1
routine, discussion of	1	1
seasons, importance of seasons, seasonal change	1	1

Name	Files	References
tourist season or cycle of stratford life	1	1
sense of belonging	3	10
feeling connected	1	4
sense of community	5	20
lack of community	3	3
sense of not belonging	5	13
feeling disconnected	1	2
not feeling accepted or included	2	2
out of place	1	2
significance of memories	4	8
significance of nature	4	10
social media use	2	2
staying in or 'being a hermit'	2	2
stereotypes	3	4
strategies for dealing with harassment and related issues	1	2
Stratford Pride, discussions about	3	3
support network	3	6
the arts	3	3
theatre, Stratford festival	4	6
time, references to time or temporality	5	13
Toronto, references to	4	30
Toronto Pride	1	2

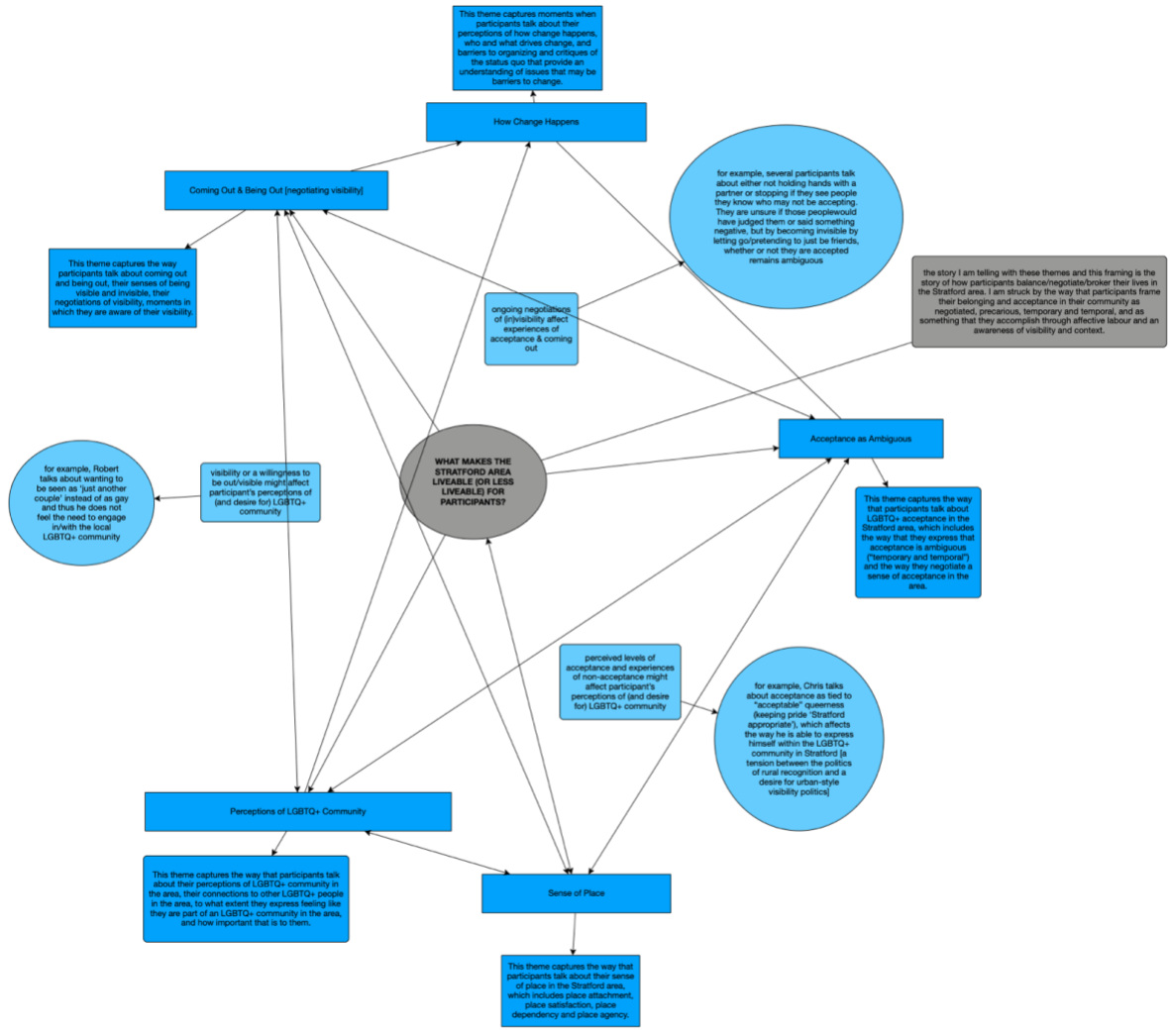| Name	Files	References
wanting to move to Toronto	1	2
toxic masculinity	1	1
transphobia, experiences of	1	1
travel, references to	1	2
violence against LGBTQ+ folks	3	6
threats against LGBTQ+ folks	1	1
volunteering	2	2
walkability of Stratford	1	1
wanting to leave the city for somewhere smaller	1	1
what is community	4	9
where in the Perth County area they lived	5	5
where they live now	1	1
why they left the Perth County area	3	3
why they live where they do	1	1
why they wouldn't move back to Perth County	4	5
why they're participating	1	2
work, discussions of work	5	10

Appendix H: List of 21 initial themes

Theme Name:
Methods/methodologies
More-than-human encounters/affects
Age, life stage, retirement
How change happens
Place satisfaction
How participants talk about the Stratford area
Experiences of place/space
Place attachment
How they move around the area
Knowing people and being known
Race/racism/white centricity
Trans & GNC experiences
Online community & internet usage
Health & mental health
What is queer space?
LGBTQ+ community in the Stratford area
Connections to other LGBTQ+ people
Resilience strategies
Outness and identity
Sense of community
Misc.

Appendix I: Reviewing themes chart

Themes:	Theme Description:
Negotiations of visibility & Outness	This theme captures the way participants talk about their senses of being visible and invisible, their negotiations of visibility, moments in which they are aware of their visibility, and their experiences being "out" and "coming out" in the area.
Acceptance as ambiguous	This theme captures the way that participants talk about LGBTQ+ acceptance in the Stratford area, which includes the way that they express that acceptance and/or tolerance are ambiguous ("temporary and temporal") and the way they negotiate a sense of acceptance and/or tolerance in the area.
Sense of Place	This theme captures the way that participants talk about their sense of place in the Stratford area, which includes place attachment, place satisfaction, place dependency and place agency.
Perceptions of LGBTQ+ Community	This theme captures the way that participants talk about their perceptions of LGBTQ+ community in the area, their connections to other LGBTQ+ people in the area, to what extent they express feeling like they are part of an LGBTQ+ community in the area, and how important that is to them.
How Change Happens	This theme captures moments when participants talk about their perceptions of how change happens, who and what drives change, and barriers to organizing and critiques of the status quo that provide an understanding of issues that may be barriers to change.

Appendix J: Reviewing themes mind map

Appendix K: Defining and naming themes chart

Theme Name:	Theme Description:	Codes:	How it relates to the data:	Research Question(s)
negotiations of (in)visibility	This theme captures the way participants talk about their senses of being visible and invisible, their negotiations of visibility, moments in which they are aware of their visibility, and their experiences being "out" and "coming out" in the area. The story this theme tells is about how visibility is not something participants "achieve" but something they continuously do work to negotiate.	'being careful'; 'unable to be myself'; 'we're just regular people'; awareness of visibility; being identified properly; body, embodiment; cisnormativity; coming out, outness, discussions about outness; embracing individuality, being confident; experiences of being misgendered; expressions via clothing and style; feeling frustrated; feeling monitored; heteronormativity; homophobia; homophobic and transphobic language; identity discussions; invisibility; issues with ID; making others uncomfortable; marriage, experiences of; navigating names and pronouns; PDA; religion, discussions of; resilience strategies; violence against LGBTQ+ folks.	Negotiations of (in)visibility are closely connected to ambiguous (in)tolerance and also to sense of place.	How do participants make sense of their place in the Stratford area? How does a sense of belonging or not belonging affect participants' experiences?
ambiguous (in)tolerance	This theme captures the way that participants talk about their	'you do your thing, I'll do mine'; access to services; awareness that 'being themselves	Ambiguous (in)tolerance is closely connected to	How does a sense of belonging or not belonging affect

	inability to know for certain whether people or places are or will be tolerant or intolerant of LGBTQ+ people. Such talk is characterized by a recognition that (in)tolerance is "temporary and temporal". The story this theme tells is about how it is not always possible to know whether a person or place will be tolerant or intolerant and that such ambiguity affects participants in particular ways.	is risky'; bathroom access issues; being identified properly; being known; bullying, experiences of; cisnormativity; experiences of being misgendered; feeling frustrated; feeling monitored; feeling stressed; feeling uncomfortable; feeling unsupported; heteronormativity; homophobia; homophobic and transphobic language; importance of lgbtq visual cues (flags, etc.); lack of family support; local community acceptance of LGBTQ folks; losing friends and family over being LGBTQ+; PDA; religion, discussions of; resilience strategies; safe space; strategies for dealing with harassment and related issues; transphobia; vandalism; violence against LGBTQ+ folks; what accepting actually means.	negotiations of (in)visibility and also to sense of place.	participants' experiences? And how and where do participants experience a sense of belonging and not belonging in the Stratford area?
sense of place	This theme captures the way that participants talk about their sense of place in the Stratford area, which includes place attachment,	'rural' or rural things; 'small town'; 'the country'; 'vibe' of a place; access to education; access to entertainment or 'things to do'; access to health or medical	Sense of place shapes how participants negotiate their (in)visibility in the area,	How do participants make sense of their place in the Stratford area?

| | place satisfaction, place dependency and place agency. | info; being known; church; comparing Toronto & Perth County; comparisons between Stratford and Perth County; connection to friends; connection to land; connection to neighbourhood; connections to place, complicated; connections to family; discussions about St. Marys; discussions about 'the city'; driving, the ability to drive; family history; family support; feeling monitored; going to University; heteronormativity; hobbies, discussions of; home; homophobia; homophobic and transphobic language; how long they've lived where they live; issues with neighbours; lifestyle and place; lucky to be in Canada; multiple communities or cultures within Stratford; perceptions of Perth County; perceptions of Stratford; place attachment; lack of place attachment; nostalgia, missing a place; rooted-ness; significant places; place meaning; place satisfaction; place | their sense of acceptance, their perceptions of and need for a local LGBTQ+ community, and the way they talk about how change happens. | |

		dissatisfaction; race, discussions of; retirement, mentions of; routine, discussions of; seasons, importance of seasons, seasonal change; sense of belonging; sense of community; sense of not belonging; significance of nature; staying in or 'being a hermit'; theatre, Stratford Festival; Toronto, references to; urban, urbanites; where they currently live [their house or apt]; where they live now; why they live where they do; work, discussions of work.		
perceptions of LGBTQ+ community	This theme captures the way that participants talk about their perceptions of LGBTQ+ community in the area, their connections to other LGBTQ+ people in the area, to what extent they express feeling like they are part of an LGBTQ+ community in the area, and how important that is to them. The story this theme tells is that there are	'if you know who's there & how to look for things'; activism; allies & discussions of allyship; bars, queer bars as queer space or community; being identified properly; connection to community; connection to friends; connections to other LGBTQ+ folks; desire for community; desire for connection; desired events; drag, discussions about drag; exclusivity of events; events being alcohol centric; feeling comfortable; feeling fearful; gay	Participants' perceptions of LGBTQ+ community and whether or not they are part of a local LGBTQ+ community provide another way of understanding how participants make sense of their place in the area. Participants' perceptions of LGBTQ+	How does a sense of belonging or not belonging affect participants' experiences? And how and where do participants experience a sense of belonging and not belonging in the Stratford area?

	multiple ways of conceptualizing LGBTQ+ community and that the notion of community can operate both as a source of connection and of alienation.	straight alliances; heteronormativity; importance of lgbtq visual cues (flags, etc.); Infinite Pride Stratford; intergenerational contact; LGBTQ+ community in the Perth County area; LGBTQ+ events in the Stratford area; online LGBTQ+ community; parade experiences; politics of pride; reference to a specific LGBTQ_ person or ally in the area; reference to a specific place in the Stratford area; safe space; sense of belonging; sense of community; sense of not belonging; social media use; Stratford Pride, discussions about; support network; trans community; what is community; what it means to be queer; work, discussions of work.	community are shaped by their negotiations of (in)visibility and their sense of place and ambiguous acceptance. Their perceptions of LGBTQ+ community also inform the way that participants talk about how change happens and the kind of change that is necessary.	
how change happens	This theme captures moments when participants talk about their perceptions of how change happens, who and what drives change, and barriers to organizing and critiques of the	age & LGBTQ+ acceptance; barriers to organizing; being 'self-sufficient'; changes perceived in Stratford; changing perceptions in Perth County; creating space for questioning; educating others about LGBTQ+ issues; embracing	The way participants talk about how change happens is shaped by who they are, their sense of place, their history in the area, and what they	How does a sense of belonging or not belonging affect participants' experiences? And how and where do participants experience a sense of belonging and not

| | status quo that provide an understanding of issues that may be barriers to change. The story this theme tells is about what and who motivates and sustains change in the area and also barriers to change that need to be addressed. | individuality, being confident; exposure = acceptance; fear of change; feeling frustrated; feeling happy; feeling politicized; feeling proud; feeling safe; feeling supported; heteronormativity; hopes for the future; how change happens; importance of lgbtq visual cues (flags, etc.); issues with ID; media representations; need for change; normalizing pronouns; possibilities, imagining differently; resilience strategies; solidarity; Stratford Pride, discussions about; support network; working-class / factories. | want to see change. | belonging in the Stratford area? |