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LGBTQC: Queer Perspectives on the Illinois-Iowa Quad Cities

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LGBTQC

Queer Perspectives on the Illinois-Iowa Quad Cities

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Abstract

Cities are broadly conceived to be queer utopia when compared with rural spaces. While the Quad Cities of Illinois and Iowa fit this simplistic model in some ways, the region has several unique characteristics that warrant their own investigation. I argue that the social climate of the Quad Cities is generally perceived as welcoming and inclusive by the LGBTQ+ community. However, despite an assortment of community-building institutions, some find socialization and partner-seeking a bit difficult. Many advocate for investment in a variety of physical LGBTQ+ "third places" (public gathering places), which would yield a variety of benefits for this community. Through ethnographic accounts, I explore the experiences, assets, and needs of the Quad Cities LGBTQ+ community and find that physical community structures are still largely necessary despite improving acceptance and transformative geosocial technologies.

Looking out of the Window

By looking out of the window, we're supposed to be dreaming of something better – a world where no one is oppressed along the lines of gender, sexuality, race or ability, a world beyond binaries, beyond the idea that we're either male or female, straight or gay, monogamous or polyamorous. A place to be free. A utopia. – Amelia Abraham

This is a study of, by, and for the LGBTQ+ community in the Quad Cities.

What does that mean?

1. "*LGBTQ+.*" Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer. Queer has become quite the umbrella, and I wouldn't be able to use it as such without decades (or even centuries) of dedicated activist work. But we also include plus, because we know that even those labels don't fit for all of us.

2. "*Community.*" Not a straightforward term, and rather elusive, actually. Rothenberg grappled with this when researching lesbian space in Brooklyn and has collected several definitions (1995, 171). Some align the term with a boundary: a neighborhood of people who interact and share certain characteristics like race or class (Karp, Stone, and Yoels 1991). It could also mean a non-spatial sense: an imagined community that rests on "comradeship" or "fraternity" where one will never know or even hear of all their fellow members (Anderson 1991). In this type of community, you live in the minds of each other. It's an image, perception, or feeling. Rothenberg also brings up the gay slogan "we are everywhere" – the "we" referring to togetherness, and the "everywhere" to a blanketing coverage of queers all over. Yet another definition focuses on "the social interactions within a spatially delineated 'imagined' collectivity." This idea gets to the networks created by socio-psychological unity among similarly identifying people (Wolf 1979). Community can also consist of the social groups in which one feels a sense of camaraderie, support, understanding, vision, and self.

This is not an exhaustive list, but one might get the sense that these ideas overlap quite a bit and get into the weeds. I'll get into some home-grown ideas later, but the takeaway for now is that community is a subjective term, and often has something to do with connections, real or imagined, between people who share a place, an identity, attitudes, or any combination of these things.

3. *"Quad Cities."* Another elusive term. There aren't four, and they aren't quite discrete "cities." Home to human civilization for thousands of years, "the QC" today is a series of neighboring river towns that straddle the Mississippi River as it flows west between Illinois and Iowa (Figure 1). A Rust Belt metro, metals and agricultural innovation bolster the economy, which is still recovering from the 1980s Farm Crisis. Sprawl, along with downtown revivals, represents a notable departure from the area's industrial past. The "Quad" comes from the earliest four cities – Rock Island, Moline, and East Moline, Illinois and Davenport, Iowa. Bettendorf, Iowa has grown to the size of many of the other cities in recent decades, and several small municipalities dot the blurred edges of the landscape. Locals refer to the Quad Cities as both singular and plural, reflecting the atypicality of a metro area that lacks a core. Multiplicity of nearly everything also causes some issues when trying to apply urban tropes, such as the idea that it would be a queer hub. More on that later.

Figure 1. The Quad Cities straddle the Mississippi River in Iowa (north) and Illinois (south). Map by author. Data: US Census Bureau, US Department of Commerce, US Geological Survey, Esri, and TomTom.

4. The prepositional soup at the beginning of the sentence. *Of*, *by*, and *for*? *Yes*, *yes*, and *yes*. I first focus on the "*of*." Geographers began looking increasingly to the "spatial basis of gay identity and to the impact of gay communities on the urban fabric" in the last decades of the twentieth century (Rushbrook 2004, 447). This intersection is especially of interest to social scientists and urban geographers who may share interests in studying phenomenological data on gender and sexuality and its variance over space. Early studies tended to focus on urban male homosexuality, deviance, and the development of gay neighborhoods, or "gayborhoods" (Castells 1983, Forsyth 2001). Later studies began to focus on the process of creating queer spaces both in and out of the city, the power embedded within urban gay male enclaves, and the spatial dynamics of a variety of intersectional queer identities (Rushbrook 2004, 447-450; see Bell and Valentine 1995; Rothenberg 1995; Myrdahl 2013; Goltz 2014; Goh 2018). Foundational work in this field has illuminated patterns and identified relationships in place while drawing on larger sociocultural themes and events, which I will later outline. These studies are often ethnographic in methodology and therefore help generate a "thick description" (Geertz 1973), which anthropologists analyze to generate theories about patterns and relationships. This information and its implications can help a community understand its assets and needs, and each study contributes to a broader picture of the spatial variance of queer experiences both within and between study areas.

In this vein, I argue that the Quad Cities are worth investigating. While research on queer communities is no frontier, the area until now has not been the site of such an endeavor. There is a general lack of knowledge about LGBTQ+ experiences, assets, and needs in this liminal metro, and information specific to this region may be a helpful resource for community leaders. This knowledge exists in fragments stored in the life histories and experiences of individuals. It is when this valuable information is collected and placed in context that it transforms and creates a shared identity.

It is also a study "by" the Quad Cities LGBTQ+ community. As a member of this group, it is very much an analysis of perspectives, values, and experiences with which I am quite familiar and engaged. Still, the community was largely "imagined" to me, and I was curious as to how the cultural landscape – referring to the area's values, norms, and politics – shapes how queer people experience this place and place in general. *Who is out there? What are they doing, thinking, changing? How do they experience their lives? Why are they here? What drives them away?* As Amelia Abraham tells us, we are visionaries engaged in the fight towards utopia and as a collective are "looking out of the window" toward where we might be and who we might become (2019, 288). Engaging in dialogue with local "visionaries" can shed some light on factors that create queer space in the Quad Cities.

Lastly, "*for.*" This study serves as documentation of a moment in time for us. It outlines where we have been, who we are, and what we'd like to become. While it might accomplish several other goals, I primarily intend for this to be a snapshot of today – which we share – in a way that illuminates these collective values and perceptions.

Generally, this research focuses on how the Quad Cities "ranks" in terms of inclusion as framed by self-identifying members of the local LGBTQ+ community. I draw on the experiences of this community to identify the needs and assets of the region. To do so, I performed 10 semi-structured interviews in 2019 and early 2020 and discussed personal experiences with how place – especially this one – impacts queer lives. Place-based experiences with community can serve as proxies for migration factors and satisfaction. Through these interviews, I learned that the community generally finds the Quad Cities to be adequately inclusive, and many have positive experiences and personal ties that keep them in the area. A small base of community organizations, virtual communities, groups at work or school, and third places are vital assets that contribute to this sense of belonging. These all function as "pull factors" that bring and keep people, and those without these ties feel much differently. A small pool and a dearth of mechanisms for meeting

others means partner-seeking is a challenge. This "push factor" is likely to drive those that are less connected away. I find that the community would benefit from further developing queer-specific groups and third places, and that we likely have the means to make this happen.

Review of the Literature

Migration and the hierarchical urban-rural spectrum

One might expect rural, exurban, and suburban spaces to be inferior settings for queer people when compared to the metropolis – the welcoming heart and hub of LGBTQ+ lives (Bell and Valentine 1995; Myrdahl 2013; Goh 2018). This "hierarchical reading" casts rural spaces as categorically oppressive and isolating and assumes queer individuals always prefer urban ones, which can have the effect of skewing analysis and muting the voices of those with incompatible experiences and perspectives. Some may view rural spaces as idyllic and/or urban spaces as systemically unequal, uncomfortable, or unrepresentative (Bell and Valentine 1995; Slutsky 2010; Myrdahl 2013; Lewis et al. 2015; Goh 2018). This view also limits the attention given to the enormously gray and varied area between extremes of rural and metropolitan. The liminality of the Quad Cities in this respect likely presents a concomitantly underrepresented blend of voices and experiences, and this study seeks to give voice to these perspectives.

Similarly, a number of variables impact individual migration factors and experiences in any place (Lewis 2014). Some may feel stuck in an undesirable place due to immobilizing factors such as poor socioeconomic status or young age (Bell and Valentine 1995). Others might have some sort of privilege – relationship status, age, connectedness, ability to "pass" – that allows them to feel satisfied enough with their surroundings, even as non-traditional members of small conservative cities, suburbs, or "hate states" (Christensen 2006; Myrdahl 2013). While avoiding a hierarchical reading helps validate these experiences, this phenomenon might also be understood as a type of

relative gratification – that their experiences are not actually as positive as those of their straight counterparts but are perceived that way due to lower expectations. One's reported "better-than-expected" experiences and attitudes might outshine underlying identity-based structural inequalities (see Anderson 2002).

Queer space and early placemaking

Those with strong ties to a place for reasons external to their sexuality such as family, work, friends, or religious networks often find great relief in the more modern development of in-person LGBTQ+ support groups (Denton 2018; Forstie 2018) and virtual communities (Bell and Valentine 1995, Renninger 2018), though others still remain ambivalent toward their surroundings (Forstie 2018). The rise of the "gayborhood" in 1960s and 1970s San Francisco is a key turning point and example of place-based support, as we see deliberate efforts by queer people to create power spatially and open the door to being "out" in public (Castells 1983). This work is certainly rooted in racial, economic, and gender-based privilege, as it was white gay men who, without a family to support and receiving generally higher wages than women, propelled the LGBTQ+ community to a central position in the planning of policy and design of significant portions of cities (Castells 1983, Forsyth 2001). Even in areas where no gayborhood proper exists, similarly accommodating institutions including bars, bookstores, and media outlets further contribute to a place-based sense of inclusion (Drushel 2018).

While the likes of Castells and Forsyth, applying Myrdahl's hierarchical reading, might see gay neighborhoods as purely beneficial hubs for otherwise marginalized queer people, others push back against the power of the "gayborhood" that can sometimes fail to address systemic intersectional inequalities within the LGBTQ+ community as well as mainstream society. Frequent points of contention are over the overbranding of urban spaces as "welcoming" (Myrdahl 2013;

Goh 2018) and systemic inequalities along intersections of sexuality and gender identity and other factors such as race, life stage, and socioeconomic status (Myrdahl 2013; Lewis 2014; Lewis et al. 2015).

Assimilation, virtual space, and the realm of the public

Several developments, however, may threaten the very existence of these physical "third places" for general gathering. Geosocial dating apps, such as Tinder and Grindr, allow users to create profiles with photos and personal information and browse those of others nearby. Tinder and similar apps are geared toward dating and require that you "match" before chatting, and Grindr is generally for men seeking more casual encounters. These apps mitigate the barriers presented by distance, time, and outness while pulling gay activities (i.e. in-person networking, friendship formation, and searching for romantic and sexual partners) out of the public and into private spaces once again (Miles 2014; Drushel 2018). Improved acceptance of lesbians and gays by mainstream society has led to less support within the community for specialized venues and media outlets (Harris 1997; Drushel 2018). Critiques of these urban "post-gay" (Ghaziani 2014) and "post-lesbian" (Forstie 2018) discourses highlight the need to reassess our "progress" and characterize several traditionally "inclusive" developments (such as "mainstreaming") as nothing more than detrimental imprints of assimilation.

These strides "forward" might be seen as beneficial for queer communities due to the conveniences of technology and acceptance of the public, and there are certainly innumerable positives. Through a critical lens, however, we can reinspect the impact of these apps and developments as the re-closeting of queer voices (Drushel 2018; Goh 2018). Apps may be convenient and potentially helpful in places that lack general acceptance or specialized venues, but often create social isolation, false emotional connections, and compulsive app use while failing to

reproduce the realities of in-person forms of community building (Miles 2014). Participation in virtual communities may be little more than a ravenous "response to the hunger for community that has followed the disintegration of traditional communities around the world" (Rheingold 1993, 62). These mediated spaces mean different things to different users, are imbued with their own set of power dynamics, and can only be fully understood when placed in context with the physical world and its modern feedback variables (Brown, Maycock, and Burns 2005; Renninger 2018). Virtual communities can *assist* physical community, but can be inadequate replacements when left as one of the only outlets for community

The case could be made that the "mainstreaming" of LGBTQ+ culture creates a "marketplace" in which queer people have adequate opportunities for acquiring social capital, but there are still at least some "domains of queer life" that will not have "ready substitutes" in this market (Drushel 2018). Despite all the assimilation and inclusion that has occurred, we are likely not in a "post-gay" phase in any of our cities, and encroachments on common queer struggles continue to occur despite wider-spread acceptance and decentralization of gayborhoods (Ghaziani 2014).

The Research

I conducted semi-structured interviews with 10 self-identified members of the Quad Cities LGBTQ+ community. The study was only open to those 18 and older, but I did not have any further criteria for selection. All recruitment was through Clock, Inc. LGBT+ Community Center in Rock Island, Illinois (Figure 2). Clock opened their doors in the spring of 2019 offering support groups, events, and counseling geared toward LGBTQ+ individuals in the area. Clock's founder, Chase Norris, was motivated to open the center by a youth group that he had mentored during his education as a social worker. The center features a large space for events and activities as well as a private office for counseling. The youth group and after-school drop-in hours are extremely popular

Figure 2. Interior of Clock Inc. LGBT Community Center in Rock Island, Illinois. Photos by Chase Norris, Clock Inc. founder and executive director.

among young people from all over the region, including some whose parents drive nearly 45 minutes from outside the metro area.

I volunteered my time to the center in the summer of 2019 and assisted in a variety of community events such as Quad Cities Pridefest, open mic nights, and social groups. From hanging rainbow balloons for the early June grand opening to assisting in creating an LGBTQ+ workshop program, my time in this light and informal atmosphere was varied and engaged. The experience was overwhelmingly positive and helped me connect with members of the community and local non-profit world. Though not a formal component of the research, the knowledge gained and history learned here greatly informed my research and guided some of my investigation. A flyer in the center explained my study in brief and that I would be contacting those who leave their information (name, telephone, and email) to schedule a single one- to two-hour interview. The center also advertised an online version of the sign-up form in a post on their Facebook page.

Of the interviews ultimately conducted, three were recruited physically at Clock and seven were recruited online. All respondents, therefore, have some affiliation with the center ranging from simply liking the page on Facebook (or having a friend that shared the post who does) and having visited in person. This, along with voluntary participation in the study, indicates that the sample is to some degree connected with organized LGBTQ+ community affairs in the Quad Cities. This is to say that the findings reflect the perspectives of those that are invested in the community in some way. All respondents were residents of the Davenport–Moline–Rock Island Metropolitan Statistical Area (the Quad Cities) as defined by the U.S. Census Bureau. Four were women, four were men (one of whom was transgender), and two were non-binary or genderfluid. In terms of sexuality, six identified as gay or lesbian, two as bisexual, one as pansexual, and one as queer. Seven were in some sort of relationship; three were single. All were either employed, retired, or students. Three grew up entirely in the Quad Cities; two moved to the Quad Cities while growing up; two grew up just

outside the area; and three are from well outside the region, including one from Chicagoland and two from the east coast. All but one identified as ethnically "white." Interviews took place in 2019 and 2020 at cafés in Rock Island, Davenport, and Moline. Each interview was audio recorded and transcribed. In this paper, I use pseudonyms, altered personal details, and generalized descriptions to protect participants' anonymity.

The interviews were very loosely structured around several key topics. I first had participants walk me through the story of where their life has taken them and how they wound up in the Quad Cities. This allowed me to build rapport, fill in personal details, and begin to understand their personal relationship with the area. In most interviews, I then asked about what comes to mind when they hear the word "community," and asked several questions about where they live and what their ideal place of living was like. This visioning was important as we later discussed the Quad Cities both as matching and falling short of these expectations. Conversations then generally flowed between discussions of general personal investment in and perceptions of the Quad Cities, experiences with the local LGBTQ+ community, sense of belonging, and participation in virtual communities. Interviews ended with a discussion of how things are evolving over time in the Quad Cities for the LGBTQ+ community, what we are doing well here, what could be done differently, and what would facilitate change or is currently getting in the way. I include my interview guide in Appendix A.

In many ways, these interviews serve as a dialogue with my own community. My identity as a gay Quad Citizen of four years as well as my role at Clock gives me a certain positionality that participants perceive and respond to. I made no effort to hide these things; in fact, I argue transparency on both fronts was crucial to yielding meaningful results. Rapport is much easier to build, for example, when the people you talk to feel they already share some perspectives. At the same time, it puts some participants in a position in which they might feel that I already know what

they are going to say or otherwise relate to their experience. "You know?" was used by participants so frequently that I created a keyboard shortcut for it in the transcription software and even found myself using it to probe. While I limited expressing personal values to a minimum, I do not claim to have an entirely value-neutral approach, however. In fact, the entire framing of my project and several questions are framed by a collective "we." This is a study of, by, and for the LGBTQ+ community and a synthesized insider perspective is needed. "Privileged observer" is a term that Hersker and Leap (1996) use to highlight the way in which they consider their own positionality and critically examine the ways in which their research might endanger or otherwise affect queer people and communities. Relatedly, Lapovsky Kennedy (2002) addresses the question "who may speak for whom?" and concludes that natives can generally "speak for themselves." It is through this framework that I interpret my participant data. Beginning with individual experiences, I identify themes and place patterns in context with a larger framework in order to theorize answers to the questions I set out to examine, thus drawing conclusions about our collective understanding.

LGBTQC

I've just always had this feeling that people could be who they want to be, be who they need to be here and that it's okay. – Alex

Dawn is a lesbian woman in her 50s who grew up in the Quad Cities. By her request, we met at a favorite after-church lunch spot of hers: a bustling café operated out of an Italianate-style home on a bumpy brick road in Davenport's historic Gold Coast neighborhood. Despite a quick foray out of state in her 20s, she returned to the Quad Cities with her then-husband and raised her family here. Family is largely what has brought and kept her in the area, and she says the Quad Cities has always been her home. Though she acknowledges that she perhaps has an unusual story in that she came out later in life, she describes the Quad Cities as a region that is generally welcoming and inclusive of LGBTQ+ people:

Even when I've been dating someone and we've been out in public, you know, I've never really had any issues. At first, it was a little, I guess, nerve-racking, but the more comfortable I got with myself the more I didn't care what other people thought. And I've never had any issues with anybody being negative, and I have like, rainbow stickers on my car and, you know, I have a flag hanging on my house, I've never had any repercussions because of that, so I guess that's why I felt comfortable here, because I have not experienced [anything negative]…I know people who have, and I feel very lucky. I guess maybe my feeling might change if I did experience something like that. To this point, I haven't, so that's why I really feel comfortable here.

This perception is largely shaped by positive interactions and is echoed by several others who note that they have had few negative encounters, including one participant who has been out and open in the Quad Cities since the 1980s and one since the 1990s. None expressed concerns about feeling unsafe or unwelcome as openly LGBTQ+. This is not to say that the Quad Cities "arrived" at the finish line of civil rights decades ago. Dawn, though she feels quite comfortable here today, tells us over the whistle of a passing train how dramatically things have changed in just a generation:

> …but I think younger people are a lot more open now, too. And I think that was actually part of what helped me finally be more honest and out about things – the friends of my kids. My oldest son was involved with theatre in high school, and I helped, I did costuming, and, you know, did parent backstage stuff. And there were so many kids in this program that were – in high school – *out*, and with their girlfriends, with their boyfriends, whatever. And I thought, "You know? This never would have happened," I said. "This was the same high school that I went to. This *never* would have happened back when I was there." And a couple of them – it's 9 years this year – that a couple of them in *high school* came out on national coming out day. And I thought, *You know what? If they can do it, I can do it.* So I did it. That same year, too. And I tell them every year, I said: "You gave me the courage to do this because, you know, if you guys at your age can do this, and be out and open, then, you know, what am I afraid of?"

Having this connection to the LGBTQ+ community through her children is extremely important in making Dawn's experience here a pleasant one. She defines community as the people she chooses to surround herself with, and it is these people that helped her see she had little to be afraid of.

Membership in place-based subcommunities such as churches, colleges, and organized community groups is a key factor in creating positive connections over time. Kent, a deeply religious

retiree, says that community is about creating a sense of identity that comes from a variety of settings:

> It can come from a number of areas, that's the nice thing. When I look at the total of things that we've talked about before, as far as looking at the churches that have been gay-affirming, be it the [Metropolitan Community Church] or the other affirming churches that exist now, the bars that have existed, the college organizations…each one of those for me are creating some sense of community so at least people have a variety of ways for at least making some level of contact. Within that sense of how you may identify yourself as [LGBTQ+], what allows you to have that sense of identity, and where can you find your particular sense of identity within that? So, I think the variety of organizations and spaces are helpful.

In other words, community institutions are sometimes the way in which individuals connect with similar people. Kent is mostly talking about organizations that are catered to the LGBTQ+ community, but Dawn shows that other spaces are great, too. She benefits from the school even though she is not a student, and she becomes comfortable with her lesbian identity even though the drama club is not a queer-specific group. At the same time, there is no guarantee that queer-specific organizations exist nor is there an obligation for places like schools to continue providing a refuge such as theatre. These modes of support exist in large part due to support from the community itself, and their closure would spell disaster. I explore the roles and responsibilities of larger institutions in more detail later.

I did not find an exclusive relationship between growing up in the Quad Cities and having warm feelings toward it or having intentions of staying permanently. Kirk, for example, had spent years in larger metro areas and was "for certain this whole Iowa thing was going to be terrible" when he moved here for work nearly 20 years ago. When asked what keeps him here, he says it's the "sense of community" he found here when compared to other cities.

> Growing up in [the city], it was like—you don't leave anything in your car, period. Where when I moved here, Eric and I were downtown Davenport one night and we got back to my place and he had a key so we let ourselves in but we realized the next day that I lost my keys. And so I go to work, call the dealership, and it was like $80 for a new fob for my car and I wasn't happy about it. This was like 16 years ago, and the lady at work said, "Well, look in the newspaper,"

she's like, "there's a lost and found section, like if you find something or lose something, you can put an ad in the newspaper. And I was like… "Ha! … People don't do that, that's not a thing!" And um…well we got the newspaper at work, so the next day she went in there and looked at it, she's like, "There's an ad here that says 'Keys found at Third and Ripley.'" And damn, if they weren't my keys…

These positive interactions with people he interacts with regularly are what define a good sense of community for Kirk. "*Iowa nice*" was a new experience for him that largely shaped his community perceptions, and he now has started a family that calls the Quad Cities home.

All participants have ties to the area related to work, family and relationships, or school. The stronger the ties and more ties one has along any of these lines, the more likely they are to view their residence in the area as permanent. As one might expect, school – both K-12 and higher education – tends to be less of a predictive factor given that this tie is gone after graduation. Among those with looser and fewer ties, feelings toward migration away stand somewhere between *open to the right opportunity* and *actively making an effort to leave*. All in this "making an effort" camp are waiting for circumstances beyond their reach to resolve before moving away. Still, many have firm roots here, and many view themselves as "Quad Citizens" that do not intend to move away anytime soon.

These warm perceptions might seem unrepresentative or limited in that my research only includes people who currently live in the Quad Cities, are invested and connected enough to be aware of local community groups, and have the time and interest to participate in a project that deals directly with community work. Essentially, I am working with a self-selected group that falls somewhere between really liking it here and making it work well enough. This might seemingly skew my analysis, as several voices are certainly excluded. I did not attempt recruitment methods outside of Clock, nor did I make an effort to recruit ex-Quad Citizens. Conversely, my study also does not include those who are very new, and surely these perspectives would serve as a proxy for things the Quad Cities do well. The addition of these missed voices – newcomers and those who have left – may make an excellently framed follow-up study that could better inform conversations around

community benefits and shortcomings, respectively. The purpose of my study was to get a sense of how *inhabitants* conceive of the region and why *they* are here. Those invested in the area and the organized community likely have a rounded perspective and provide key insights on the needs, assets, history, and composition of the region. I found that the sample still picked up on the good and the bad, which likely parallels in some way the views of those who have recently come or left.

Come on in, the water's fine

I wish there were more people like me that I could vibe with. – Alex

Those who do express desires to move away do not attribute this to a hostile cultural environment or the lack of social service structures for LGBTQ+ people. There are a few key factors, however, that play a role in influencing outmigration. Some note that the LGBTQ+ dating "pool" is a bit unsatisfactory. Participants describe it as relatively small, and we see that most firm linkages to the region have little to do with something intrinsically appealing or welcoming about the Quad Cities and more to do with other ties such as family or work. In other words, none of them moved here because they have always dreamed of living in the Quad Cities, which might speak to some of the things the area lacks. Above, I note that further research into those who have moved *away* from the region will be helpful; here, these perspectives would especially illuminate what exactly it is that is missing from our pool. Proper planning with this crowd in mind might allow for quite the turnaround: knowledge that an environment for partner-seeking exists could both keep and bring people to the Quad Cities.

I would argue, however, that this poor perception is at least in some part due to the concomitantly unsatisfactory *mechanisms* for meeting new people. Some participants describe the formal community as being good enough but the *scene* as unimpressive. Hearing a pool of people say "the pool is unsatisfactory," though, makes me wonder where the proverbial pool is, who's

swimming, how my participants fit in, and whether any of those in the pool are aware that this is being said from the sides of the lido deck. Conceivably, we would all be members of this unsatisfactory proverbial pool, and part of the problem may simply be that we are having some trouble seeing to the other end. Alana, a seasoned Quad Citizen in her 30s, addresses the nuances of some of these questions while outlining her ideal place of living:

> Alana: Oh yeah, I mean, [an LGBTQ+ community] definitely necessary. Like, I've been telling my friend, "I don't want to date anybody! I don't want to date any of these lesbians." I mean, that's a perfect example of why we need a big community because like…God, it's so incestuous. You know? Like, everybody's been with everybody's girlfriend and it's…yeah. There's just a toxicity to a small community and everybody being with each other and so…it's I suppose…more to pick from? I don't know. More choices?
>
> Robert: A bigger pool – so you'd say the pool around here is…small?
>
> Alana: I mean, it's not bad…and sometimes I forget there is a bar community, and there's other lesbians beyond – more queer people that just don't go to the gay bars, and it's like, *well, how do you find them?* You know? So. It depends on how you're looking at it. But yeah, that's why a bigger pool is better, I think.

Alana's points out that size is only one issue here, but a bigger pool would help with making connections. Her concern about the bar scene is further illustrative of the idea that a varied base of outlets is needed.

While participants suggest that the presence of a scene for casual and romantic connections falls a bit short, they do explain that there are a fair number of places to go to feel supported and welcomed and that there are a variety of services that do an adequate job of creating an organized community network for LGBTQ+ people. For example, many praise the work of Clock for filling a void in the area while noting that non-profits and community centers are not where you go to find someone to date or have casual sex with. This perceived issue with *the scene* makes relationship status and personal attitudes toward partner-seeking important in determining who comes and the types of experiences people have in the Quad Cities. Relationship status tends to be a fairly salient identity in

the context of migration, as partner-seeking is generally a place-based behavior. Those without

strong relationship ties feel less of a "pull factor" to stay in the area.

Another common thread between at least a few participants is that when there *are*

community events, they tend to be so infrequent that those with inflexible work hours are unable to

attend and engage in community. This is reflected in much of the sample beyond those who notice:

those well-off socioeconomically and those that are retired are often more able to give back

(financially or with their time) as well as participate in organized community events. At least one

retired participant makes a conscious effort to patronize a local gay bar once or twice a month, and

one upper class participant who enjoys volunteering finds that he is able to do so consistently.

The rise and fall of third places

I think that there could be more places for us to meet and more avenues. More casual—for me, it's hard to go to a gay
hangout night, because I'm like, "Ugh, whatever." Because those are the places that aren't bars. So I wish there was
more…a variety of places and whatever to meet people that's not the gay bar, but also not like a really corny
organization. – Alana

History tells us that gay spaces were once quite hidden. Queer communities and

relationships formed under the radar in bars and bedrooms. Historians have found evidence of

place-based gay communities in the United States dating back to 1890s New York City, which stands

in stark contrast to the assumption that "proto-queer culture" did not exist due to gays being

unaware of each other (Drushel 2018). It wasn't until San Francisco – the perfect storm of counter-

culturalism, urbanity, masculinity, a history of liberalism and minority struggles, and a concentration

of gay people – that open communities became well-established and commonplace (Castells 1983).

Quad-City Times columnist Barb Ickes credits a Rock Island nightclub as "the place to be" for local

gays in the 1980s and 90s. Packed every weekend, Ickes got to know the woman she fell in love with

at J.R.'s.

It gave us just what we needed: A way to be in the same place. We didn't have to pretend to be casual friends. We didn't have to hide the fact that all we really wanted to do was sit closely, look into each others' eyes and feel our hearts race.

We held hands and felt like we were getting away with something. In fact, we were.

Almost as important to me as the freedom J.R.'s gave me is what it spared me. I never wanted to make others uncomfortable.

People who are not gay can take their courtships anywhere they like. Who hasn't seen the love-struck couples on blankets in the park? The guy is propped on one elbow, smiling down at his giddy girl, who laughs at her own happiness. Yeah. That wasn't us.

We had to take our affection indoors; a place that stayed protectively dark, even when the lights flashed from the dance floor. In those flashes of light, it was difficult to detect that we were smitten. Those who noticed didn't care.

I was aware that it was different for some of the regulars. Their gayness was more obvious than mine. I knew there were very few places they would be welcome. For many of them, J.R.'s was home. (Ickes 2016)

Home. A place of refuge; a place of wellbeing, happiness, and fulfillment. If J.R.'s was home, its closure in 2004 must have made these people homeless.

I had heard about the historic importance of J.R.'s through my interviews, and it was surprising to hear that a place like that once existed. Through these stories, we hear that outlets for romantic and casual socialization among queer individuals are slightly lacking in the Quad Cities today. Outside of the more social work-oriented non-profit world, participants note a singular permanent queer-specific third place, Mary's on Second, a bar that opened in Davenport in August of 2000 (Figure 3). Circa 21 and The Speakeasy, a theatre group in Rock Island, often produces queer-friendly attractions such as drag shows and musicals, though these are not exclusively by or for the LGBTQ+ community. The annual Pridefest and Fall Pride are community events that do generally attract a sizeable crowd. Since 2018, a Pride Parade crosses from Davenport, Iowa to Rock Island, Illinois each June, symbolizing the unity of the Quad Cities and the LGBTQ+ community

Figure 3. Exterior of Mary's on Second in Davenport, Iowa. Photo by author.

(Figure 4). Outside of these places in space and events in time, little seems to exist for queer-specific socialization and partner-seeking when compared to other mid-size or larger metropolitan areas. In this regard, perhaps the Quad Cities does fit the "big city" hierarchical model, as the quantity and quality are arguably higher than in typical less densely populated areas.

It turns out, though, that we do not need to look far away to find an example of what a Quad Cities *with* more of these places looks like. We only need to look back in time. The number of LGBTQ+ social venues in the Quad Cities has long been in decline – much lower today than it once was. As the Quad Cities are perceived to have been greatly improving in terms of LGBTQ+ inclusion, they seem to be losing queer specific venues. This follows Ghaziani's (2014) assessment precisely: the bars close in the name of progress. Mary's was once part of the "Rainbow District," standing among other gay bars in Davenport. One of these bars, Club Fusion, even advertised on television when they opened in 2003. The Rainbow District was also home to 811 Lockdown, Liquid, and Connections. At the same time, developers and the media were very upfront about gentrification and profiteering, noting that "the Rainbow District attracts the yuppie dollar like a magnet" and embracing urban theorist Richard Florida's controversial claim that encouraging the creative class – artists, bohemians, gay people – can be beneficial for economic growth (Heitz 2003, Florida 2002). The Illinois side was also throughout time home to a handful of gay bars including Madison Square, Augie's and community fixture, J.R.'s.

At the time of writing in 2020, a new nightclub, Varieties, is slated to open next to Mary's in short order. Its impact and endurance will certainly serve as a forecast of future queer-centric community development. Even if a gay bar scene is suddenly revived, however, many have doubts as to whether this alone will combat the lack of third places. Chase Norris, founder and executive director of Clock, Inc., points to the monoculturalism and exclusivity of the bar scene as one motivation to open the center. He believes that age 21 should not be the first time you
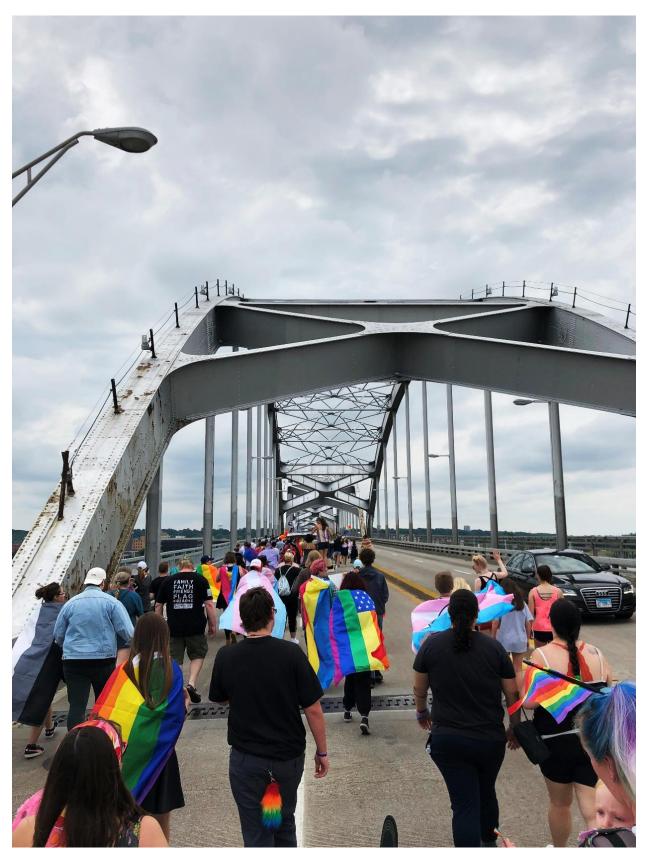
Figure 4. Spectators of the 2019 Pride Parade following the last float. Here, they are pictured crossing from Davenport, Iowa to Rock Island, Illinois via the Centennial Bridge. Photo by author.

meet your peers. While non-queer individuals generally have the rest of space and time to make important connections and relationships, Chase saw a need especially for youth to make connections and feel safe in their community.

Others have echoed these sentiments: Joan, a recovering alcoholic lesbian woman in her 60s, further notes that a gay bar is not a safe space for gay alcoholics like it is for other gay patrons. While living in a nearby city, she credits her (coincidentally lesbian) therapist for creating the social infrastructure that allowed her to feel safe there:

> Joan: …she would make it safe. She would create a group, and you would go on a group outing. And you would go down to the bar as a group of non-drinking people and shoot pool, and play the…you know, jukebox, and chit-chat, and dance and, you know…but you knew you were in a group. So I move here, and I don't know how it happened, but we created that same thing. Sometimes we would go, like, to a [gay AA] meeting and then after the meeting we would go to get something to eat at like Village Inn. So here we are in this real big group. And then many of those people would then – as a group – go to JR's. But we were always in a group of non-drinkers. And it was safe for us, because we were there with each other's supporting each other and if somebody were to say "I'm uncomfortable…"
>
> Robert: "We're all uncomfortable."
>
> Joan: And away we go! Or whoever needed to, you know…we were all able to develop our own little niches for each other and take care of one another.

While there are creative ways that bars can be made inclusive, those under 21 are still excluded, they rely on pre-existing connections with community groups, and they are simply not the scene that everyone wants. Conversation with others tells me that the crowd at Mary's tilts older, and even if this is not the case, others have this perception which impacts the community and discourages those in search of something more. Further, given that this bar is the only game in town, it is hard for those who seek anonymity to find it: you can't go out without seeing and being seen by *the crowd*, which has limited spaces to congregate as a community.

I guess I've kind of got a little queer community going now from people that I've met on Tinder. – Caleb

Social network sites, dating apps, and less queer-exclusive options seem to fill the void in some ways, serving as a good fit for those looking for socialization and affiliation in ways that are both related and unrelated to geography (Drushel 2018, 10). Alex, who is in their forties and identifies as non-binary, has seen this new age of technology transform the community right before their eyes:

> I envy the younger generation because of how much more mainstream the community has become. I mean, there's still a long way to go for sure. I would have loved to have been able to have at least online communities that I could engage with and be a part of because life was very lonely growing up. Especially through high school, I was very lonely and then…I was lonely after college too.

Alex now uses these online communities to connect with others, and deeply values Clock as the only queer place physically in the Quad Cities that they engage with. Alex also notes the ubiquity of virtual communities for youth today. Caleb, a queer trans man in his early 20s, has been a member of several non-place-based online communities since before he was out and cites the blogging site Tumblr as a hugely important place for self-discovery:

> Caleb: Tumblr brings me back, because that was like—closeted junior high queer kid, like, you have a gay Tumblr. Like that's what you…what you have. So that you said that [Tumblr] I was like, woah that's crazy.
>
> Robert: Tumblr was important.
>
> Caleb: Tumblr was like, huge. Because I (laughing) was looking at the #ftm hashtag on Tumblr to see trans guys…was like my whole…anyway. My whole existence.

Caleb's sentiments reflect those of many queer individuals, especially those who are closeted or newly out. The visibility and information provided by online communities, in this case, was deeply impactful. In one hidden group, Caleb and his brother coincidentally discovered each other's membership and thus had a safe and pleasant coming out. Through this, we see that Internet venues

can serve a variety of functions. Some of these include serving as a "more accessible first or interim point of socialization about their sexuality," as a "more convenient environment with fewer social misunderstandings and mixed signals," and also as a "source of reference groups and perspectives" (Brown, Maycock, and Burns 2005). Caleb recognizes this range of specialized "places" online, and today utilizes identity-specific Facebook groups more, which he notes are rising in prominence.

Several participants also have experience with place-based dating apps. While these may serve as some form of community, they have inherent problems that are magnified when they monopolistically are the only "place" to hang out. Caleb has had a "really positive experience with Tinder in this area." However, Caleb describes the dating pool as "not *huge*" and outlines some issues with being mid-transition. Lightheartedly, he says he's had to build a "thick skin," as there are very few people who are like him. Though the architecture of the app allows you to select from a searchable list of gender identities, you still must tell the app whether to show you to people looking for "men" or "women." When you select who you would like to see, your only options are "men," "women," and "everyone." This results in a system that functionally reifies the strict categories of the gender binary and regulates connections in a way that in-person community typically does not. Though Tinder isn't the only place-based dating app, it is among the most popular apps. Given that most people use the apps to access a larger pool curated based on sexuality, this works to Tinder's advantage and creates a system in which users have few viable alternatives and are dependent upon its ad hoc social and political systems (Renninger 2018). For this reason, I argue that the mediated world of apps is an insufficient replacement for in-person communities and further expansion of alternatives is needed.

Institutions and subcommunities

He was really nervous to conduct his first meeting, and he came home that night and said, "A woman walked into that room and said 'I have worked in this building for 28 years and today's the first day I felt comfortable coming to

work.'" And he's like, "That's why I did that. If I touched no other person in that entire place, I've done my job." – Kirk

Sometimes, having a connection to a smaller community is what makes the Quad Cities a great place for LGBTQ+ people. Just as Joan had a connection to community through her therapist and Dawn through her children's friends, several other queer-centric subcommunities exist in the Quad Cities and provide vital connections to their members. When asked if he feels he belongs here, Nathan is torn and gives a two-sided answer. Juggling his identities as a local college student and a home-grown Quad Citizen, he feels there are different answers depending on the context.

> …because that's like two different things right there. Because in the [college] bubble, it's like, yeah, this is where I belong. Like, most of my friends are LGBT, that's awesome, and that's great, but then on the weekends, I'm away from campus. I go to work and there's…a few openly gay people at work, so I don't really feel like I *don't* belong, but it's just like…the bubble kind of makes me spoiled in a way because it's *so* nice. It's so nice to have all those friends that are so supportive and then you go away to the real world and…you know, the Quad Cities in general has a lot of very conservative people and just…people that even come to the place that I work.

The "college bubble" serves as a "comfortable and safe" retreat within the Quad Cities to Nathan. This is not to say he is unhappy outside his small college, but he appreciates that he is able to truly be himself and is celebrated on campus. While the university atmosphere is great for him, it would be quite difficult to be connected to it if he were not a student. College is certainly not accessible for everyone. It's not a bubble that just any queer can join, and neither is a high school GSA or employee support group. While some say being a "college town" of sorts has some progressive residual effects, the full benefits of such an institution are generally only available to its members. These subcommunities play backup when no other outlets can be identified, and they do not accommodate everyone.

Outsiders might even be surprised to learn that these types of subgroups exist. I was surprised to hear that a couple of the area's largest employers supported internal LGBTQ+ organizations. Through subsequent interviews, I found that I was not alone in my ignorance. While

these organizations have an incredibly important role in creating a welcoming and inclusive community, these connections are generally not afforded to outsiders – they are a privilege of these institutions' members. This exclusivity might be countered to some degree by philanthropy. Arconic, for example, is an aerospace supply corporation with a Davenport plant that employs over 2,500. The corporation has a variety of employee resource groups (ERGs) committed to "fostering unity among employees of similar background and their allies, as well as building connections among our employees and in the communities where we operate" (Arconic). One of six such groups, Employees at Arconic for Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, and Transgender Equality (EAGLE) has a philanthropic wing that raises money and volunteers for local non-profits. EAGLE has recently assisted Clock and The Project of the Quad Cities (TPQC), which provides sexual wellness services and some queer-specific programming. While it's nice that many schools and corporations support these groups which sometimes collaborate and give back to their community, this work is tangential to their main purpose and there is generally no obligation for them to do so. None of these groups – including non-profits – provide the outlets for partner-seeking that many say are lacking. In general, the community would benefit greatly from a set of programs or businesses that are inclusive, community-wide, and specifically target a variety of queer-oriented functions such as socialization and philanthropy.

A number of participants find churches, especially welcoming and inclusive ones, to be outlets for engaging with the LGBTQ+ community. The younger crowd seems less involved with the church scene than older adults, perhaps reflecting broader trends of increasing mainstream acceptance and decreasing religious affiliation. Some LGBTQ+ churchgoers, though, describe their church as the thing that keeps them here – an anchor in place for them. This echoes studies that note the growing Universal Fellowship of Metropolitan Community Churches (MCC) as a place-based institution that suits the needs for those uncomfortable with what they see as the "downsides"

of gay bar culture (Drushel 2018). Dawn, who jokes that she is a "recovering Catholic," was happy

to find MCC when she first came out:

> Dawn: It was very helpful when I first came out to know that there was a community. A friend of mine took me to the church, and that was where I found people who were more like me, and who I could feel comfortable around. Like I said, growing up in the Catholic church, we did a lot of church stuff, I did a lot of youth group stuff, I was, you know, involved with retreat programs and stuff, so I did feel comfortable doing that, but there was always something kind of missing; that I wasn't letting myself be who I really was.

> Robert: Right, yeah. For the people that want to get involved with that kind of community stuff, you don't know what's there until you…it's not going to come to you.

> Dawn: Right, that's it. You have to go out and search for it, and I think especially as kids, there's not a lot out there. I'm so grateful that Clock Inc. is there now because if I were to come out younger, I wouldn't have known where to go. I mean, if you're 21 or older, okay, there's the bars, and that's how you go out and meet people. And that's what I did at first too, but even as an older person, it's not really my scene. The church was a great outlet for me to meet people that were LGBT *and* straight and everybody was comfortable with each other and open and there's a sewing group, there's a bible study group, and like I said, I was very big into church, and I thought, if I come out, *am I going to lose that part of myself?* So the church was a big thing for me, still feeling like I could have that part of myself and be who I was.

In many ways, this sentiment reflects the perspectives of many members of the queer church

community. She identifies the lack of third places but finds refuge in a welcoming church. The MCC

is an extremely progressive church; however, it is not the only church attended by queer followers.

Several other churches in the Quad Cities have committed to an open and affirming covenant or

similar measure. Others still may have strong progressive values without passing such a measure. In

some ways, this development reflects the broader trends of "mainstreaming": mainstream

institutions being perceived as welcoming enough by the LGBTQ+ "market" and mitigating the

need for queer spaces (Drushel 2018). I explore the impacts of mainstreaming in more detail later.

Visioning a Community for All

…we were pretty much the gays *at the [bake sale] table. And there weas still that 18-year-old in the back of my head like, "Are those guys in line – are they snickering? Are they snickering at me? Are they pointing at the rainbow flag? Saying 'there's the gay one?'" … but I had the epiphany that at one time, a woman couldn't have stood at that table. Or a woman would have been just as equally uncomfortable standing at that table. At one time, an African American would have been uncomfortable sitting at that table…it's just…it's our turn to stand at the table.* – Kirk

Above, I describe the Quad Cities as a generally comfortable place for the LGBTQ+ community with a variety of outlets for engaging with community. A limited number of third places and special events serve as an outlet, as do non-profits, virtual communities, and institutional subgroups. Threaded throughout, however, is a feeling that these things could be greatly expanded in order to address structural iniquities and expand mechanisms for socialization. We can do a much better job of creating an environment that appeals to all.

Should an LGBTQ+ this-or-that pop up, it would be one thing to ensure those who live here know about it, but another undertaking to properly direct people such as tourists and newcomers to the venue. At least one participant raised this concern from a personal perspective: *if I were to move back to the metro area from just outside of town, how will I know where to go to meet people?* This can have a direct impact on one's perception of the pool. As noted, the Quad Cities are, in fact, plural, and thus lack the singular downtown common in most metropolitan areas. It's more than just downtowns that are repeated along the riverfront: each city has its own city centers, historic neighborhoods, and suburbanized areas stretching from bluff to rolling bluff. Each also has its own set of histories and institutions, though there is certainly much overlap as well as change over time. This unique "separate-yet-united" dynamic presents both challenges and advantages. It can be nice to have multiplicity – each city surely has its own character, and there is something to be said for variety. But where it becomes a hinderance is when you have great assets being underutilized due to their separation – separation both in the spatial sense and administrative or jurisdictional sense. To extend the pool metaphor from earlier, it could partially be the case that the pool exists in fragments

which are illegible to each other. While this might reflect historic patterns that construct gay landscapes as "generally hidden, recognizable only to those in the know" (Rothenberg 1995), it seems that those in the know cannot find them either. It is this very disjointed dynamic that may prevent people who share a personal desire for community venues from joining forces. In other words, the sum of the parts very much could add up to a whole that is greater, but we first need to enhance our sense of cohesiveness.

Going "mainstream?"

[The bars] are gone. But I think that's almost kind of a good thing, 'cause it kind of tells me that there's not a need for them…there's a section of younger LGBT people that feel comfortable mainstreaming or going to meet somebody anywhere. – Kirk

> *I can look at a woman and be like, "She's gay." And I'm sure that I hit other women's gaydars, but I feel invisible sometimes if that makes sense. In the mainstream, unless I have a shirt on that says "I'm a lesbian! Feel free to hit on me!" then that makes it harder.* – Alana

It would be important to situate any endeavor in queer placemaking within the discussion of "mainstreaming." Recent decades have seen increasing assimilation of queer culture (especially gay male culture) with mainstream society nationwide. Increases in legal rights and perceptions of inclusion are accompanied by a decrease in third places in many cities. Young people today generally "do not suffer the extreme sense of isolation experienced by previous generations" (Drushel 2018, 9), and are often satisfied by the widespread promise of acceptance. This is absolutely the case in the Quad Cities, and while one participant noted that this might be a mostly good thing, most see it as a mixed bag. The desire to have closed spaces is still present, though less dire and for different purposes: partner-seeking challenges remain in broader community without these spaces, as do concerns with ensuring that organized community is accessible to all.

Even Ickes (2016) acknowledges that the Quad-Cities community was changing rapidly and the bars were in trouble:

By the time J.R.'s closed, I didn't really need it anymore. Many of us didn't. Those of us who found our partners fell into comfortable relationships, and we no longer needed a safe place to hide. We also found a reasonable level of comfort in mainstream hangouts.

These sentiments may ring true for a crowd that has comfortable relationships and accepting communities, but many question whether this subduction into the mainstream world is a good thing. Alana's perception that there's nowhere to meet other lesbians stands in stark contrast to this notion. Mainstreaming has impacted geographical enclaves, queer-owned businesses, and queer socialization. Harris (1997) attributes these changes to "the acquiescence of queers to their seduction by marketers of mainstream products and services who now see them as an attractive niche market," but Drushel (2018) argues that this perspective underestimates their agency and misses the complexity of the situation. He instead reasons that queers willfully embrace mainstreaming because mainstream outlets often offer greater potential for accumulating social capital in today's more accepting world than do queer-specific neighborhoods, businesses, and leisure time activities (9). This paradoxical conclusion is well supported by data in the Quad Cities: we see perceptions of inclusion heightening while the community itself has abandoned its former cohesive identity and scattered. Maybe a Quad Cities way to do things *is* each city having queer third spaces to call their own, thus embracing multitudes and hybrid identities in ways that deconstruct borders and binaries. The key, though, is making sure that they "mesh" well with the communities they serve – that queer people know about them, and in turn, they become fixtures of the landscape that require no introduction or referral. Focusing on cohesiveness will be important once we drum up an active interest in making change.

A reflection for the future

In their own words, LGBTQ+ Quad Citizens find the area to be a hospitable home that is sufficiently inclusive. Virtual communities, institutional groups, and community centers are vital

community assets, but do not adequately replace the socialization functions of physical third places, which are lacking. The growth of third places and community networks can very much alleviate concerns with having few social outlets or a small "pool" and lead to a much more vibrant LGBTQC. If anything, this study of, by, and for the Quad Cities LGBTQ+ community shows that we have a number of interested stakeholders and organized non-profit groups dedicated to our shared future. Resources, too, are power: time, energy, money, skills, and knowledge each have a hand. It is my hope that this report can serve as a resource for guiding discussions among movers and shakers about the future of the Quad Cities and the LGBTQ+ community. Having this information loud and clear is an important step, but it is only one piece of the puzzle. As in the interview process, each voice brings a unique perspective and a unique set of resources. Beautiful things happen when we share our resources with the world, and I am confident that this is no different. It is time to put our heads together, Quad Cities. No one has the power but us.

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Appendix A

Interview Guide

I. About you
   a. Tell me the story of where your life has taken you and how you wound up in the Quad Cities. If you grew up here, why are you still here?
      i. Where have you spent other long periods of time?
      ii. What factors drew you to the QC?
   b. Fill in: age, religious beliefs, political attitudes, racial/ethnic identities, disabilities, SES, gender, sexual orientation, relationship status, city, employment, kids, family
II. Community
   a. When you think about the word "community," what comes to mind? What's your definition?
   b. What is your neighborhood like? Why do you like it?
   c. When you think about your ideal <u>place</u> of living—maybe not the house, but the neighborhood, people, or surroundings, what's it like?
      i. What about that makes it so appealing to you?
      ii. Does this vision depend on a sense of community?
         1. …among LGBTQ people?
      iii. (Does it relate to location/space/place?)
III. Virtual and Online Community
   a. Do you use/have you used any virtual/online communities (Facebook groups, Tumblr blogs, support forums, telephone hotlines, etc.) or locative apps (Tinder etc.)?
   b. How do these virtual communities affect your ability to find community, friendship, relationships, information—i.e. are they all positive experiences?
   c. Do most people you encounter use these spaces for the same thing you do? Does it depend on where you are?
   d. Have you ever used a service/technology like this while closeted or recently out? What was it like?
IV. The QC Community
   a. We talked a little about why you're here…
   b. Do you consider yourself a "Quad Citizen?"
      i. How invested are you in this place? Elsewhere?
   c. Do you see yourself moving away from the QC anytime soon?
V. The LGBTQ Community
   a. Do you feel connected to the/a LGBTQ community here?
      i. What experiences make you feel that way?
      ii. How has this changed over time – over the course of your life?
   b. Do you feel you belong here as a (LGBT) person?
      i. What makes you feel this way?
      ii. Would you have said the same thing 5, 10, 20 years ago?
   c. Does the presence or lack of a 'community' affect your wellbeing? Quality of life, happiness, networking, finding friendship/relationships…
   d. Regarding your ideal place of living and being welcoming and inclusive, does the QC fit the bill?
      i. Thinking about other places you've lived, is the QC better or worse off than those places? Why?

          ii.   The QC might not be 'the big city,' but is the social climate here okay? Would you prefer a 'big city?'

         iii.   Is the QC changing or evolving?

    e.   What does a place's good effort to be welcoming and inclusive look like?

         i.   What are we doing well here? What could be done differently?

         ii.   What facilitates this success? Or gets in the way of doing better?

VI.   Closing

    a.   Is there anything I haven't asked about that you feel is important to share?