

AND YA DON'T STOP: INVESTIGATING RACE, SPACE AND MEANING IN
TORONTO'S QUEER PARTY 'YES YES Y'ALL'

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ABSTRACT

This Major Research Paper (MRP) is a case study of the queer hip hop and dancehall party Yes Yes Y'all (YYY). This MRP seeks to challenge white, cismale metanarratives in Toronto's queer community. This paper employs Critical Race Theory (CRT) and queer theory as theoretical frameworks. Racialization, racism, homophobia, homonormativities and homonational rhetoric within queer discourses are interrogated throughout the analysis. In pursuit of this research, five participants and two key informants were interviewed. Four emergent themes are explored: fluid identities, the intersection of race and sexuality, dancing as expression of sexuality and gender identity, and the transgressive possibilities of YYY.

Key words: Queer, Dancehall, Toronto, Queer Space, Racialization

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DEDICATION

In memory of my mother, Linda

LIST OF ACRONYMS

BLM – Black Lives Matter
BLMTO – Black Lives Matter Toronto
CRT – Critical Race Theory
DADT – Don’t Ask Don’t Tell
J-FLAG – Jamaica Forum for Lesbians All-Sexuals and Gays
KI – Key Informant
LGBTQ – Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transgender Queer
MRP – Major Research Paper
POC – Person/People of Colour
QPOC – Queer Person/People of Colour
SMM – Stop Murder Music
YYY – Yes Yes Y’all

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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Establishing boundaries: the paper, the communities, the event

Toronto is widely dubbed the most diverse city in the world (BBC, 2017; Toronto Foundation, 2016). Toronto is also rated high on quality of life indexes (PWC, 2017). On the one hand, the city boasts comprehensive settlement services and resources for ethno-specific communities, aiding in the process of integration. On the other hand, there are several social, political and systemic barriers that bar racialized and immigrant communities from certain spaces and experiences. This Major Research Paper (MRP) seeks to challenge dominant heteronormative and homonormative discourses of whiteness embedded in queer citizenship narratives. It further seeks to problematize homonational conceptions of queer migration.¹ At the centre of this paper are the voices of seven interview participants who have attended the Toronto hip hop and dancehall event, Yes Yes Y'all (YYY). I position the YYY event as both a counter narrative to white cis-male² metanarratives and space of subversion within Toronto's queer community.³

¹ Queer is a term used to describe non-heterosexual, non-normative sexualities and gender identities. I employ this term throughout the paper to denote non-normative identities and as a rejection of binarism. Heteronormative is the presumption that people fall into distinct gender categories (man/woman) and assumes heterosexuality as the norm. Homonormativity refers to heteronormative ideals being embedded into queer culture that intersect with racism, sexism, capitalism and transmisogyny. Homonationalism refers to the process of embedding LGBTQ rights into nationalist projects that ignore intersecting oppressions (Puar, 2006; Duggan, 2002).

² The term 'cis' is employed to denote a gender identity that is consistent with one's assigned sex at birth.

³ It is necessary to make a note on language. A variety of terms are used to refer to racial, ethnic, cultural and diasporic identity. The terms used such as black, blackness, brown, racialized, Caribbean are not complete or concrete and run the risk of limiting and homogenizing the nuances of identity. Racial categorization is a social construct that is context dependent. The aforementioned terms have different meanings in various geo-political locations. It is important to note that the notion of identity is fluid and shifting.

The hip hop and dancehall event, YYY, began in 2009. The organizers consist of DJs Sammy Rawal, Nino Brown, Stunts, Yes Yes Jill and L rock. Their beginnings were in the Global Village Backpackers Hostel.⁴ The organizers have since grown the event from around 100 patrons so that it currently fills ‘The Nest’⁵ nightclub with six to seven hundred patrons attending the party monthly. They have also organized special events during Pride week in Toronto in June each year, as well as establishing partnerships with other event organizers around the city, notably the Manifesto Festival.⁶ The organizers’ initial vision was to create a distinctly queer hip-hop and dancehall party catering to black diasporic communities in Toronto. The YYY DJs refer to the party as "straight-friendly," a play on the gay nightlife rhetoric of “gay-friendly” (Brown & Abdmoulaie, 2016).

YYY has become a platform for emerging and established local and international talent, with a predominant focus on racialized queer and trans artists. Some of the artists that the event has hosted include A Tribe Called Red, Angel Haze, Big Freedia, Le1f, Matthew Progress, Scratch Bastid, Keita Juma, Shi Wisdom and local DJs Bambii, Mensa, Lissa Monet and Wristpect (Brown & Abdmoulaie, 2016). The party is visually captured by resident photographer, Yannick Anton, who is one of the two key informants in this study. His images document the fluidity of the queer landscape with his sensual and candid shots, which have secured him wall space at the Art Gallery of Ontario and

⁴ The now defunct Global Village Backpackers Hostel at King and Spadina was the original venue of YYY. The event outgrew this venue as the capacity of the bar was only equipped to hold 100 people (Karstens-Smith, 2014).

⁵ ‘The Nest’ is the nightclub that YYY is held at. It is centrally located at College and Bathurst (Nest 2017).

⁶ The Manifesto Festival is an award winning Toronto hip hop festival established in 2007. Manifesto “is a non-profit, youth-powered platform designed to put local artists on the map and unite, inspire and empower diverse communities of young people through arts and culture, year-round” (Manifesto, 2017).

Ryerson University galleries (Brown & Abdmoulaie, 2016). Emphasizing diversity and acceptance is the directive of YYY and given its growing following, queer people of colour (QPOC) in Toronto seemingly agree.

For this MRP, I interviewed five patrons of the monthly event YYY as well as two key informants who are involved with the creation and maintenance of the party. Regardless of their level of involvement with YYY and the queer community at large, the interview participants all indicated in varying ways that they continually negotiate spaces of inclusion where they are able to express multiple aspects of their identity. The interview participant that I call ‘Dave’ aptly described the phenomenon of leaving part of his identity out in certain spaces as “living in silos.” While I am not interested in focusing on how one’s identity affect their ability to forge community in Toronto, I am interested in analyzing how the seven participants’ intersecting identities effect inclusions/exclusions through their experiences engaging with the Toronto queer community at large and YYY specifically. I am interested in exploring how racialized queer affirming space is created, what visibility feels like and what role community members and allies play in this venture. I examine the event specifically to determine whether there are possibilities to integrate a greater breadth of inclusive spaces.

1.2 Positioning

It is important to acknowledge my race and class privilege as a white middle-class queer woman who was born in Toronto. Because of these identities, I have been able to access unearned privileges, in public spaces to which some of the participants in this study have not had access. With this social location in mind, I seek to work as an ally to both the participants and black scholars who have long been taking up critical anti-racist practices and scholarship. Following Razack (2007), we must not,

continue to maintain a willful blindness about our collective history, unable to call up, for example, anything that might show us how we are implicated in the West's power over the non-West. [...] We cannot know this if our national mythology is that we are completely innocent, as a middle power and as nice Canadians. Second, race has handily enabled us to pursue the path of innocence, offering its well-worn tracks to make the journey speedy (p. 391).

In other words, my aim in allyship is to contribute work that seeks to untie and dismantle the very structures that exist *here in Toronto* and that afford me unearned privileges at the expense of racialized people.

Though some of the experiences of the participants in this study resonate with me with respect to sexuality, gender and living closeted in suburbia, I acknowledge that during the interviews, there were dynamics that arose and had to be negotiated as a result of power relationships. For example, being in a position of power as the researcher, I must cast the gaze at my own reflection (Boler, 1999, p. 161) recognizing “how [my] privileges are located on the same map as their suffering, and may—in ways we prefer not to imagine—be linked to their suffering” (Sontag, 2003, p. 103). A reflexive component of this project is recognizing how power relations influence my interpretation of data resulting in a tension between the participants and me.

1.3 Research Objectives

This paper has four main research objectives. Following the unique and fluid narrative of each of the participants, I use these objectives to review the literature as I engage with each of the participants' stories. The first objective of the paper is to provide a brief historical analysis of queer diasporic and transnational discourse with a particular focus on the colonial and immigration relationship between Canada and the Caribbean. The second objective is to demonstrate how homonational “migration to liberation” (Murray, 2004) rhetoric positions homophobia as a Caribbean phenomenon. I seek to

problematize this discourse and to illustrate how it poses barriers to the inclusion of queer Caribbean visibilities and narratives in Toronto. The third objective is to unsettle colonial notions of the ‘correct’ performance of gender and queerness (Butler, 1990). The final objective of this paper is to interrogate homonormativities by placing the experience and knowledge of the seven participants at the centre of the analysis in this MRP.

1.4 Chapters structured

A structuring of this paper is in order. Chapter 2 is the literature review and is divided into five sections. The first section of Chapter 2 presents the two foundational theoretical frameworks that I employ: critical race theory and queer theory. The second section of the literature review provides a brief historical analysis of how histories of colonization and slavery impact the sexualities of people living in post-colonial states.⁷ The third section calls into question problematic articulations of Canada as a ‘liberation land’ and the ‘Jamaicanization’ of homophobia. Drawing on Puar’s (2013) concept of ‘homonationalism’, I examine at how liberation “rights discourses produces narratives of progress...that accord some populations access to citizenship—cultural and legal—at the expense and delimitation and expulsion of other populations” (p. 337). The example of the Stop Murder Music Campaign (SMM) is used to illustrate ongoing colonial conceptions of liberating the global south. This section also uses an intersectional lens to explore sexuality and gender expression in primarily dancehall spaces, analyzing the complexities of the genre. The fourth section reviews notions of belonging and space allocation, examining the creation of space intended to advance inclusion for black or otherwise racialized queer communities. The final section of the literature review first

⁷ By using the term ‘post-colonial’ I do not wish to suggest that the pervasive effects of colonization in the Caribbean have come to an end. Rather, I use this term to reflect the language of the scholars such as Stanley-Niaah (2010), Frank (2007), Sheller (2012) who are used throughout this paper.

calls out the invisibilization of discussions pertaining to black queer space. The final section also credits Black Lives Matter Toronto (BLMTO) as a leader in racial justice initiatives in Toronto.

Chapter 3 presents the methods of recruitment and participant engagement. This chapter illustrates how I used purposeful sampling and snowballing methods of recruitment to find participants to join the study. This chapter also includes my rationale for structuring this as a case study, which draws upon a reflexive approach while analyzing the participants' narratives. Chapter 4 is the analysis. The section is divided into five sections. The first section presents an introduction to each of the seven participants including DJ Sammy Rawal (key informant 1, or, KI-1), Photographer, Yannick Anton (key informant 2, or, KI-2), and the five participants for whom I use the pseudonyms, Samira, Tiana, Sofia, Isaac and Dave. The next four sections explore the emergent themes from the narratives of the participants. Each of the themes are explored separately while I engage with each of the participants simultaneously. I conclude with the limitations of this study, suggestions for future research and a comment on the need for a greater variety of inclusive QPOC spaces.

Chapter 2: Literature Review: From the Dancehall to Yes Yes Y'all

2.1 Theoretical approaches considered

My theoretical approach is an amalgamation of Critical Race Theory (CRT) and queer theory as each interrogates how power relationships based on race, gender identity and sexuality impact the experiences of people with racialized and queer identities. I use these two theories to pull apart the ways that heteronormative, colonial ideologies, which are deeply embedded into Canadian political and popular media discourses, construct

racialized queers as either non-existent or in need of salvation. I also apply these concepts as they complement the analysis of each of the participants' experience as racialized, immigrant, and queer people living in Toronto. A brief review of how I draw upon each theoretical approach follows.

i. Critical race theory

I develop my analysis through the lens of CRT to explore the myriad of ways that systemic racism and colonialism are pervasive and active drivers of oppression in dominant culture. While institutional systems such as the law, education, and media are often framed to be objective and neutral social structures, CRT deconstructs and calls this notion into question. For example, critical race theorist Bannerji (2000) challenges such social systems and explains the Canadian system to be

a construction, a set of representations, embodying certain types of political and cultural communities and their operations. These communities were themselves constructed in agreement with certain ideas regarding skin colour, history, language (English/French), and other cultural signifiers—all of which may be subsumed under the ideological category 'white'(p. 64).

Bannerji writes about how this construction of Canada impacts the experience of citizenship for racialized people. I use this notion to first challenge the supposed neutrality of queer space. Further, I use this concept to pull apart the ways that it effectively denies the creation of inclusive spaces and spaces that cater to racialized queers. Walcott (1997) suggests that “to be black and ‘at home’ in Canada is both to belong and not belong” (p. 136) and so CRT is used to interrogate how queer space is constructed as neutral but in fact is serves the interests of white bodies. A variety of CRT scholars, both classic and contemporary such as Lorde (1984), Hill-Collins (2000), Walcott (1997; 2003; 2016), Crichlow (2004), and Razack (1998), are all used to examine how historical processes of coloniality shape power relations. Further, the

aforementioned scholars provide useful analyses to explore the continual construction of a racialized ‘other’ which has deep rooted historical origins in slavery and European Imperial beliefs of superiority (Said, 1978).

I draw on the work of Puar (2006; 2013) to explore homonormativities on a local level and homonational rhetoric on a national and global scale. Homonormativities refer to the assimilation of sexual citizenship that upholds the nationalist images of ‘queer’ correctly performed as white, cis-male, and middle class (Duggan, 2002).

Homonationalism is used to explore how racialized ‘other’ queers are both constructed as ‘in need’ of salvation from their necessarily homophobic homelands and also deviant and to be feared in their new chosen settlement home (Puar, 2006). These concepts, which are widely used by CRT scholars, provide a valuable framework to construct an analysis intertwined with queer theory.

ii. Critical queer theory

In this paper, I engage with queer theory to interrogate heteronormativity in public spaces and a society premised on cis-male white experiences. Butler’s (1990) theory of performativity suggests that gender is a scripted repetition that produces a ‘reality’ constituting an active conception of gender as something that one *does*. Many of the queer theorists useful to this project weave CRT throughout their analyses. This is why Puar (2006; 2013), Lorde (1984), Walcott (1997; 2003; 2016), and Crichlow’s (2004) work will help me to destabilize ‘correct’ homonormative performances of queerness. Homonational projects code queerness as ‘white’ and ‘cismale’ while there is a presumed heterosexuality of colored bodies (Puar 2006).

Queer theory is also useful in my analysis to call into question notions of community, culture and citizenship narratives that often get conceptualized as static.

Walcott (2016) suggests that

we can glean a cautionary tale from what rights talk has produced for ‘post-rights’ queer people in North America. These ‘post-rights’ queer people measure their citizenship in the exact and minute terms of heterosexual citizenship. Any deviation from the heterosexual state norm is considered a lack in equal citizenship. Thus, the production of homonormativity does not just mirror heteronormativity, it also constitutes a knowable and therefore consumer population or niche that is and can be internally and externally policed and governed (p. 150).

Walcott’s notion of the relationship between hetero and homonormativity interrogates queer rights discourses calling into question hetero-patriarchal knowledge production.

Walcott (2016) further suggests that “rights talk often works to produce and police sexuality on singular terms forcing sexual minorities into a one-size-fits-all model” (p. 152). Throughout this project, I extend this idea to expand the dialogue to include issues of inclusive space. This paper calls for more than *inclusive space*, it also calls for the recognition and production of space that is created and understood from queer, racialized perspectives.

iii. Positionality, revisited

To work towards the objectives that I have outlined, means that a requisite of this paper is to outline how I, as a white, Toronto-born, queer woman approaches the discussion of racialized queer people’s experience of a hip hop and dancehall event in Toronto. My work begins with questioning how I begin to write this paper from an anti-colonial, anti-racist and anti-oppressive framework in ways that allow me to speak about racialized queers. Following CRT scholar Ladson-Billings (2000), I do the ‘active

intellectual work' required to challenge a system "designed to create individuals who internalize the dominant world view and knowledge production and acquisition processes" (p. 258). Drawing on the lessons of Tuhiwai-Smith (2001) "research [is] a significant site of struggle between the interests and ways of knowing of the West and the interests and ways of resisting of the Other" (p. 2). My project remains committed to challenging my own worldview and assumptions as well as promoting social justice. My aim is to conduct research that "empowers[...] the marginalized and promote[...] action against inequities" (Strega, 2015, p. 208). I acknowledge the importance of centering the knowledge of QPOC scholars and participants in order to avoid misappropriating their experiences or re-appropriating them into the hands of white scholars. Part of the way in which I seek to do so is by a process of reflexivity, considering my race and cisgender biases and reactions to the experiences of the participants in this study. I ground my analysis in the knowledge of the participants following Hill-Collins notion of "insisting on the epistemic privilege of the oppressed" (Strega, 2005, p. 214) while always referring back to the literature on CRT and queer theory.

2.2 Jamaicanization of homophobia: Roots, the dancehall and homonationalisms

i. British Common Law and Slavery

In order to contextualize the exclusion of queer and trans bodies from the dancehall scene, I turn to the histories of colonization imposed upon the Caribbean nations. Though this discussion does not go into an in-depth exploration of British Common Law, the aim is to briefly contextualize the way that homophobia functions in post-colonial Caribbean states, attributing the roots to a myriad of influences. In this section, I argue that the brutality that queer bodies face in the Caribbean and more

specifically Jamaica, is due to the continual effects of colonial violence and a history of slavery (Lovell, 2016).

The historical context of colonialism, racism and religion enacted by British-Victorian era morals, such as prudery and repression, were imposed upon Jamaican bodies. This translated to the *Offenses Against the Person Act*⁸, which continues to have influence today not only through legal recourse but through social policing of bodies as well. Victorian era sexually repressive laws, greatly influenced by Christianity were brought to the Caribbean. Prohibition of anal intercourse was a means to control sexual activity that would not result in reproduction while simultaneously outlawing pleasure and desire. When Jamaica gained independence from Great Britain in 1962, strict adherence to fundamentalist Christian values remained influential. Jamaica is the country with the largest number of Christian churches per capita in the world (Lovell, 2016). So not only were widespread Christian fundamentalist values introduced through imperialism and the *Offenses Act*, but the influence of these values and adherence to them has widened (Lovell, 2016).

The policing of queer and trans bodies has expanded through not only legal recourse but also the social control of sexuality. During the colonial era, people living in Caribbean nation states were enslaved and subjected to sexualized violence. The continued legacy of anti-same sex sentiment has roots in slavery era dehumanization and exploitation of Caribbean bodies. Having left behind a “sexually stringent” cultural climate in Europe, slave owners perceived Caribbean bodies as hyper-sexualized and used this to their advantage to sexually exploit Jamaican slaves (Lovell, 2016). This

⁸ The *Offenses Against the Person Act* criminalizes ‘buggery’ (anal intercourse) either between or within genders (Lovell, 2016).

exploitation is almost certainly said to involve same-sex relations between slave owners and slaves (LaFont, 2001). It is suggested that “the reality of slavery most certainly brought about a new meaning of same-sex relations among Afro-Jamaicans” (Lovell, 2016, p. 89). This sentiment is echoed in a study conducted by King (2006) that deconstructs the persistence of homophobia in Jamaican culture whereby a respondent stated,

[homophobia] has everything to do with plantation slavery. [T]he various forms of sexual exploitation that took place ...make something like homosexuality very sensitive [for Jamaicans.] The respondent added that the act of anal penetration signified ‘the emasculation of the African male during slavery (p. 24).

The persistence of anti-same sex sentiment is not as simple as internalized European religious and colonial constructs. As Murray (2012) and Moore (2014) suggest

the decision to maintain the existing Laws after Independence evidences the investment of the new male ruling elite (in maintaining their favoured positions), a sweeping away of their former ‘inferior’ positioning in relation to the departing British state, and the complicated ‘dubbed’ processes that underlies this (p. 24).

Much of the British Common Law legislature was created against the fear of a racialized, specifically black, ‘Other’, marked by their ‘non-Europeaness’ as a threat to the aforementioned morals and values. In a post-independence era, Caribbean nation states carried over internalized repression of non-hetero sexualities and non-binary gender expressions. This history, used by citizens of the global north, is disaggregated from rhetoric surrounding the Caribbean. It effectively pushes narratives of progress and modernity through the denial of colonial histories. In effect, this positions Jamaica (and other Caribbean nation states) as *especially* homophobic and in need of salvation. Further, it discursively separates Caribbean queer migrants from queer citizenship in Canada again replicating the colonial notion of the racialized ‘Other’.

ii. Homonationalism: Discursive divisions between queers in the dancehall

Nations of the global south, and most applicable to this MRP Jamaica and other parts of the Caribbean, are positioned as abusers of human rights and ‘in need’ of salvation. The western model of sexual citizenship (Fumia, 2010) brands gay and lesbian rights as human rights and asserts that Canada is capable of bringing sexual freedom to citizens of the global south (Wahab, 2016). To explore this in depth, I turn to the policing of Jamaican Dancehall artists through the ‘Stop Murder Music’ (SMM) campaign. SMM was spearheaded by Peter Tatchell, a white British national, known for his work in LGBT movements (Tatchell, 2003). Despite the fact that this movement began in the UK, it travelled to Canada.

The SMM campaign encouraged venues not to sign with dancehall and reggae artists known to include lyrics that glorify the violence enacted upon queer bodies. The SMM campaign relies heavily on enforcing European and Canadian constitutional laws that prohibit the promulgation of written or performed hate speech against a specific social class or group (Tatchell, 2003, p. 16). The Canadian branch of SMM was started by Akim Ade Larcher in conjunction with EGALE Canada.⁹ Larcher emigrated to Canada to escape homophobic persecution in the Caribbean. The Canadian branch urged venues to cancel dancehall and reggae artists shows, specifically targeting Beenie Man, Buju Banton, Bounty Killer, Capleton, Elephant Man, Sizzla Kalonji, T.O.K., and Vybz Kartel¹⁰ (Chiola, 2011). The Canadian and British chapters of SMM further sought to prevent dancehall and reggae artists from entering the border. The Canadian branch launched a massive campaign reaching out to Minister of Citizenship and Immigration,

⁹ The Canadian branch of SMM differed somewhat from the British in that it included the voices people who identify as a part of the Caribbean diaspora living in Canada (Wahab, 2016).

¹⁰ These are all names of popular Jamaican reggae and dancehall artists.

Diane Finley, as well as the Canadian Border Services Agency. A request was made asking the government to ban Elephant Man and Sizzla Kalonji from entry into Canada as a means to censor and prevent their tours during the summer of 2007. This campaign was grounded in the homonational ideological standpoint that homophobia is a problem of the Caribbean, namely Jamaica and needed to be prevented from leaching into the Canadian nation. SMM used dancehall and reggae artists and traditions as the vehicle to drive Jamaican bodies elsewhere.

Though ultimately none of the artists were barred from entering Canada,¹¹ let us pause here a moment to consider the specifics and the implications of this campaign. Unlike the UK's branch of SMM, Canada's had support from several queer Caribbean diasporic groups. This complication of colonial, diasporic and racial politics still denied the voice of queer people living in the Caribbean. The campaign reproduced colonial, homonational power constructs whereby white, global north, queers assert what the proper gender performance of Jamaican culture should be, further playing into the notion that racialized queers are in need of liberation. The SMM campaign sets up the Jamaican as the 'other' and as a threat to the queer, white homonational security (Goldie, 2001 p. 216). By positioning homophobia and anti-gay sentiment as the sole issue to be tackled within this campaign, Tatchell and others failed to see the nuanced ways that race, class, nation of origin, region, sexuality and class play into the discussion around the dancehall tradition. This serves to separate queer Jamaican and Caribbean diasporic peoples from their *own* traditions. This action positions the dancehall tradition as violent and static, limiting its transgressive and expressive possibilities for queer people. Further, by failing

¹¹ Germany listed Jamaican dancehall performer Sizzla Kalonji on the Schengen information system as a person excluded from the area (Tjenbé Rêd 2008).

to consult with regional queer activist groups situated in Jamaica, the SMM campaign ‘violently abstracts’ sexuality from race and region in a way that denies the complex interplay between ongoing colonial influence and culture (Bannerji, 1995; 2000). The campaign writes off an entire tradition while belittling the possibility for agency on the part of queers living in the Caribbean in diasporic communities globally including Canada and performing what has been defined by them as cultural expressions of gender and sexuality.

iii. Complexities: Dancehall

Rebranding dancehall music as ‘murder music’ categorically relegates an entire cultural tradition as violent. By conceptualizing homophobia as unambiguous through the example of dancehall music and the SMM campaign, it privileges discussions of homophobia and further silences the possibility of viewing queer rights from an intersectional lens. Bannerji (1995; 2000) argues that “race, class, gender and sexuality cannot be violently abstracted from each other and that we have to view these relations as having autonomy but also as having mediated or mutually constructed character” (p. 223). I propose that this concept can be pushed further to include how regional politics and the ongoing colonialism (even in post-colonial nation states) impacts the Caribbean non-normative sexualities. This is to say that the input on queer people *living in the Caribbean* must be considered *first* when discussing the needs of Caribbean queers. Looking back to the example of the dancehall, the failure to view the genre within its particular cultural and political context mystifies its dynamism. As Chiola (2011) states “from its beginning, dancehall culture evinced socio-political consciousness, hyper-heterosexuality, socio-economic class division, and violence. However, it is difficult to separate these elements: they are mutually implicated” (p. 64). Canadian queer rights

discourses label dancehall as homophobic, which in effect frames it as a ‘Jamaican’ issue further silencing opportunities to discuss the intersecting realities of race, sexuality, gender and citizenship.

iv. Dancehall: Contradictions

It is important to note the contradictions in dancehall spaces. They cannot be reduced to one defining aspect such as sexuality, violence or gender policing. The genre originated in the 1980s in inner-cities in Jamaica (Galvin, 2014) and plays an important role in nation building in Jamaica. Scholar Stanley-Niaah (2010) argues that dancehall is a space whereby disenfranchised bodies in a post-colonial state can creatively take up space. She further explains that dancehall is,

structured by the urban, a space that is limited, limiting, and marginal yet central to communal, even national, identity[...Dancehall’s] identity is as contradictory and competitive as it is sacred. Some of Jamaica’s significant memories of itself are inscribed in the dancehall space, and therefore dancehall can be seen as a site of collective memory that functions as ritualized memorializing, a memory bank of the old, new, and dynamic bodily movements, spaces, performers, and performance aesthetics of the New World and Jamaica in particular (p. 118).

Galvin (2014) juxtaposes dancehall’s “metaphorical disruption” and “erogenous celebration of womanhood” to the way it “supplements the declining disciplinary role of church and state in policing gender norms and sexuality” (p. 40). Dancehall acts as a space of cultural production whereby youth forge an identity in “local, national and global contexts” and it also functions as meeting place of communication for ‘ghettoized’ youth (Stolzoff, 2000, p. 7). A more comprehensive, culturally safe analysis of dancehall traditions engenders an understanding that promotes agency for Caribbean local and diasporic communities.

2.3 Queer migration

Canadian multicultural discourse seeks to affirm the value of all people regardless of race, gender, sexuality (Canada, 2017). Multiculturalism is an official policy, though it also operates as an ideological framework that informs political institutions, education, and legal systems. It further posits that Canada is diverse in ethnic and cultural makeup and that this reality is part of the country's inherent strength. With respect to immigration, this very discourse also portrays Canada as a 'liberation nation' (Murray, 2014) exemplified through its acceptance of queer migrants and refugees. Canada is a recipient of queer refugees and hosts a relatively hospitable environment for queer people. For people who hold multiple identities that impact their experience, such as queer/racialized/migrant, there are multiple challenges to forging a sense of belonging. Given that Canada *can* and *does* welcome queer migrants and has multiple services for them, one would deduce that the nations should also ensure that there is space for queer/racialized/migrants to take up (Canada, 2017).

Jamaica Forum for Lesbians, All-Sexuals, and Gays (J-FLAG)¹² and Human Rights Watch documented several incidents of violent persecution against queer/trans people living in Jamaica in the years between 2004 and the present day¹³. The brutal violence that affects the daily lives of queer Jamaicans, severely impacts attempts to organize a queer rights within the Jamaican state. This is exemplified through the murder of Brian Williamson in 2004 who was the founding member of J-FLAG. Queer Jamaicans fearing for the safety of themselves and their families seek refuge in in

¹² Situated within Jamaica, J-FLAG "is the first human rights organisation in the history of Jamaica to serve the needs of LGBT peoples[...It is the] first port of call for the media [...and is] the mouthpiece for the LGBT community" (J-FLAG 2017).

¹³ Lenford 'Steve' Harvey, a gay man who worked for 'Jamaica AIDS Support for Life' was murdered on the eve of world AIDS day. In 2013, Dwayne Jones, was murdered after attending a party in Montego Bay (J-FLAG 2017).

nations, such as Canada, that are perceived to have hospitable environments for LGBTQ people.

Canada has been accepting refugees on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity since 1992 and the number of applicants has steadily increased since then.

Country	Referred		Accepted	Rejected
Antigua/Barbuda	2014	16	11	7
	2015	13	10	1
	2016	29	8	15
Bahamas	2014	28	9	2
	2015	71	17	15
	2016	101	45	38
Barbados	2014	24	13	6
	2015	35	16	7
	2016	32	26	6
Jamaica	2014	205	116	76
	2015	186	81	78
	2016	153	71	72

(Government of Canada 2017)¹⁴

Given the larger and increasing numbers, there is a need for increased inclusion of queer migrants.

While the intent of this paper is not to document anti-queer/trans violence in the Caribbean, it does seek to call into question discourses of “migration to liberation”

¹⁴ These may not represent SOGI claims. Any discrepancy in numbers is the result of abandoned or withdrawn claims.

(Murray, 2014). Contrary to neo-liberal rhetoric that positions Canada as a ‘safe haven’ for queers, there are several systemic level institutional barriers that queer migrants face when settling in Canada. Canada’s colonial history positions “racialized people as ‘uncivilized and foreign’” (Philip, 2016, p. 7). Researchers have documented racist discourse in Canadian institutions such as the media, education systems, the justice system, immigration policy, racial profiling and racist policing (Tator & Henry, 2002, 2006; Razack, 1998). Hernandez-Ramdwar (2008) expresses concern over the increased police presence at soca events, explaining that party goers have been subjected to police helicopters ushering them out and performers being forced to finish their sets with lights on. Police suggested that this was due to “the ‘type’ of people present (although what type they meant was never fully defined)” (Hernandez-Ramdwar, 2008, p. 88).

Racialized youth are discursively positioned as threats to the social order and in need of salvation (Tator & Henry, 2002). Sexuality and gender identity of queer migrants often intersect with other dimensions of their identity such as race, religion, ability and class resulting in barriers to full participation and inclusion in society.

Exclusionary discourses extend beyond Canada’s institutions. Queer migrants report facing racism within mainstream queer communities, posing additional barriers to forging a sense of belonging (Ou Jin Lee & Brotman, 2011). Homonational discourse positions Canada as a ‘liberation nation’, however, the reality is that racism is prevalent in queer communities. Ou Jin Lee & Brotman (2011) report that queer migrants explain that the most meaningful spaces of belonging are those where their multiple intersections of identity are affirmed. Further, research with refugees often emphasizes “their homelessness...in relation to belonging to a particular nation, and the concomitant

tension between the need to return them to their country of origin or integrate them into their new home nation” (Murray, 2014, p. 136). The question of home and belonging is tricky for queer migrants who have faced significant persecution. The argument is made that “home is understood less as a fixed place and more as a matter of where one best knows oneself” (Murray, 2014, p.136). Thus, in order to provide an opportunity to create a ‘home’ in Canada—whether that be spatial or temporal—institutions and communities must be called upon to challenge systemic racism and barriers imposed upon queer and racialized bodies.

2.4 Black Lives Matter

In the past two years there have been greater attention paid to the barriers that racialized queers face in Toronto and across Canada. It is essential to recognize the ways that racialized and migrant communities are uniquely impacted by homophobia due to ongoing effects of racism and colonialism. Dialogue in regards to racism and systemic barriers have long been taken up in racialized communities and have garnered much mainstream attention in the past two years. As noted above, these discussions can be attributed to a myriad of factors. However, Black Lives Matter Toronto (BLMTO) have been instrumental in shedding light on longstanding, deliberately excluded voices from the discussion. In March of 2016, BLMTO began a sit-in in front of Toronto Police Services, demanding police accountability for the murder of Andrew Loku¹⁵. During the Toronto Pride Parade in July 2016, BLMTO maneuvered a blockage that paused the parade demanding that all three levels of government and institutions (such as police and

¹⁵ Andrew Loku was a man who lived in a Canadian Mental Health Association subsidized housing unit in Toronto. Andrew Doyle, a Toronto Police officer shot and killed Loku on July 8th 2015 because he stated that Loku advanced on him with a hammer. The interaction between Loku and Doyle lasted only a few seconds—coresidents in the building said that Loku did not have time to drop the hammer before police opened fire (Warnica, 2015).

education) rectify matters in order to improve the well-being of Toronto's black community (BLMTO, 2016). The multiple demands notably included

- A condemnation of Toronto Police's excessive use of force and ongoing intimidation and harassment tactics against Black Lives Matter-Toronto protesters.
- A public apology from the Mayor John Tory for the actions and trauma he inflicted on the Black community.
- The creation of a Toronto District School Board-wide policy ensuring that uniform codes and practices do not violate the human rights of students.
- Revocation of the Safe Third Country Agreement which bars most refugee claimants entering from the United States over land to claim asylum in Canada. The Designated Country of Origin list, which makes it almost impossible for US citizens and citizens of forty other countries to claim asylum in Canada, must be eliminated (BLMTO, 2016).¹⁶

One of the demands specifically concerning black queer youth was to double the funding for Blockorama from \$6500 to \$13 000. This demand is not only tangible, but symbolic of the struggle for space that black communities are repeatedly denied by the government and institutions. Walcott (1997) suggests that "to be black and 'at home' in Canada is both to belong and not belong" (p. 136). The marginal funding for and continual downsizing of queer black space¹⁷ is reflective of the ways in which blackness is left out of or '*does not belong*' in queer Canadian discourses.

KI-1, Sammy refers to BLMTO's work as having inspired a 'cultural zeitgeist' that has brought to mainstream attention some serious systemic issues with respects to racialized communities, particularly concerning anti-black racism. BLMTO has publically called for an intersectional approach to Pride, prioritizing the hiring of black trans people, increased space for black queer youth and reinstating particular culturally

¹⁶ For a full list of the demands made by BLMTO please see <https://blacklivesmatter.ca/demands/>

¹⁷ 'Blockorama', one of Pride Toronto's most popular events created by and for black queer and trans people was located at a large stage west of Church Street on Wellesley (Samson, 2010). Between the years of 2007 and 2011, the party was repeatedly moved to make space for corporately sponsored stages mirroring the ongoing displacement that diasporic bodies face (Samson, 2010)

focused spaces that Pride has cancelled over the years (BLMTO, 2016). BLMTO's enormous contribution to the demands for black queer space is explored throughout the participants' narratives.

Histories of colonization and slavery provide the historical context for the contemporary homonational discourses that position homophobia as a Caribbean phenomenon. The SMM campaign and the demonization of dancehall music feed this rhetoric. However, CRT and queer theory scholars challenge the static and homogenous portrayal of diasporic traditions. The next section of this paper demonstrates the methods I have used to attempt to continue conversations, from a critical race and queer theoretical perspective, to which BLMTO has brought new life.

Chapter 3: Methods of recruitment and participant engagement

This study is structured as a case study of the monthly queer hip hop and dancehall event, YYY. The goal is to explore how the space transgresses white, male metanarratives in queer communities and what meaning patrons derive from the event. As previously, I interviewed five patrons of YYY for whom I use the pseudonyms Samira, Tiana, Isaac, Sofia and Dave. To engage with the five participants, a one-on-one semi-structured interview was conducted between each participant and me. Neuman and Kreuger (2003) explain the value of ethnographic interviews in their description of qualitative research as "the systematic analysis of socially meaningful action through the direct, detailed observation of people in natural settings in order to arrive at understandings and interpretations of how people create and maintain their social worlds" (p. 78). All identifying information such as place of employment or organizational affiliations are omitted to maintain confidentiality. A section reviewing demographics of

each participant, respectively, is offered in the analysis section of this paper in Section 4.2. All interviews were conducted during the summer of 2017. To invite participants to the study, I used a mixed-method of recruitment. First, I used purposeful sampling. At the May 2017 YYY event, I recruited potential participants. Purposeful sampling involves “identifying and selecting individuals or groups of individuals that are especially knowledgeable about or experienced with a phenomenon of interest” (Palikas et. al., 2015, p. 2). I remained mindful that it is important that participants exercise agency, a willingness to participate and the ability to express their experience with the phenomenon in a meaningful and reflective manner (Palinkas et. al., 2015). The event is located at a bar called “The Nest” at Bathurst and College. The doors opened at 10pm at which time I promptly entered so as to mingle with potential interview participants prior to the venue filling up. For the first hour of the party, I introduced myself to party attendees, left them with my business card, allowing them the autonomy to decide if they would like to participate. Three people came forward with an interest to participate. Secondly, a snowball method of recruitment was used to invite participants to be a part of the study. According to the snowball method of recruitment “the researcher accesses informants through contact information that is provided by other informants” (Noy, 2008, p. 330). One participant in the study was able to refer me to someone else who agreed to participate. As well, a personal friend helped me to identify potential participants for this study. Telephone, email and direct messages were used to maintain the snowballing momentum. From my purposeful sample and snowball, five participants agreed to participate.

The study also included two key informants, DJ Sammy Rawal of YYY (KI-1) and Yannick Anton, the photographer of the event (KI-2). For both, their real names are used with permission. They are a part of a small group of people who create and maintain the event each month. Key informants “are selected because they have comprehensive knowledge because of their roles or because of their ability to translate, interpret, teach or mentor the researcher in the setting of interest” (Green et. al., 2015, p. 5). I made contact with Sammy through a mutual friend and he readily accepted my invitation to participate in this study. Sammy then introduced me to Yannick, who also agreed to be a part of this study.

As stated in the recruitment letter, in order to participate in the study, each participant had to be 19 years of age or older, have attended YYY at least twice, and identified that they or their family had engaged with the immigration system. Strong preference was given to participants who identify as racialized and on the queer spectrum. Each of the participants of the study fulfilled these requirements at the time of the study with the exception of Tiana who had only attended YYY once. Once contact was made between the potential participant and myself, a letter was sent inviting the participant to join the study. Each participant was also sent the consent form to review prior to the interview. When the participant confirmed their interest and availability, an interview date and location were confirmed. All interviews were conducted in a private room at Ryerson University with the exception of the participant who I call Sofia and the key informant, Yannick. The interview with Sofia was conducted over Facetime. Yannick and I met at a coffee shop in Kensington Market. At the time of the interview, each participant signed the consent form and was invited to ask any questions that they might

have about the process. The interview questions were focused on participant's engagement with queer bars and clubs in Toronto, YYY, and other hip hop and dancehall events. My questions aimed to elicit responses that explored how they felt their multiple intersections and identities are or are not affirmed or celebrated in various spaces. In this way I was able to further interrogate what this means for the inclusion of racialized and queer bodies in Toronto. Interviews for key informants were designed to discuss how and why YYY was created and what contributes to the maintenance of this event. An additional purpose for conducting interviews was to examine if or how the YYY event affirms QPOC identities. Each interview was audio-recorded and took between 45 and 75 minutes to complete, depending on the nature of the participant's answers.

Once all seven interviews had been conducted, I transcribed each recording. Within seven days, the transcribed interview was sent back to the interviewee, at which point they had ten days to make any changes to the data or withdraw from the study. After transcribing the data, I coded and analysed each of the five participant interviews followed by the two key informant interviews. To do this, I searched for recurring themes in each personal narrative. After coding the data, I reviewed scholarly literature on reflexive and critical social science approaches to research. According to Strega (2005) the belief of critical social science is that reality is constructed through social, political, cultural and other forces. Further, this approach explicitly endorses a social justice standpoint seeking to challenge "existing power structures" like systemic racism, colonialism and anti-queer sentiment (Strega, 2005). Applying my understanding of critical social science in my analysis means that I attempt to subvert white meta-narratives of queerness while privileging the experience of racialized, queer

knowledge(s). Through a reflexive process, I also make clear my interpretations of the participant's knowledge while centralizing their knowledge and experiences.

I acknowledge that my sample size is small. The goal of this study is not to demonstrate generalizability but rather to explore the YYY event in depth through the experiences of and thoughts expressed by participants. As Flyvberg (2006) states, generalization “is considerably overrated as the main source of scientific progress” and there are many ways to “enter into a collective process of knowledge accumulation” (p. 227). This paper does not intend to generalize, rather it seeks to contribute to a growing knowledge base that calls white meta-narratives into question, pushing for further research in the area. This study problematizes white hetero and homonormativities while pushing for a wider variety of inclusive spaces. Racialized queer youth voice is centralized to destabilize the notion of a ‘universal’ queer subject. Furthermore, this study seeks to facilitate further dialogue around the intersection of racialization, queerness and inclusion.

I use a reflexive practice to centralize the participants' voices and to allow them to inform and construct the analysis throughout this project. Drawing upon the expertise, experience and knowledge to inform my analysis, I insist on the epistemic privilege of the oppressed (Hill-Collins, 2000). With this approach, I follow the participants experience and knowledge to guide my analysis of the phenomenon. It became apparent through this process that my literature review would be best constructed through the rich knowledge with which Samira, Tiana, Isaac, Sofia, Dave, Sammy and Yannick provided me. Based on this approach, this research is strongly directed by what I understand my interviewees to be saying. For example, when reviewing my literature review, I attended

to what people had said to me as a way to guide me to the appropriate resources to integrate into my analysis. I see this as different from assembling literature in order to analyze my transcribed data. It is a process guided by my understanding of the participants' narratives.

Before proceeding to the analysis, a comment on the fluid nature of this paper and the process of continuously challenging my preconceived notions and assumptions. Initially, I intended to map out and begin my literature review while I simultaneously conducted, transcribed and coded my interviews. I had hypothesized that my literature would include elements that later, given nuanced responses from participants, I determined that I would need to reorganize as I reflected on how much I still needed to learn and unlearn. The process of what I call *unlearning* and *learning* was conducted through attending the event and journaling afterwards, actively member checking the participants' responses, and as aforementioned, seeking out literature based on participant knowledge(s). Some of the literature that I sought out to support this process includes post-colonial and CRT scholars Frank (2007), Stanley-Niaah (2010) and Sheller (2012). The work of these scholars focuses on sexual citizenship in post-colonial Caribbean nation states. The narratives of the participants ultimately guide me towards a nuanced analysis of homonormativities and sexual citizenship in order to challenge colonial, white meta-narratives in a necessary way.

Chapter 4: Narratives and reflections

4.1 Reflexive approach

Following a reflexive approach, I engage with each participant individually allowing their narratives to guide the discussion on exclusions/inclusions within the queer

community. Though each of the participants had unique experiences that they attributed to their social locations, there were four emergent and recurring themes. Each of these four themes will be explored separately while centering the participants' narratives. My own reflections are italicized and embedded into their stories as I interact with their dialogue. The narrative of the participants' is first introduced and then my own reflections and analysis are denoted by italicized script.

4.2 Introducing the participants

i. KI-1, DJ Sammy Rawal

Sammy is one of the five founding DJs of YYY. He identifies as a QPOC. He grew up in Vancouver and moved to Toronto when he was 18. Sammy's parents are both of Indian descent but their families immigrated to East Africa. He credits much of his musical interests and inspiration to East African sound. He is also employed in the creative arts sector as a photographer and director of major Canadian artists music videos¹⁸. He and the four other DJs of YYY met at the queer event 'Hump Day Bump' which, along with Vazaleen, partially spawned the idea for YYY.¹⁹

ii. KI-2, Photographer, Yannick Anton

Photographer Yannick identifies himself as Jamaican-Trinidadian, first generation Canadian, queer and male. Yannick has been documenting the aesthetic of YYY since 2009.

¹⁸ Sammy's CV includes work with major Canadian arts such as Dragonette, Hannah Georgas, Metric and Feist (Sammy Rawal, 2017).

¹⁹ 'Hump Day Bump' and 'Vazaleen' were both events put on by the late iconic Toronto Queer, Will Munro. These events were seen to bring together a variety of communities, outside of the Church Street community. (Whyte, 2010).

iii. Samira

Samira identifies as a black Ethiopian-Canadian woman, having immigrated to Canada three years ago from Ethiopia. Samira is 21 years old. She outwardly rejects identification in regards to her sexuality. She is an artist and her primary medium is photography. Samira has attended YYY 3 times.

iv. Tiana

Tiana is the youngest of the participants at 20 years of age. She identifies as Jamaican-Bajan and Canadian. Tiana explains that she is bisexual but heteroromantic.²⁰ She is a university student outside of Toronto. Tiana has attended YYY once.

v. Sofia

Sofia identifies as a white, German woman. She immigrated to Toronto shortly after high school. She identifies as both queer and bisexual, drawing upon either term depending on the context. Sofia is 25 years old. Sofia is a graduate student at a University in Europe. Sofia attended YYY approximately 7-8 times during the years that she lived in Toronto.

vi. Isaac

Isaac identifies as a black, queer Jamaican-Guyanese Canadian male. His father is Jamaican and his mother Guyanese and he was born in Canada. He is 30 years old. He works in theatre arts and has attended YYY 3-4 times.

vii. Dave

Dave identifies as a gay, male POC. Dave was born in Trinidad and identifies himself as brown, west-Indian, Trinidadian and Canadian. He is 30 years old and works in the marketing sector. Dave has been to YYY 2-3 times.

²⁰ There are several popular definitions of heteroromantic. Tiana uses this term to mean that romantically, she is attracted to cis-men but that she has sexual attraction to women as well.

While this sample is not entirely representative, it does confirm my observation that those who attend YYY are approximately between the ages of 19 and 35, are predominantly POC and identify on the queer spectrum.

4.3 Interrogating queer: Free up!

Apprehension or lack of attachment to labels in regards to sexuality is a prevalent theme that emerges throughout the participants' narratives. Though most of the participants do not *outwardly reject* terms associated with gender identity or sexual orientation, each participant indicated that they feel constricted by the language that is used to define one's sexual orientation.

Isaac indicated that he draws upon a variety of terms to define his sexual orientation:

To the public I say [I'm] bi if they really ask. I don't know if I completely identify with that label as well. Fluid, I guess on the inside. Through practice, most people would say [I'm] gay. I've dated both men and women though... There's a little shit inside of me that doesn't want to make others' lives easier by putting myself in a box. I think they treat you differently if they know what you're into. It makes them feel a bit safer. I would like to be looked [at] as a whole and complete individual beyond my sexual orientation. I've also been bullied a lot by white gay identifying men for my beliefs/not labeling myself. I don't think that I choose my label in defense of that. I'm just now more comfortable with who I am.

Isaac's response evokes early queer theorists' interrogation of social processes. His rejection of categorical sexualities is informed by others' questioning of his sexuality, and, a reaction to white, homonormative narratives that he encounters. Isaac calls into question "the normalizing mechanisms of state power to name its sexual subjects: male or female, married or single, heterosexual or homosexual, natural or perverse" (Eng, Halberstam, Muñoz, 2005, p. 1). Further, Isaac begins to "pull apart the acronym [LGBTQ] in order to understand relational subjectivities and experiences of place and space" as his self-identification is context dependent (Johnston, 2015, p. 671).

Like Isaac, Samira rejects categorical sexualities, although she outwardly refuses to use a label and unapologetically complicates the notion of choosing an identity.

I like men but I think I'm slowly starting to believe that I can like what I like. It's more of a fluidity kind of thing. Me like the gyal dem too. My sexual orientation

is free. It's more my business...I can't help who makes my heart flutter. Labels...I think labels are this nice little box that society is just so comfortable trying to put people into. But you can cross more than one box. It's just a complication. No, so I'm not a labels person. Just like if it happens, it happens sort of but, like, it's my decision and that belongs to me. I don't need anybody telling me that this is what I need to do or who I need to like.

Samira articulates an important aspect of queer theory and identity politics. Her decision to live free of a label "and thereby free of commitment...is aimed at remaining 'unboxed'" (Guittar 2013, p. 396).

Tiana, the youngest of all the participants at age 20, also identifies with fluidity.

Given the drastic increase in dialogue around sexuality and gender identity, I imagine that fluid identities are more common and a comfortable space for young people to occupy.

She distinguishes her romantic orientation from her sexual proclivities.

I identify as bisexual but heteroromantic. It's not particularly important for me to use labels to identify myself but like for other people. If you want a label and prefer that I address you as that label [I will]. I would want someone to address me how I'd want to be addressed.

I am struck by Tiana's earnest description of the way that she separates her romantic life from her attraction. Her conceptualization of sexuality seems to mirror a new trajectory of 'coming out' (or deciding not to at all) that youth are/not engaging in. As Guittar (2013) explains that

contemporary youth are sensing that they can affirm a mere affinity for members of the same sex, and engage in the outward elements of coming out, by disclosing to another person "I like girls," "I like boys," or even "I just like people." This is a relatively new pattern of interaction (p. 394).

Tiana also alludes to defining her sexuality as being something she does 'for other people.' Defining to appease others is a common narrative throughout the discussions. Guittar's (2013) conceptualization of the 'queer apologetic' whereby young people coming out with an affinity for the same sex rather than a concrete identity (ie. gay/lesbian) "because they viewed it as a less risky way to come out" (398). Though Tiana's identification does not fit neatly into Guittar's (2013) concept of the 'queer apologetic', she identifies herself strategically to satisfy the cultural expectation that she define her sexuality while still doing so on her own terms (p. 398).

When asked about their relationship with the queer community and events, both

Samira and Tiana question what it means to label something as queer:

Tiana: What is a queer event? Anything that's a safe space is, like, a queer event! I wouldn't really label anything a queer event! Anything at Ontario College of Art and Design is safe and queer, like I am there. I don't think twice about it, ya...

Samira: Its unnecessary to give them [events] a label. It's like I hate it when people have to specify that I'm a 'BLACK' artist.

Though Tiana contests the idea of 'queer space', she also acknowledges its transgressive elements. She explains that she finds the event more inclusive of a variety of bodies than other hip hop and dancehall spaces that she goes to.

I've been clubbing downtown before and it's, like, different. People are more visibly queer at YYY. I don't know if it's 'cause I knew it was a queer space I felt like a lot more queer people came out because they felt like it was a space for them? It felt a lot more inclusive than other places too.

Samira, too, recognizes the inclusivity of the space from a holistic perspective.

When I am [at YYY] there's always this sense of community. It's not such a big deal going up and dancing with somebody...people are willing to engage with you...I think when you go [to YYY] vs. like Sneaky Dees.²¹ The competition exists more in other spaces. Community isn't at other places. You can go there [YYY] and it doesn't matter what you do there. Whatever you do there stays there. It's just this big melting pot of like nobody really giving a crap. Everything is accepted vs. other places, like, ya... It's a positive experience.

Both Tiana and Samira speak to the ways in which spaces are 'queered' and how YYY "offers a radical alternative to heterosexual space" (Oswin, 2008 p. 90) challenging both hetero and homonormativities.

Samira recognizes the significance of YYY as a space for queer Caribbean diaspora. Spaces like YYY function as what Oswin (2008) calls a "reterritorialization of heterosexual space...it purportedly enables the visibility of sexual subcultures that resist and rupture the hegemonic heterosexuality that is the source of their marginality and exclusion" (90).

Another participant, Sofia, invokes language to challenge identity politics within the queer community. After stating that she identifies as female, bisexual *and* queer, she explains:

²¹ Sneaky Dees is a bar close to 'The Nest' where YYY is held. Sneaky Dees hosts a weekly Hip Hop night (Sneaky Dees 2017).

I don't love either of the terms. For a while, I didn't like to use the word bisexual at all just because it has a lot of negative and wrong connotations...so then I just started using queer. But then I kind of thought all of those negative connotations and wrong impressions that come with the bisexual identity, that's not my fault. I wanted to take the term back so I started identifying with that more so now I kind of use both terms.

Like the other participants, Sofia is not attached to labeling herself and does not express an affinity for a categorical sexuality. Sofia affirms her identity as a political strategy. Challenging the misunderstandings about bisexuals, Sofia opts for this identity as a subversive tactic. Butler (1990) suggests that "the task is not to refuse representational politics—as if we could...the task is to formulate within this constituted frame a critique of the categories of identity that contemporary juridical structures engender, naturalize, and immobilize" (p. 5). Sofia provides a deep critique of the way that identity politics impact her lived reality.

The construction of a queer space of fluidity is the result of an intentional effort on the part of KII, Sammy and the YYY DJ collective. Sammy's narrative espouses an element of 'subjectless' critique of queer theory that is unbounded by homonormative metanarratives that privilege white, cisgender gay men.

...From our first party, our tagline [was] "straight friendly" which is a play on the 'gay friendly' or 'queer friendly' phrase... and we were like 'fuck this.' Our whole thing with that was come as you are—anyone, everyone...no matter your age, race, gender...even with respects to the crew of YYY...The party itself at the foundation has always been super supportive and in conscious of all that...

As Sammy explains that the party has been dubbed 'straight friendly', it dawned on me that the 'subjectless' aspect of the event is related to the impetus for this project. The space is first and foremost for QPOC. How 'queer' is conceptualized of is open for interpretation, contestation and negotiation. Crichlow (2004) explains that "the terms 'gay' and 'queer' conjure stereotypical images of a population that is white, effeminate, weak and affluent" (35). I understand the 'straight friendly' tagline of the party to be an intersectionally informed response to the way that "these descriptors efface Black men's sociopolitical and cultural history, which is one of colonialism, racism, sexism, imperialism, and so on" (Crichlow, 2004, p. 35).

Certainly, the participants in this research also feel that the fluidity of the space is palpable. All of the participants seem to embrace a 'post-identity' rhetoric whereby they

will and do identify their sexuality but feel that it's unnecessary to do so, especially at YYY. Post-identity politics "claim to have actually achieved, in practice, the universal enfranchisement and inclusion that identity-based liberalism offered only in theory" (James 2016 p. 23). I understand some of the participants responses to espouse that YYY is a space of post-identity, even if just for a night. Isaac relates this to Caribbean culture and discusses experiences within his family.

I think culturally, in the Caribbean, like in my family, it's like a 'Don't ask Don't Tell' mentality. We may know, like my younger brother may wear nail polish sometimes and its like we notice that, I can see an aunt or uncle clock it, but never mention it to him or mention it to my mother out of respect. I think that's carried over to the YYY environment. It's not DADT but its like 'we accept you no matter what'...Like DADT in a positive way...like we embrace you for being who you are, it doesn't really matter.

Isaac subverts and reclaims the term DADT, which usually has negative connotations in relationship to the queer community. When he discusses the connection between the site of the family and the YYY environment, one can interpret his idea of family to mean the YYY community as well. He suggests that the space provides affirmation, without the need to categorize who you are. Crichlow (2004) explains that "for most buller men and batty bwoys²² living in Canada, the family is a crucial site of potential affirmation and support. This role is strengthened by the tensions and hostilities of the racism they encounter in white society" (p. 80).

Samira alludes to what Isaac refers to as "DADT in a positive way" when she explains that "you can go there and it doesn't matter what you do there. Whatever you do there stays there."

Upon realizing that both Isaac and Samira had similar thoughts in regards not asking about identity/activity staying within the borders of YYY, I question the deeper meaning behind their comments. Though I did not push further during either interview, I wonder whether this notion of relegating behaviours and identities as somewhat secretive is indicative of discourses that "purify racial and sexual identities by silencing 'difference' [and in turn] regulating morality" (Crichlow, 2004, p. 28). Do they conceptualize of YYY as a space that subverts the "regulatory concept that polices the performance, actions and expectations of all black bodies be they bullers, batty bwoys,

²² Crichlow (2004) states that "'batty bwoy/man' is a derogatory term used in Jamaica, Antigua and Guyana to describe sexual practices between men who engage in same-sex relations..." (p. 197). This pejorative term refers to gay or effeminate men. *Batty* is Caribbean slang for bottom or buttocks, thus the term is in reference to male-to-male anal intercourse (Crichlow, 2004). This term is widely used by the dancehall artists that this paper has discussed.

bisexuals or heterosexuals” (Crichlow, 2004, p. 29)? Conversely, I am curious if their allusions to secrecy are references to safeguarding YYY as a home for QPOC.

All seven of the participants embraced fluidity as being a part of their identity in some way, shape or form. Even the participants who indicated that their sexual orientation was close to either gay or straight still contested the rigidity of binarism. All of the participants, too, spoke of how their other identities such as place of birth or race, impacts their gender expression or experience of their sexual orientation.

4.4 Intersections of race/gender/sexuality

As I read over my discussion with Sammy with respects to what inspired YYY and how the party has grown over the years, I note that he pushes beyond Canadian notions of multiculturalism and homonormative gay rights discourses. He discusses how the common connection between East African and Indian diasporic communities inform the impetus for a space such as YYY that doesn’t necessarily cater to white gay men. Throughout our discussion, his narrative is intersectional by nature, recognizing the urgent need for space that celebrates queer bodies of colour because of the lack of visibility specifically for this population.

Our party for the most part is POC. I think that’s very rare for a party of its size in Toronto. I think also, in respect to recent years, it’s really catering to QPOC who don’t live in the downtown core. It feels like word is spreading and there’s young kids from the suburbs coming in—which is great! It’s really breathed new life into the party.

All of the participants recognize that YYY is first and foremost a party created for QPOC²³. Each participant reflected on how the space recognizes their multiplicity of identities and what that feels like.

For example, Dave discusses the complex interaction between his race, ethnicity and sexuality. He notes that he experiences ignorance both in hetero and queer spaces:

I find that I need to identify myself by my race more so than I need to define myself by my sexuality. I feel less inclined to do that. Maybe there’s associated shame with it, I don’t know, I don’t think I’ve explored that enough. It doesn’t

²³ Sammy states that the party caters to QPOC. He also acknowledges that white, heterosexual people are welcome at YYY as well.

feel like its related to shame, it feels like my sexuality is more evident than my race. I find that people just assume that I am gay so they will do with that what they will... When it comes to my race I feel like I have friends who, because I've never had to have a difficult conversation with them about what I find problematic within our community or any experiences that I've had that they haven't (because they're white people). [They] assume that I don't have those problems and therefore don't associate me with being a QPOC... They just assume I'm one of them.... I find I need to identify myself by my race quite often... to be like 'no, no, no' these experiences are real and not just because I don't talk about it any chance I get. What I should be doing more is correcting people when they say things that I find problematic.

During this conversation, I sense a frustration in Dave's voice. This vexation continually returns as a theme throughout our discussion as we delve into the notion of inclusivity and how much more visibility is needed for QPOC. His insight into his lived experience as a queer Caribbean Trini man conjures notions of homonormativity whereby his brown body is subjected to the fragmented geographies of power across lines of race and ethnicity (Oswin, 2008). Dave calls upon himself to invoke his 'particular embodiment' problematizing inequities instead of what Oswin (2008) names "abstract calls for 'unity across difference'" (p. 96).

Isaac discusses the power of just *being* in a space where he is able to hold his blackness and queerness together unapologetically. He explains that within the borders of YYY his body is not seen as menacing, rather, it is celebrated for its multiplicity of locations. Isaac discusses how his body relates to the space through movement and interactions:

[It's] a very inclusive space but also... 'not gay only' space... [I'm] not looked at as dangerous, "too black", too whatever [like] in whiter spaces... As a black queer man I am fighting against the labels... not [to] I deny who I am... This is deeper and more complicated than I expected... I guess the shedding of the skin... involves being able to, like, live out fantasies that you didn't really think would happen for you as a queer person.

Isaac describes the perception of the black body as 'dangerous' or 'too black' in white spaces. Walcott (2016) describes this as the "demonization, surveillance, and practices of otherization which... accompanies neoliberal triumph" (p. 100). I understand Isaac to conceptualize YYY as a space that contends with and subverts "the simultaneous forms of racist/white supremacist and heteropatriarchal violence and oppression to which [he is] ...often subjected" (Bailey & Shabazz, 2014, p. 449).

Samira continually returns to the theme of YYY being fun, inclusive space that is meant for everyone. She also discusses the accessibility of the space in regards to participating in dance and music traditions. She discusses feeling welcome to learn how to *be* in the space.

YYY everyone is just there to have fun. Other parties there's a pressure where women have to look a certain way or like you have to dance a certain way or you can't talk to these people because there's some type of, like, hierarchy...a little bit. For me, I am Ethiopian so I have no involvement in the Caribbean. So, like, for me going into a party like that, I have had to learn how to dance. It's intimidating to go and talk to people who have been dancing, and know how to dress and know Toronto speak vs. YYY where the common goal is to have fun. It's more of an accepting space.

Samira "understands [her] relational subjectivity and experiences of place and space" (Johnston, 2015, p. 671) as intertwined with her identity as an Ethiopian-Canadian woman. She also hints at feeling excluded in certain spaces, serving as a reminder that community is not only physically bound but bound by gender and culture as well. Samira points out that her language, dance and aesthetic is different as an East African woman to that of Caribbean folks. Crichlow (2004) cautions that the term or concept of black community "functions as a floating signifier...its meaning shifts in accordance with who is doing the defining" (p. 16). Within the context of YYY, the definition has a broad reach—"a mixed crowd...predominantly POC"—as KI-1, Sammy suggests. This expansive version of inclusivity is felt by the sample of party-goers that I interview.

Tiana discusses feeling more connected to Caribbean communities than queer communities because the former is a 'stable' identity whereas her sexuality is fluid.

I identify more with my Caribbean community. I feel like I identify less with a queer community 'cause there's like judgment, ya know? I feel like queer people think I'm basically straight. I feel like identifying with a queer community is hard for that reason. I identify with my race and culture before I identify with a queer community or culture. Also the issues that they're overcoming, like transfolks and such, are quite different than the issues that I am dealing with. So its kind of like stepping back there and I can be a little more vocal in the black community.

Upon hearing this response from Tiana, I was not surprised nor did I feel that there was very much to explore. Upon reexamining this portion of the discussion, I come to understand a deeper connection to common, lived experiences that communities of people experience individually and collectively. When Tiana explains that she identifies

first with the Caribbean community she makes place and space hers by “making outernational identifications with other black peoples” (Walcott, 2003, p. 45).

Unlike Samira, Tiana has grown up immersed in Caribbean, and more specifically, dancehall culture. Her insight into how YYY’s presence relates to communities and larger structures is informed by her lived experience as part of the Jamaican diaspora. She states that “[YYY] does challenge whiteness though. It allows you to come back in touch with your culture that you’ve been forced to quiet down.”

I understand Tiana to be referring to the attempted erasure and delegitimizing of black cultures. Walcott (2003) troubles the notion of ‘two founding peoples’ and multiculturalism. Tiana’s narrative speaks to Walcott’s notion of ‘the coloured core missing’ and the ‘willful attempt to make black presence absent’ (p. 136) in Canadian discourse. The implications of a space in which you are no longer ‘forced to quiet down’ has a far reach. As Sheller (2012) explains,

Sexual citizenship is not just about personal rights or individual empowerment; nor is it simply about state recognition of certain kinds of privacy, although it includes all of these. It is also concerned with collective processes, public spaces, and forms of interrelatedness that are sexual or sexualized. Thus, it is a politics of public actions and, hence, a politics in which bodies are central and cannot be ignored or bracketed as in classic liberal theory (p. 41).

Dave’s discussion of the intersection of sexuality and how bodies are racialized is nuanced. He is extremely aware and critical of homonormativities. When discussing if and how he expresses his multiple identities at YYY, he alludes to the ‘performative’ aspect of queerness. His responses elicit a homonormative definition of ‘correct’ queerness equating to cis-maleness and whiteness. Butler (1990) explains that “gender is not a noun, but neither is it a free-floating set of attributes, for we have seen that the substantive effect of gender is performatively produced and compelled by the regulatory practices of gender coherence” (p. 24).

Even when I think about going to a YYY...I don’t think I do express anything related to my heritage or background. It’s one of those things where certainly I think it’s common for people like me who grew up in white neighbourhoods and

towns where you sort of get used to this idea that it's better to fit in and look like everyone else. That becomes what you associate with attractive with other people and what will get you attention in a bar. I would say for most of my 'out' life, it would be about picking up or getting picked up. To me the idea of being anything other than what's conventionally attractive didn't really fly. Rangela is a gay night for brown people. They have it at Fly. Its very South Asian heavy—lots of Bollywood music. I would never go to them because those guys presented very much as my culture and I didn't think that was attractive for a very long time. It occurred to me that it wasn't...that I didn't find it attractive, because I obviously did, it was what I saw in the mirror every day, and it's not like I think of myself as unattractive. It was that it wasn't what was being sold to me as attractive. When I would go to these parties at Woody's, I would wear like polos [...] looking like my white friends. I had a friend who said to me "I feel like you dress more boringly" when I was hanging out with these 'Abercrombie' like guys. That stuck with me 'cause it was like I was dressing and behaving like these guys I hang out with because I see them as chiseled and blond and blue-eyed or sandy haired and gorgeous and that's what everybody wants. Now, I was trying to dress like them and be like them. It was a very, very strange experience. That was kind of the norm for me.²⁴

Dave deconstructs a very important tension. He brings to light how whiteness and maleness gets coded as the correct way to perform queer. Though Butler (1990) does not explicitly include an analysis of white cis-male metanarratives, her discussion of the "repeated stylization of the body" (p. 33) speaks to the ways in which the appearance of whiteness produces discursive notions of "the real" (p. 33), or more aptly, the desirable.

When asked if there are dimensions of her identity beyond woman/queer that are recognized at YYY, Sofia said that, as an immigrant, she feels affirmed.

Yes, I was comfortable. I felt like I was an outsider, but not in a bad way. I didn't feel like I was an outsider that wasn't accepted, I was just like...I felt different from most people...As a foreigner. I'm white, but I'm not North American/Canadian. People might not see that at first but when they start talking to me they're like "oh you have an accent, where are you from?" I feel that part of me is recognized within the space.

At YYY, most people are POC and I'm white and I'm German so I feel like I'm definitely in the minority. And it's just like, at first glance, I don't have very much in common with people[...]Even like I said, I don't know some dancehall songs... I know that a lot of people who go to YYY are 1st/2nd/3rd generation immigrants as well but, ya, I dunno. It's also because I'm a pretty recent newcomer, it made me feel like a tourist in a kind of way.

²⁴ Dave refers to 'Fly' and 'Woody's' which are both bars in the Church-Wellesley neighbourhood.

Sofia differentiates her experience as a white woman in the space. At the same time, she discusses her identity as an immigrant who speaks English with a German accent in relation to other marginalized bodies as both being celebrated within the atmosphere at YYY. In this way, YYY challenges discursive interpretations of multiculturalism that imagine black people as “being from elsewhere” (Walcott, 2003, p. 136) by creating an atmosphere that prioritizes QPOC.

Isaac’s relationship to queer communities as inextricably intertwined to his identity as a Jamaican-Guyanese Canadian. He both fights for recognition of his experience as a racialized man and challenges erasure of blackness within queer narratives. When asked if he feels like he is a part of a queer community, Isaac replies,

Ya, sometimes not by choice. Sometimes I think that I’m lumped in there just because. The queer friends that I have are awesome. Being attached to that isn’t always bad. Sometimes when I’m in completely white queer spaces I don’t always love the label. I feel like then it’s making me like everyone else in that space and my experience is different. Like every white person in that space. They’re like ‘ohh we don’t see race’. I kind of turn into an invisible queer person [...] he’s not that black guy until Beyonce comes on and it’s like “ohhhh he’s *that* queer black guy!’ and you’re like ‘oh god’... That label THOUGH!

In response to being asked if he gets tokenized, Isaac states,

Absolutely, and so when you are tokenized, you really reject that notion and reject the space as well. I know that I’m a lot smaller in white spaces... Smaller. I make myself a bit smaller. As a black man I know what stigma that holds but also what power that holds and I think that I give up that power to make other people feel more comfortable...

Isaac’s dialogue is so rich in metaphor relating to discourses of citizenship in settler colonies. Walcott (2003) refers to the ‘racial geography of Canada’ as “the struggle over space” whereby the quality of land granted to black communities by the nation was “suitable for little more than housing plots” (p. 43). I suggest that there is a connection between the way Isaac states that he makes himself smaller and “national historical narratives [that] render these geographies invisible” suggesting that “any black presence in Canada is a recent and urban one spawned by black Caribbean migration” (p. 43).

I ask Isaac about the role YYY has in challenging homonormativities and white cis-male metanarratives in the queer community. He sees the space as a means for white queers to call their privileged positions into question.

I ask if YYY play a role in challenging white dominant discourses in the queer community and if so, how. Isaac suggests that it does for a variety of people.

Yes, for me but not only for me. For white queer people in those spaces as well. They get to experience something that is fun and safe and maybe goes against what they thought a black queer person would be like. Yeah, you have those drag queens and whatever and lots of different kinds of queer people. But to have us do it our way is not only empowering for me but is a huge educational lesson for a community as a whole, the queer community. Queerness and privilege for whatever reason kind of go hand-in-hand. If you are privileged enough to be able to call yourself queer, it means that you're probably very progressive...

Isaac refers to the importance of expressing the multitude of identities that QPOC occupy. His narrative speaks to the need for public forums that Sheller (2012) has argued we need to debate.

[...]Sexual citizenship—whether aural or scribal, musical or lyrical, bodily or spiritual—[is]...contributing to the development of erotic agency as protest against, and resistance to, the constrained heteronormative sexualizations and hierarchical racializations of citizenship in the post-plantation Americas. Erotic agency here encompasses not just sexuality but all forms of self-determination of one's own bodily relation to time, space, movement, labor, knowledge, kinship, and divinity. It is the larger life horizon in which existence flourishes (p. 279).

This project is premised and conceptualized through an intersectional framework and the impetus was to uncover the ways in which YYY attempts to affirm the ways that identities impact one another. Though participants had varying experiences in queer scenes and levels of engagement with YYY, they all suggested it was space that allows them to bring multiple aspects of their identity together. Further, participants Isaac and Dave alluded to the space as healing for their teenage selves that had to 'leave behind' dimensions of their identities in various environments. Because musical expression is a vital part of cultural traditions, participants also discussed the comfort of moving freely and authentically in a culturally relevant space.

4.5 Dancing to resist!

All of the interview participants mentioned the importance of dance relating it to its emancipatory potential. Sheller (2014) states that dance traditions have

profound implications for the performativity of citizenship...overflow[ing] beyond the formal political realm...the analysis of citizenship from below ultimately must engage with popular cultures of dance and performativity as aspects of embodied freedom as politicized erotic agency (p. 38).

Movement as connected to sexuality and culture is a prevalent theme throughout the interviews. The participants discuss every aspect of dancing. They shared with me how they prepare themselves for a night out, the aesthetic they embrace, and the sacredness of dance.

Looking over the interviews and reexamining all that the participants shared with me, I am surprised at how much we talked about dancing. Participants Samira and Tiana focused a significant amount of the interview on dance as every question inevitably, somehow, came back to movement in the dancehall. This way of taking space is both a desire and pleasure as well as a political claim to belonging: in the national imaginary and as a gendered and sexual being.

Samira explains that the aesthetic she embraces plays with both her masculine and feminine sides. Though, she explains her movement is directly linked to her *womanness*.

For me I, like, stay in baggy clothes like sneakers. I own my sexuality in my own way. I like to wear makeup, too, and I like to play up my hair - but I stay in hoodies (laughs). Comfortable... The way I dance its like 'yes, I am a woman, I have hips and I do this and it makes me look good.'

I have always been perplexed by particular brands of feminism that discount the erotic as a power that women possess. Samira discusses the agency that she exercises through her body and cisgender expression. In this way, the body is recognized as a site of pleasure and a site of power. As Lorde (1984) states,

The erotic is a resource within each of us that lies in a deeply female and spiritual plane, firmly rooted in the power of our unexpressed or unrecognized feeling. In order to perpetuate itself, every oppression must corrupt or distort those various sources of power within the culture of the oppressed that can provide energy for change. For women, this has meant suppression of the erotic as a considered source of power and information within our lives (p. 53).

When asked if she expresses different parts of her identity, Samira points towards the ritualistic self care that she exercises to get ready.

I think everytime we go out, the hair gotta be poppin', the skin juicy and glowin'... You gotta stretch before you go out 'cause when you wine up on someone you gotta be READY... When I saw you at YYY, that was the first time I was back in a while... MANS spilled a drink on the ground, I stepped in it and I did the splits! I smacked my forehead on my KNEE. One leg was going to Finch and one to Union²⁵ ... so ya that's why I stretch! Stretching is essential... I think [at] YYY everyone is out to have a GOOD time. It is a celebration. Other times going out you're, like, ok so I have to look like this... And everyone's, like, doing this, like what's the flex, what's everyone wearing, is it a heels thing, is it sneakers? It's always sneakers cause you're DANCING but like...

I read Samira's account of the aesthetic that she embraces as unapologetically in honour of her body. I interpret her explanation as an appeal to a "politics of pleasure... capable of intersecting, challenging, and redefining dominant narratives about race, beauty, health and sex in ways that are generative and necessary" (Morgan, 2015, p. 44).

Tiana describes the music and dancing at YYY as a transnational experience, conjuring feelings of nostalgia from her youth while she was living in Jamaica.

I lived in Jamaica for 4 years in the middle of my adolescence so from 13-17 and during that time music was a huge influence in my life. So when I am here and I hear dancehall, I'm like prepared and it brings me back home a bit 'cause it feels nice. When they were playing the music at YYY, I was happy, I was feeling good I was like 'yesssss'. I was like 'Dj, play the music louder,' It was nice being there, I can't lie!

Earlier in the interview Tiana also said "[YYY] allows you to come back in touch with your culture that you've been forced to quiet down." I draw a connection between the nostalgia and her description of cultural traditions being silenced. Tiana conceptualizes both her culture and femininity as a source of agency, "revealing the body as a locus of national and transnational relays of power" (Sheller, 2012, p. 246).

Tiana links her sexuality to her body pride and femininity. She connects both of these aspects of herself to the sexuality of the *dancehall space*. She states, "I like dresses. I like to play up my femininity. I like to OWN my sexuality. I'm happy in my body so

²⁵ Finch and Union are stops on the Toronto Transit Commission subway line that are at opposite ends of the city on a North-South axis (TTC, 2017).

it's like ya... You can NOT escape anything sexual with dancehall. It's basically like dry sex OK!" Tiana's narrative alludes to the

sexualized representation of the potent female bottom in contemporary Jamaican dancehall culture – these nether regions that are not spoken of in polite/political society. In a controversial reading of slackness (sexually explicit lyrics, performance, dress and dance) as “erotic play in the dancehall,” Cooper argues that, “liberated from the repressive respectability of a conservative gender ideology of female property and propriety, these women lay proper claim to the control of their own bodies” (Sheller, 2012, p. 42)

Tiana's playful energy is imprinted in my mind when I recall our discussion about dancehall and YYY specifically. She deliberately, without regret connects the erotic nature of dancehall to the feminine agency and power she possesses. At the same time, she avoids completely relegating dancehall tradition as sexualized. To Tiana, it is much larger than music, it is cultural and social autonomy.

KI-2, Yannick is privy to the emancipation of which the participants speak. As the photographer, he documents the physical embodiment of the freedom that is difficult to explain with language.

There's a magic in certain spaces. The 'Wreckroom'²⁶ was wild. There was lots of space, a pole on the stage, you could hang from the ceiling. People were realizing that we played dancehall. The dancers would come out and throwdown. It was beautiful. I have never seen that at a party in Toronto either. I could take a picture of someone and doing a headstand, then there would be someone on the ceiling, then there's someone on the pole, someone is getting picked up, someone is getting a shot poured on them. All of these things are happening in the same space. Its not one particular spot but in the same room it's all happening. Everywhere you go there's a different, high, beautiful energy. It makes the party what it is... Freeup!

I feel a sense of nostalgia as Yannick's photographic memory of the Wreckroom reminds me of my first few times attending YYY. I remember feeling that the space was full of possibility. His description reminds me of how exciting it was to finally feel the embodiment and freedom of my queerness.

²⁶ 'The Wreckroom' is a venue in the Annex neighbourhood of Toronto that used to host YYY. It is now closed.

Yannick acknowledges that dancehall movement is based on proximity and that this can be read as hypersexualized. He suggests an alternative lens through which to read dancing within YYY.

...Anything beautiful can be fetishized. Like I said, you can see wining or bubbling in the corner as dry sex and humping and that they should get a room...Or you can see it as a wicked bubble and a good dance... you can see it as beautiful and spiritual or fetishized. It's important to capture the wide range of people of YYY cause that's what the party is.

At another point in our conversation Yannick traces the origins of dancehall movement back to "its roots in traditional African dancing, where you see everyone in a circle wining their waists..." He connects the diasporic roots to the spiritual challenging the "incessant fetishization of women in the dancehall" (Frank, 2007, p. 173).

Isaac frequently comes back to the meaning of dancehall throughout our conversation. He also notes YYY's capacity to forge a safe hip hop and dancehall space, acknowledging that these traditions are often unsafe for queer bodies. Like Tiana, Isaac evokes a sense of nostalgia.

I remember being younger and hearing my cousin talk about going to jams or 'fetes' and describing the type of dancing they were able to do and the music they were listening to and I guess at other queer events I don't always get to hear music from my background and my culture. I mean you hear hip hop, you hear RnB, you hear pop whatever...like reggae, calypso or soca whatever you don't hear as much and so it's almost like I get to live out that young person fantasy in a safe queer space. I didn't think I would ever have the opportunity to dance in public to that music with other people being into it and dance how I want and express myself how I want.

When I ask him to share some of those fantasies, Isaac laughs.

Being able to really wine up on someone, get down, dance authentically to dancehall music in a positive manner, to express sensuality to that music which is also a bit fucked because its attached to homophobia in a lot of ways. I know initially when I went to my first one and I heard the music there was like a physical reaction that made me feel a bit uncomfortable. I knew that I was in a space that was safe. I still felt that I wasn't completely allowed to let go until halfway through the night when I was like "yaaaa"... When you're around other people like you and people who've had similar upbringings and so... I guess I didn't want to be called a 'battyman' in a negative way from another black male. I

feel like that's loaded and you grow up hearing that all around you and, that for me, is attached to that music sometimes.

Pausing here, consider the power of language. Isaac's fear of being called a 'battyman' speaks to the experience living under oppressive "structures of dominance that exist within violent and homophobic black heteronormative communities" (Crichlow 2004 p. 31). Bakhtin (1981) suggests that "language has been completely taken over, shot through with intentions and accents...Each word tastes of context and contexts in which it has lived its socially charged life; all words and forms are populated by intentions" (293). Isaac subverts these 'contexts' as he recounts what dancing feels like for him as a Caribbean man (with other Caribbean men).

So I guess dancing to that music is like me reclaiming the genre and what it means to me now. It means something different to me now. Its freeing to be like "fuck" I hated hearing that music in high school because it made me feel like a little fearful or I attached it to really aggressive relatives who were super homophobic. Now to be in public and to be able to...there's like a community and safety there.

Isaac's narrative is so rich in dynamic and seemingly contradictory feelings. On the one hand, he deconstructs the tension and discomfort that he feels being in a space that he has coded as anti-queer. On the other hand, Isaac describes an emancipatory reaction within the boundaries of YYY. Borrowing from Sheller (2012), sexuality is historical and political in nature nor does it

simply emanate from within an already formed subject. Rather, it is interactively elicited through encounters between bodies and sexual geographies, which include spaces of belonging and safety, ethnosexual borders and frontiers, and modes of normalizing, policing, and surveilling sexualized bodies and places. Sexuality is rooted in place, politics, relations of power, and access to or exclusion from the rights of citizenship (p. 242).

Isaac goes on to explain that the environment at YYY is healing. He states that "it's like letting my grade 9 self be able to attend a dance the way that I wanted to. It's like a way to give him a second chance and way to show him that this shit doesn't matter."

Isaac's reflexive conversation with his younger self moves me. I contemplate the gravity of spaces like YYY for QPOC communities. Listening to his narrative, I wish that this project had the capacity to reach a larger sample of the community—the stories that Isaac and the other participants have gifted me with are powerful. Isaac reminds me of the capacity for storytelling to affect change within communities.

Sofia has engaged with hip hop and dancehall spaces the least out of the 5 participants. She admits that dancehall music is not her preferred genre but something draws her back to the space. During our conversations, she also discusses her experience as a white woman in the space “as an outsider but not in a bad way.” She explains the energy of YYY similar to how Samira does.

It’s always a very positive energy. You can tell that people are there to have a good time and it’s not very... Sometimes at other events it feels sort of cliquey. Everyone is just there with their group of friends and sometimes there’s not even that much dancing, only when people get very drunk. People are there to dance and there’s more interaction (at YYY). There’s also less judgment in a way.

All of the participants explicitly state that the energy at YYY is centered around fun, freedom, acceptance, and dancing. Sofia is the only participant who does not have a cultural connection to hip hop or dancehall traditions. Still, she acknowledges that it is the queer event in Toronto that she has engaged with the most. I wonder if the emancipations that the participants discuss is connected to notions of freedom “grounded in the living sensual body as a more fully rounded, relationally connected, erotic, and spiritual potential” (Sheller, 2012, p. 24).

Dave’s tone is highly politicized and analytical at all times. While discussing his experience dancing at YYY, he continues draw connections between various experiences throughout his life relating them structural homonormativities.

When I was 19 we used to go to Caribana²⁷ fetes, there would be 20 of us in the family taking a limo down... I remember thinking [YYY] is like what those Caribana parties were like. My sisters would meet guys at those parties and they would have their fun hookup stories. I had hooked up with a guy at this first YYY. I remember thinking ‘wow I’m like my sisters’... and that’s why they love those parties so much ‘cause you can go and dance you feel attractive. That’s the other thing that I love about it: it was really the first time I felt really good looking. At other spaces by default you’re not white so you’re not hot. And at YYY and events like this so many guys were checking me out and wanted to talk to me.

The complex web that Dave weaves tells the story of how YYY conjures memories of his family, Caribana and sexual citizenship. His narrative invokes “a diasporic experience...positioned between resisting racism, homo-hatred, and white

²⁷ Caribana is an annual Caribbean themed festival held in August. It is North America’s largest cultural festival (Caribana 2017).

homonormative on the one hand and attempting to frame lives beyond those dynamics on the other” (Walcott, 2016, p. 132). Dave continues to discuss some of the problematic experiences that he encounters as a QPOC at spaces like YYY.

It wasn’t even just brown guys and black guys, it was white guys too. But then that started this cycle of fetishization and people only being into me because I am brown or thinking that because I am brown I’m going to be a certain type in bed. At the time though it was very exciting to me, I wanted to get more of it because I felt SO hot. I remember music being amazing, loving the guys and feeling free and great.

Dave contrasts the excitement of feeling desirable to the discomfort of feeling fetishized. His analysis of how white queers perceive black and brown bodies is directly reflective of Said’s (1978) concept of ‘Orientalism’ whereby westerners perceive and thus define the east.

This theme, however naively, was an unexpected and welcomed surprise. The conversations continually returned to the appreciation for a space where the participants could dance *in a way that they could own*. This theme is connected to the way in which YYY transgresses homonormative discourses in regards to the dancehall.

4.6 Not just a club: Transgressing the dancehall

One of the original research objectives for this MRP was to investigate if and how YYY impacts communities outside of its social borders. The participants had varying responses as to whether or not YYY transgresses white/male metanarratives, how the space impacts QPOC communities and what effects YYY has had on ‘straight’ hip hop and dancehall scenes through their partnerships.

When asked if YYY challenges homonormativities in the queer scene, Dave is apprehensive to say yes. He acknowledges the power of a predominantly POC space so that he can “actually dance to and want to hear, seeing people that look like me and even talking like me... I think when it comes to YYY it gives people that outlet, that opportunity to be themselves...” Dave feels QPOC face larger systemic barriers to inclusion than YYY has the capacity to tackle. He explains to me that “it doesn’t have the

momentum because there's this very clear line between white gay Pride and what's successful and what sells and the POC version of Pride and the community.” He goes on to suggest that

the doors just have to be available to them. I think that clubs which are popular and that are more accessible and that have the followers should book them. Like Fly or Woody's or these bigger venues, these predominantly white clubs that everyone knows about and goes to that have the money to push the promotions should be hosting these events. They should let the POC organizers that are behind them take the reins for the evening but they don't... There's physically NOT ENOUGH space for us to have these kind of nights. In order for us to get that kind of momentum, there has to be more acceptance for accessible spaces.

Dave raises an interesting question with respect to equitability and inclusivity. Is it up to the community to transgress inequity? Or is it the responsibility of people with economic power to support communities to do so? He appears to endorse the idea that “the master's house will only be dismantled with the master's tools” (Gates, 1998).

Dave's narrative draws upon the notion of ‘interest convergence’ whereby white people will only support racial justice if they can directly benefit from it as well (Bell, 1980).

Further, his narrative suggests that because white bodies hold the majority of power within the queer community, events like YYY lack the agency to transgress these systems.

I feel continually challenged by Dave's responses to the questions that I ask him. He sees everything as interconnected. He draws connections so beautifully between different systems in a way that can only be done by someone who is 'grounded in the experience, or process or phenomenon' (Strega, 2005).

Dave draws a connection between the lack of accessible QPOC space to the ways that white queers go to YYY to

voyeur on the dancehall and watch ‘cool black people getting down low and shaking their booty.’ It's an event for them, it's an experience...but these white gays who don't get that...They treat it like this spectacle. They have a disrespect for it. That really bothers me.

I am interested in the way that Dave speaks his experience and his truth as a QPOC. His narrative calls upon white queers to reevaluate their position when entering black space. He vehemently problematizes “the politics of voyeurism and fetishism that frequently accompany the representation of black bodies” (Barnes, 2000, p. 89).

Dave affirms that YYY is a space for QPOC. He also speaks in detail about how important it is for Toronto to have spaces that celebrate racialized bodies.

I think people of black and Caribbean descent...people who don't get to hear their music that they grew up with that they love...people who don't get those safe spaces that they need. When I think about who would be there, that's what I would imagine. Obviously, there's white allies and they can come too but they are not the primary audience. It's for the underserved folks...Visibility is survival—it is *so, so* easy for us to disappear. It would actually make so many people comfortable. What's so scary are all of the discussions with BLM, the police, the two extra colours on the pride flag and all of these horrible comments coming from people in the queer community who before all of this would have had me over for a beer...to think that there are people who are supposed to 'understand' me would actually prefer that I didn't exist, is terrifying. I can't imagine visibility being anything but a good thing, even if it means we're targeted. No light is always going to be flattering. It's better than being completely shut out.

Dave speaks to what Walcott (2003) refers to as the 'elsewhereness' “conditioned by an imagined diasporic collective history and by the nation-state's demand for black people to belong elsewhere” (p. 134). The discourse that multiculturalism policy and rhetoric produce positions Caribbean culture as having a specific time and place (such as Caribana) rather than as embedded into and a part of Canadian culture.

Finally, Dave calls for an intersectional framework to be employed when it comes to the creation of queer space that is inclusive of black and brown bodies.

That's why YYY is so important because there isn't equity of spaces. They're so few and far between and they're constantly overshadowed. It's a problem when the predominant spaces don't want to share. And they've always been doing it but now more people are calling it out. I don't get it. I think that YYY offers an opportunity for POC to feel comfortable and familiar in a space. There are actually a lot of parties like that but there's a big tension between being black or Caribbean and gay. YYY really offers the opportunity to finally have both. We don't have a space where we're fully ourselves. When we're in a gay bar, it's predominantly white, or a certain class, we have to fit that mold. If we're in a POC space that's not necessarily gay friendly, then we have to fit that mold. The two rarely intersect. When they do it's like “omg, thank you this is amazing..!”

KI1, Sammy provides me with so much rich information and analysis of the politics behind YYY. When asked about accessibility for people facing multiple barriers to inclusion in queer scenes, Sammy addresses how YYY has been able to circumvent challenges and what work still needs to be done.

...Everything, down to security, who is at the door, in respects to music, also in respects to cover charge. We charge now \$10 after midnight and we know that can be a bit expensive for people. We always try to do reduced rate before a certain time or a pay what you can 'cause that accessibility has always been important to us. We have also donated money every month to a local charity, a community-based charity. It's always in the forefront of our mind.

The discussion Sammy and I are having is happening approximately two weeks prior to the 150th anniversary of Canada's confederation on July 1st, 2017. The YYY DJs are featured in an 'alternative to 150' party called 'Unceded' along with several Indigenous DJs and artists. I ask Sammy about YYY's efforts to decolonize queer space.

There's a lot of sensitivity with that party especially. We didn't feel comfortable with getting as much money as they were offering us... We never want to publicize it on our Facebook page. We don't want to be applauded for it. It's just community work. It should be happening. We're actually donating 50% of our rate back into a charity that benefits First Nations music. We're always really conscious of sensitivities.

Sammy explains that YYY always donates part of its proceeds to organizations that benefit QPOC.

Everything from black canvas gallery... BCG is a new gallery in Toronto that is really intended to support black artists in the city. Last summer we did a whole charity thing for Pulse²⁸ nightclub.

Manifesto has celebrated their 11th year in the city. They've been super supportive of us for the past few years. That was always one of our mandates for YYY to bridge those scenes that felt so separate at the time. I think it's nice to sort of have these bridges connecting these seemingly separate communities. In actuality there's so much overlap.

Sammy confirms my suspicion that YYY intentionally seeks to 'queer the narratives' in regards to hip hop and dancehall. Or rather, as Walcott (2013) would say,

²⁸ On June 12th, 2016 Omar Mateen, a 29 year-old security guard killed 49 people and wounded 58 others in Pulse, a gay nightclub in Orlando, Florida (Yukselir & Bastien, 2016).

YYY is revealing “that black diaspora conditions are routed/rooted in a set of queer assemblages that hip hop is always already queer” (p. 170).

Sammy asserts that the YYY DJs recognize the cultural importance of hip hop and dancehall to QPOC, contrary to homonational rhetoric that suggests otherwise.

We’ve always tried to come at it by subverting that whole idea and reclaiming stuff that has historically been homophobic. That being said, we will never play a homophobic dancehall track... We will always cut out homophobic lyrics. There’s that conscious of curation of music and acknowledging that historically there has been really problematic things with this type of music. We’re also conscious that there’s a large group of people who grew up listening to it, are still listening to it and it’s a part of their life. It’s important that we cater to those folks. Furthermore, I think in respects to Manifesto for example, its opened up their minds as to what a hip hop scene could be. I don’t know if 11 years ago at a Manifesto party you would have heard Ballroom Vogue. Now it’s part and parcel of this ever-growing scene. For them it makes the straight hip hop question their ideals and principles and what it means to be hip hop.

Last summer we did a party at the Hearn²⁹. We had been planning that party for 6 months with Luminato. A week prior to that party was the Pulse shootings in Orlando. For Nino and I especially, it really affected us... It affected everyone but for Nino and I especially being the two people of colour in YYY...that night at pulse was a Latin night. There was a huge similarity in the type of music we/they were playing, the types of people that were at the club. It was filled with brown queer bodies and furthermore the guy who came in was a brown, Muslim man. Nino and I are both half Muslim and so there was this really problematic feeling of this person who on paper is so similar to us in background and in culture and how that type of person can be so destructive and cold hearted with our community and our family down south. It was a really tough week for us. We didn’t know how to navigate that whole thing. Do we cancel YYY? And we’re like no, we can’t live in fear... There was a moment at the Hearn party where we had a moment of silence. We had Shad down the mic and do a quick introduction and the whole place went silent for a moment, and this place was going OFF just two minutes before and it was that same feeling we had at the first party where there was this tangible feeling of community...there was a sea of people all quiet with their heads down. For me that was the most memorable moment of YYY ‘cause it transcended the whole party atmosphere. It became something more than people getting drunk and dancing.

²⁹ The Hearn Generating Station is an industrial landmark in Toronto. It was the venue that held the Luminato festival. Luminato is Toronto’s international multi-arts, multi-platform festival dedicated to performance, visual art, music, theatre, and dance (Luminato, 2016).

Sammy recognizes that as powerful an experience that YYY has been (and will continue to be), the collective is still striving to improve the ways in which it privileges and contributes to black queer creative visibility.

Out of the 5 of us there is not one black DJ. That has always been problematic for other people and for us. It's really important that we use whatever platform that YYY now has to really support black artists in the city. Every month we always have another POC DJing as the headlining spot with us. Also, having Yannick in the crew since the jump, it's important that for us his voice is heard in the scene as well. It's always been important for us that the space and the general vibe never gets whitewashed. Yannick has been such a huge part of our branding and the media presence that we have. All of our promos are through his lens, his eyes, and I think that's a really important distinctive voice that we want to define our party as.

With BLMTTO demanding QPOC visibility and rights be recognized at Pride 2016 and 2017, within several institutions and levels of government, it only seems fitting that YYY has a relationship with them. Sammy, like Dave and Isaac, credit BLMTTO with transgressing queer narratives pushing for a renewed intersectional take on visibility.

We've donated money to them and been a huge supporter of them and them us too. They've also challenged us, too, with not having any visibly black DJs in the crew. Nino is Caribbean but she is not black. We've been supportive of each other but they've also checked us. They've made us question ourselves. This new sense of activism that we've had in the past couple of years has been catalyzed by them challenging us on what the party really stands for. They're great. During the past year, two years especially, there's a really palpable cultural zeitgeist happening and they're changing stuff. It's great to see.

Sammy's narrative serves as a reminder that the creation of an inclusive space is an ongoing process of reflection, checking oneself and remaining open to feedback from communities.

Isaac concept of YYY is of a space where "zero tolerance [for racism and homophobia] is at the forefront." He further suggests that energy bleeds into the lives of the straight/white queer people who attend YYY. He believes the safety is maintained by the people who attend YYY because they are "all guardians of the space." Isaac's analysis of his experience as a Jamaican-Guyanese-Canadian queer man is pro-black and

pro-queer. Though he acknowledges that it is not a POC or queer *only* space, like Dave, he sees these identities as privileged at YYY.

It brings a lot of different types of Caribbean people together...It does have a sense of home... I think to go to a space where the majority of people aren't white is a really enlightening important opportunity. I think the music is connected to culture but the demographic isn't JUST THAT... There are people from everywhere. There is a respect for the community the culture that's celebrated.

Isaac goes on to explain that white queers and hetero people can come to YYY to gain a better understanding of queer communities.

I think the more straight black men and women but mainly men that attend these events and there are a lot of them...I think they become a bit more open in other spaces...And so of course it's impacting how they view black gay men and women. There's a very stereotypical idea that queer people don't like hip hop or dancehall... that's not true...and when they do it's a very bubblegum light version of it. To have a space that goes against that. To have a space that's like "we like music just like you do"[...] You, the Oppressor, haven't let me express myself, so we've made a space to do it.

Isaac raises several salient points in regards to black masculinities and queer expression as they relate to the discursive walls between non-heterosexualities and blackness. He points towards the monolithic construction of black queerness, suggesting that relationships and exposure in spaces like YYY challenge such problematic ideas of black queer men. Further, Isaac contests the notion that positions "black and non-heterosexuality in opposition" (Walcott, 2013, p. 170) further perpetuating the myth of a static version of black masculinity. Walcott (2013) playfully identifies that "the straightening out of hip hop colludes with a white LGBT politics that produces black cultures as always homophobic and that simultaneously makes black queers disappear too. Strange bedfellows it all seems" (p. 170). This rhetoric speaks to the homonational discourse that depoliticizes Canadian queerness while simultaneously producing a perceived threat of QPOC.

Isaac creatively expresses how YYY challenges problematic narratives in regards to queer bodies as he states that

you could be a 'super-dom-top' and dance with a 'super-femme-bottom' and it just be like nothing... It's not like when you enter the space we're all becoming super feminine. It's where you should be able to express yourself without fear or without expectation.

Isaac's commentary playfully mocks popular media's portrayal of gay men as feminine. He continually reinforces the notion that YYY is a space that celebrates expression of gender, sexuality and culture as mutually impacting one another.

KI-2, Yannick discusses YYY's influence outside the borders of its space, like Sammy, with respect to their partnerships with other events. He explains to me that "when Sammy or Nino are DJ'ing a party, even at the Ossington³⁰, we bring that energy. Don't fuck with the values of YYY. You still carry that with you. Still very cautious of people's space and energy and acceptance. It's every day." He also credits YYY with inspiring the recognition of female talent in events like 'Bare Gyal'.³¹ He takes the notion of bringing the YYY values outside of YYY's space when he states that "everyone comes to free up and claim space and not just conform to a venue. We take over a venue. We make it ours."

Yannick informed me that he wants to historicize YYY by collecting stories to go with the photos. Yannick thoughtfully explains that "pictures say a thousand words but if you don't have the real story... I feel like it could be fetishized a lot easier." His careful consideration of the aesthetic only documenting *part* of the YYY story brings to mind Razack's (2006) concept of 'storytelling for social change' wherein storytelling acts as a counter-narrative representing "different perceptions of reality that are intended as an opposition to established knowledge" (p. 1).

It is apparent to me that not only does Yannick strive to impact communities outside of those that YYY reaches but that he is also grateful for the impact that YYY has

³⁰ 'The Ossington' is a bar located on Ossington Avenue in Toronto's west end (The Ossington, 2017).

³¹ 'Bare Gyal' "serves as a popular platform to battle and break ties with the often wrongfully celebrated negative connotations surrounding all women, and particularly women of colour, from bullying to defaming sexuality, in today's popular culture... Offering up and highlighting some of the best female DJ's and entertainers" (BareGyal, 2017).

had on him. His humble approach helps me to understand how much emotional labour goes into the production and maintenance of YYY.

Though I have structured the themes of fluidity, intersectional relationships, dancing, and the transgressive possibilities of YYY as separate, I view them as interconnected. Being the youngest of the participants in this study, Samira and Tiana's narratives speak to the emerging social acceptance of fluid identities. They challenge identity politics espousing a post-identity rhetoric suggesting that there is little need to assert stable identities both for themselves and the spaces they frequent (James 2016; Guittar 2014). Both women also connected their sexuality to their diasporic identities and indicated that dancehall, and in particular YYY, is a space of freedom.

Isaac and Dave discussed the emancipatory possibilities of YYY as a space that is QPOC affirming. Further, throughout their discussion, they repeatedly reflected of experience they had engaging with such space as queer youth. I see their narratives as direct demands for more QPOC affirming space. Dave, in particular, problematized the wilful disregard for the needs of QPOC suggesting there needs to be more attention brought to spaces such as YYY.

Through my discussions with Sammy and Yannick respectively, I was able to understand the mindful preparation and consideration that goes into YYY. Sammy, in particular, discussed the original intent for YYY to be a space of celebration for QPOC and how they have grown over the years through partnerships and critical feedback from groups such as BLMTO.

Chapter 5: Conclusion: Spaces and room for growth

Through a reflexive analysis of the experiences of Samira, Tiana, Sofia, Isaac, Dave, Sammy and Yannick, this paper provides an analysis of QPOC spaces of belonging with an in-depth examination of the monthly hip hop and dancehall event YYY. Grounding this paper within the historical context of colonization and slavery, the analysis moves towards ways in which these systems continue in different forms today. Through the example of SMM, this paper illustrates the push for QPOC to exist 'elsewhere' (Walcott, 2013) and to resist the willful denial that black and queer can coexist (Crichlow, 2004). As exemplified through the narratives of all of the participants, there is a demand for space where QPOC can 'dance authentically' as Isaac explained.

This paper sought to challenge these systems and shed light on the resilience and importance of spaces like YYY, spaces that are inextricably connected to broader social justice movements such as BLMTO.

Through the narratives of Samira, Tiana, Sofia, Isaac, Dave, Sammy and Yannick, this MRP illustrates the transgressive possibilities of queer space. The four interconnected themes explored throughout this MRP speak to the intersectional nature of YYY. Through their narratives, illustrating their pain and joy engaging with the queer community, the participants tell the story of a space that they feel free to bring multiple dimensions of their identities.

5.1 Limitations

The intention of this paper was to explore spaces of belonging for QPOC people while challenging homonormative and homonational rhetoric in the queer community of Toronto. I do not suggest that this paper has come to stable conclusions, rather it seeks to continue necessary conversations that highlight the barriers that QPOC face in Toronto. Because of the limited time period during which this study was conducted, there are several voices that are missing. The sample fails to include the voices of anyone who identifies as genderqueer or transgender, two-spirit, or queer and disabled . Further, this study was focused on the geopolitics of Caribbean identity in Toronto, mainly due to the connection between Caribbean musical traditions and YYY. Certainly, this paper could be expanded to include not only the context of Caribbean traditions but the voices of people who are Indigenous or have diasporic connections, to western-African or South-American states.

5.2 Suggestions for further study

As the limitations suggest, this paper could be expanded to include a larger sample that includes the voices of transgender folks, refugee claimants, people who identify with the African diaspora, as well as generalized larger sample. This warrants further, comparative research, analysis and ethnography of spaces across the city that are branded as multicultural and ‘inclusive.’ If such a study were to be conducted, it would have greater potential for policy recommendations for the funding of QPOC space.

5.3 Important discussions

At the end of the interview with Dave, he reminded me that the discussion we were having concerning racism and exclusion is not new even though it has garnered more attention from white allies. He stated to me that racialized people, especially QPOC have long been discussing the racism, lack of visibility and inequities that they experience. Reflecting on the intentions of CRT and queer scholarship, and my efforts in this paper, it is important to highlight the critical role that intersectional space plays in the ways that affirm people’s multiple identities while at the same time challenging discursive homonormativities and homonational rhetoric. The narratives of Samira, Tiana, Sofia, Isaac, Dave, Sammy and Yannick illustrate the importance of space that allows for fluidity and cultural expression.

Appendix A

Hi,

My name is Trudie Gilbert. I am a Master's student at Ryerson University in the Department of Immigration and Settlement studies. I am contacting you to ask if you would be interested in participating in a research study that contributes to LGBTQ narratives on the monthly hip hop and dancehall party 'Yes Yes Y'all.

This research is being done as part of my Master's project in the Immigration and Settlement Studies program at Ryerson University. I am working under the supervision of Dr. Doreen Fumia, Associate Professor of Sociology and the Jack Layton Chair at Ryerson University. The focus of the research is the relationship between queer space and intersectional identity formation, negotiation and recognition.

To participate you need to identify as LGBTQ, indicate that migration has been a part of your (or *your family's story*), and have attended Yes Yes Y'all at least twice.

If you agree to volunteer you will be asked to you will be asked to attend one 30-45 minute semi-structured interview with me. You may be invited for an additional interview to clarify or to add to your responses.

In appreciation of your time, you will receive transit tokens, refreshments and coffee or tea.

Your participation is completely voluntary and if you choose not to participate it will not impact your relationship with Yes Yes Y'all or Ryerson University.

The research has been reviewed and approved by the Ryerson University Research Ethics Board.

If you are interested in more information about the study or would like to volunteer please reply to [email](#).

Thank you!

Trudie Gilbert
BSW, MA(c)

Appendix B



Ryerson University Consent Agreement

You are being invited to participate in a research study. Please read this consent form so that you understand what your participation will involve. Before you consent to participate, please ask any questions to be sure you understand what your participation will involve.

AND YA DON'T STOP: INVESTIGATING RACE, SPACE, AND MEANING IN TORONTO'S QUEER PARTY YES YES Y'ALL

INVESTIGATORS: This research study is being conducted by:

Trudie Gilbert, MA(c) Immigration and Settlement Studies, Ryerson University

Dr. Doreen Fumia, Associate Professor, Department of Sociology, Ryerson University

If you have any questions or concerns about the research, please feel free to contact:

Trudie Gilbert

Dr. Doreen Fumia
Department of Sociology
Ryerson University
350 Victoria Street
Toronto, Ontario,
M5B 2K3

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY:

The objective of this research project is to identify and explore identity negotiation within the Yes Yes Y'all hip hop and dancehall party. The specific research questions are:

- 1) What meaning do participants (party goers) attach to the Yes Yes Y'all event?
- 2) Is Yes Yes Y'all a site of social justice activism? If so, in what ways?
- 3) Does the dance club space impact the community outside of its social borders? If so, how?

The outcomes of these research questions include:

- Contributing to queer scholarship.
- Enhancing critical dialogue that examines the way this space affirms (or does not) multiple identities such as sexuality, gender identity and race/ethnicity/diasporic connections.
- Giving voice to minority LGBTQ populations in the urban centre of Toronto.
- Disrupting the white, middle class, ablebodied, male metanarratives of LGBTQ experiences, specifically in Toronto.

This study is seeking 5-7 participants who identify as LGBTQ with a particular focus on people who identify as disabled, migrants, and/or racialized.

The results of this study will contribute to the partial fulfillment of the principal investigator, Trudie Gilbert's graduate degree, under the supervision of Dr. Doreen Fumia.

WHAT PARTICIPATION MEANS:

If you volunteer to participate in this study, you will be asked to participate in a one-on-one interview.

Interview format

- Interviews will last 30-45 minutes.
- Interviews will be conducted at Ryerson University or a place of your choosing as long as it can provide aural and visual privacy.
- Interviews will be conducted at a time of your choosing.
- Your confidentiality will be protected with the use of pseudonyms.
- You will be provided with all necessary information prior to the interview, including the consent form, and possible interview questions.
- I am available to meet or correspond with you before the interview, by phone, by email or in person at a location of your choice. The purpose of this pre-interview meeting will be to discuss your rights, the nature of the interview and the project, and the potential risks and benefits of participation, and means of reducing those risks.
- You are free to stop the interview at any time and to choose not to answer questions.

Type of Information Sought

- Subject to your consent, I will collect some personal information, including your name, email address and phone number.

- Throughout the course of this research any identifying information will be protected and kept confidential. Your e-mail address will be collected so that a written transcript of your interview can be returned to you for review.
- You will be given this written transcript 1 week after the interview, and you will have 10 days to provide your feedback, request changes, or withdraw your information or data from the study.
- Your identity will not be included in the dissemination of the results of the research.
- This study is primarily interested in your experience in the queer community and the Yes Yes Y'all monthly event in particular.

Retention and Dissemination of Information

- The interview will be audio recorded.
- I will make written transcriptions of the interviews, after which the audio recordings will be destroyed.
- You will be provided with access to the transcriptions, which you may review and revise.
- Transcriptions will be kept for 5 years in case this study is published at a later date.
- All research findings and publications will be made available to you upon your request.
- If you would like a copy of the result, please contact me, at tgilbert@ryerson.ca.

POTENTIAL BENEFITS:

There are no direct benefits to the participants in this study. This research may contribute to advancing the limited literature on spaces of inclusion for racialized LGBTQ communities.

WHAT ARE THE POTENTIAL RISKS TO YOU AS A PARTICIPANT:

The risks associated with participation are very low. You may experience discomfort when discussing how racism, homophobia, transphobia or gender based discrimination has affected you. To reduce this risk you are not required to answer questions you are uncomfortable with, and the interview can be stopped at any time, either temporarily or permanently. At the beginning of the interview, you will be provided with pamphlets on queer-positive counselling services should you need them. There is a low risk that your identity could be revealed, to reduce this risk further, you have control over the time, place, length, and nature of the interviews. You will chose when and where to meet, and I will respect the conditions you chose.

CONFIDENTIALITY:

I will be collecting some personal information, including your name, email address, and phone number. However, I will protect your identity and maintain the confidentiality of this information. I will use pseudonyms so your name is not attached to the data. Data will be stored separately, in different password protected files, from identifying information.

There will be no video recordings, and the audio recordings of the interviews will be destroyed once transcribed. You will be given the transcripts to review and revise. Copies of the coded transcriptions will be kept for 5 years in case the study is published. Information will not be distributed electronically. You will be provided with access to the transcriptions and the study results will be made available to you.

INCENTIVES FOR PARTICIPATION:

You will be provided with transit tokens, coffee/tea and refreshments for your participation in this study.

VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION AND WITHDRAWAL:

Participation in this study is completely voluntary. You can choose whether to be in this study or not. If any question makes you uncomfortable, you can skip that question. You may stop participating at any time. If you choose to stop participating, you may also choose to not have your data included in the study. After your interview, within one week you will be given a written transcription for review. You will have 10 days once receiving a copy of your transcribed interview to decide you no longer want to participate. Withdrawal within this time will result in removal and destruction of data contributed. However, after this time period, withdrawal from the study may not result in removal of already collected data. Your choice of whether or not to participate will not influence your future relations with Ryerson University or the investigators, Trudie Gilbert and Dr. Doreen Fumia, involved in the research.

QUESTIONS ABOUT THE STUDY: If you have any questions about the research now, please ask. If you have questions later about the research, you may contact:

Trudie Gilbert M.A.(c)

Dr. Doreen Fumia
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Ryerson University
350 Victoria Street
Toronto, Ontario,
M5B 2K3

This study has been reviewed by the Ryerson University Research Ethics Board. If you have questions regarding your rights as a participant in this study please contact:

Research Ethics Board
c/o Office of the Vice President, Research and
Innovation
Ryerson University
350 Victoria Street
Toronto, ON M5B 2K3
416-979-5042
rebchair@ryerson.ca

**AND YA DON'T STOP: INVESTIGATING RACE, SPACE AND MEANING IN
TORONTO'S QUEER PARTY YES YES Y'ALL**

CONFIRMATION OF AGREEMENT:

Your signature below indicates that you have read the information in this agreement and have had a chance to ask any questions you have about the study. Your signature also indicates that you agree to participate in the study and have been told that you can change your mind and withdraw your consent to participate at any time. You have been given a copy of this agreement. You have been told that by signing this consent agreement you are not giving up any of your legal rights.

Name of Participant (please print)

Signature of Participant

Date

I agree to be audio-recorded for the purposes of this study. I understand how these recordings will be stored and destroyed.

Signature of Participant

Date

Would you like to receive a copy of the coded transcription of your interview to verify the transcription? YES ☐ NO ☐

Appendix C



Ryerson University Consent Agreement

You are being invited to participate in a research study. Please read this consent form so that you understand what your participation will involve. Before you consent to participate, please ask any questions to be sure you understand what your participation will involve.

AND YA DON'T STOP: INVESTIGATING RACE, SPACE, AND MEANING IN TORONTO'S QUEER PARTY YES YES Y'ALL

INVESTIGATORS: This research study is being conducted by:

Trudie Gilbert, MA(c) Immigration and Settlement Studies, Ryerson University

Dr. Doreen Fumia, Associate Professor, Department of Sociology, Ryerson University

If you have any questions or concerns about the research, please feel free to contact:

Trudie Gilbert

Dr. Doreen Fumia
Department of Sociology
Ryerson University
350 Victoria Street
Toronto, Ontario,
M5B 2K3

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY:

The objective of this research project is to identify and explore identity negotiation within the Yes Yes Y'all hip hop and dancehall party. The specific research questions are:

- 1) What meaning do participants (party goers) attach to the Yes Yes Y'all event?
- 2) Is Yes Yes Y'all a site of social justice activism? If so, in what ways?
- 3) Does the dance club space impact the community outside of its social borders? If so, how?

The outcomes of these research questions include:

- Contributing to queer scholarship.
- Enhancing critical dialogue that examines the way this space affirms (or does not) multiple identities such as sexuality, gender identity and race/ethnicity/diasporic connections.
- Giving voice to minority LGBTQ populations in the urban centre of Toronto.
- Disrupting the white, middle class, able-bodied, male metanarratives of LGBTQ experiences, specifically in Toronto.

This study is seeking 2-3 organizers of the Yes Yes Y'all event to participate in this research project who identify as LGBTQ with a particular focus on people who identify as disabled, migrants, and/or racialized.

The results of this study will contribute to the partial fulfillment of the principal investigator, Trudie Gilbert's graduate degree, under the supervision of Dr. Doreen Fumia.

WHAT PARTICIPATION MEANS:

If you volunteer to participate in this study, you will be asked to participate in a one-on-one interview.

Interview format

- Interviews will last 30-45 minutes.
- Interviews will be conducted at Ryerson University or a place of your choosing as long as it can provide aural and visual privacy.
- Interviews will be conducted at a time of your choosing.
- If you prefer to use pseudonyms to protect your identity, you may indicate this to the principal investigator, Trudie Gilbert.
- You will be provided with all necessary information prior to the interview, including the consent form, and possible interview questions.
- I am available to meet or correspond with you before the interview, by phone, by email or in person at a location of your choice. The purpose of this pre-interview meeting will be to discuss your rights, the nature of the interview and the project, and the potential risks and benefits of participation, and means of reducing those risks.
- You are free to stop the interview at any time and to choose not to answer questions.

Type of Information Sought

- Subject to your consent, I will collect some personal information, including your name, email address and phone number.

- Your e-mail address will be collected so that a written transcript of your interview can be returned to you for review.
- You will be given this written transcript 1 week after the interview, and you will have 10 days to provide your feedback, request changes, or withdraw your information or data from the study.
- This study is primarily interested in your experience in the queer community and the creation of the Yes Yes Y'all monthly event in particular.

Retention and Dissemination of Information

- The interview will be audio recorded.
- I will make written transcriptions of the interviews, after which the audio recordings will be destroyed.
- All participants will be provided with access to the transcriptions, which they may review and revise.
- Transcriptions will be kept for 5 years in case this study is published at a later date.
- All research findings and publications will be made available to participants upon their request.
- If you would like a copy of the result, please contact me, at tgilbert@ryerson.ca.

POTENTIAL BENEFITS:

Participants may not benefit directly from the study, however information gathered from the study may contribute to public dialogue regarding the inclusion of racialized and migrant bodies within queer space, thus indirectly benefiting those who identify that the intersection of migration, race and sexual orientation has been a part of their identity formation. I cannot guarantee, however, that you will receive any benefits from participating in this study.

WHAT ARE THE POTENTIAL RISKS TO YOU AS A PARTICIPANT:

The risks associated with participation are very low. Participants may experience discomfort when discussing how racism, homophobia, transphobia or gender based discrimination has affected them. To reduce this risk you are not required to answer questions you are uncomfortable with, and the interview can be stopped at any time, either temporarily or permanently. You will have control over the time, place, length, and nature of the interviews. You will chose when and where to meet, and I will respect the conditions you chose.

CONFIDENTIALITY:

I will be collecting some personal information, including your name, email address, and phone number. However, given that the names of the organizers are available to

the public, I cannot guarantee your confidentiality. I will use pseudonyms so your name is not attached to the data if you would like. Data will be stored separately, in different password protected files.

There will be no video recordings, and the audio recordings of the interviews will be destroyed once transcribed. You will be given the transcripts to review and revise. Copies of the coded transcriptions will be kept for 5 years in case the study is published. Information will not be distributed electronically. All participants will be provided with access to the transcriptions and the study results will be made available to participants.

INCENTIVES FOR PARTICIPATION:

You will be provided with transit tokens, coffee/tea and refreshments for your participation in this study.

VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION AND WITHDRAWAL:

Participation in this study is completely voluntary. You can choose whether to be in this study or not. If any question makes you uncomfortable, you can skip that question. You may stop participating at any time. If you choose to stop participating, you may also choose to not have your data included in the study. After your interview, within one week you will be given a written transcription for review. You will have 10 days once receiving a copy of your transcribed interview to decide you no longer want to participate. Withdrawal within this time will result in removal and destruction of data contributed. However, after this time period, withdrawal from the study may not result in removal of already collected data. Your choice of whether or not to participate will not influence your future relations with Ryerson University or the investigators, Trudie Gilbert and Dr. Doreen Fumia, involved in the research.

QUESTIONS ABOUT THE STUDY: If you have any questions about the research now, please ask. If you have questions later about the research, you may contact:

Trudie Gilbert M.A.(c)

Dr. Doreen Fumia
Department of Sociology
Ryerson University
350 Victoria Street
Toronto, Ontario,
M5B 2K3

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Name of Participant (please print)

Signature of Participant

Date

I agree to be audio-recorded for the purposes of this study. I understand how these recordings will be stored and destroyed.

Signature of Participant

Date

Appendix D

Interview Guide: Participants

Part A: Getting to know you

1. How do you identify in regards to sexual orientation and gender?

Prompts: Are you comfortable with these identifications or do you prefer not using "labels", explain? If you consider either your gender or sexuality to be more "fluid", how do you express this when you come to Yes Yes Y'all?

2. How do you identify ethnically/racially? Do you consider yourself more "Canadian" or more (Country of Origin/ethnic connection), or do you see them as equal parts of your identity?

Prompts: Do you express these parts of your identity when you come to Yes Yes Y'all? How? (Through dance/clothing etc.)

3. How many times have you come to Yes Yes Y'all? Do you go to other queer events in Toronto?

Prompts: What do you enjoy most about Yes Yes Y'all? How is this space different than other queer parties in Toronto?

4. Do you feel like you are a part of a queer community? Why or why not?

Prompts: Where do you find connection in the queer community? Where do you find connection in other communities? Can you think of a metaphor that describes how you fit into, or don't fit into, the queer community?

Part B: General Experiences at Yes Yes Y'all.

5. Could you share with me your first experience at Yes Yes Y'all?

Prompts: Who did you go with? Was this a new experience for you? Where you more comfortable at some events than others?

6. Are the different dimensions of your identity (beyond queer/trans) recognized at Yes Yes Y'all?

Prompts: How/why or why not?

Part C: Yes Yes Y'all's relationship with the greater queer community

7. Do you feel that Yes Yes Y'all has an impact on the greater migrant/racialized queer communities? If so, how?

Prompts: How are different identities recognized within the Yes Yes Y'all space? Who is Yes Yes Y'all created for? Who is included? Who is excluded? Do you think Yes Yes Y'all has the potential to impact hip-hop and dancehall communities?

8. It has been suggested that some hip hop and dancehall music and spaces are not inclusive of queer/trans bodies. Clearly, Yes Yes Y'all challenges this narrative. How do you see this as impacting other communities?

9. Do you have a favourite memory at Yes Yes Y'all? Can you share it with me?

10. Some people say that "visibility" is important for marginalized groups to gain equal status, others say that it is a trap that leads to the dominant group taking-on marginalized identities or fetishizing marginalized people, what do you think?

Prompts: In general do you feel that racialized/migrant queers have visibility in the queer community/Canada? Do you think Yes Yes Y'all contributes to the visibility of this group? What role does the crowd play in this? When you are at queer events, and specifically Yes Yes Y'all, how does visibility "feel", is it emancipating, is it joy-inducing? Is it painful? Or something different?

11. Is there anything else that we didn't cover? Is there anything else that you would like to say?

Appendix E

Interview Guide: Organizers

Part A: Getting to know you

1. How do you identify in regards to sexual orientation and gender?

Prompts: Are you comfortable with these identifications or do you prefer not using "labels", explain? If you consider either your gender or sexuality to be more "fluid", how has this informed the atmosphere you have created at Yes Yes Y'all?

2. How do you identify ethnically/racially?

Prompts: How has this aspect of your identity informed the creation and maintenance of Yes Yes Y'all?

3. Tell me about how the idea of Yes Yes Y'all came to be. How did you become involved?

Prompts: How is this space different than other queer parties in Toronto? Do you see this space as inclusive? What measures do you take to ensure that marginalized bodies feel welcome at Yes Yes Y'all?

4. Do you feel like you are a part of a queer community? Why or why not?

Prompts: Where do you find connection in the queer community? Where do you find connection in other communities? Can you think of a metaphor that describes how you fit into, or don't fit into, the queer community? Was there ever a time when you felt disconnected from queer communities

Part B: Yes Yes Y'all: The creation

5. Can you tell me about the first Yes Yes Y'all events? How has it grown over the years?

6. Are different dimensions of identity (beyond queer/trans) recognized at Yes Yes Y'all?

Prompts: How/why or why not?

Part C: Yes Yes Y'all's relationship with the greater queer community

7. Do you feel that Yes Yes Y'all has an impact on the greater migrant/racialized queer communities? If so, how?

Prompts: How are different identities recognized within the Yes Yes Y'all space? Who is Yes Yes Y'all created for? Who is included? Who is excluded? Do you think Yes Yes Y'all has the potential to impact hip-hop and dancehall communities?

8. It has been suggested that some hip hop and dancehall music and spaces are not inclusive of queer/trans bodies. Clearly, Yes Yes Y'all challenges this narrative. How do you see this as impacting other communities?

Prompts: How do you attempt to create an inclusive atmosphere? What further work do you think needs to be done to increase inclusivity?

9. Do you have a favourite memory at Yes Yes Y'all? Can you share it with me?

10. Some people say that "visibility" is important for marginalized groups to gain equal status, others say that it is a trap that leads to the dominant group taking-on marginalized identities or fetishizing marginalized people, what do you think?

Prompts: In general do you feel that racialized/migrant queers have visibility in the queer community/Canada? Do you think Yes Yes Y'all contributes to the visibility of this group? What role does the crowd play in this? When you are at queer events, and specifically Yes Yes Y'all, how does visibility "feel", is it emancipating, is it joy-inducing? Is it painful? Or something different?

11. What is next for Yes Yes Y'all?

Prompts: Do you have any partnerships with social justice initiatives? Do you see Yes Yes Y'all as impacting migrant/queer justice initiatives?

12. Is there anything else that we didn't cover? Is there anything else that you would like to say?

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