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Third places for queer spaces: LGBT+ adolescents and the discursive composition of a community.

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The study considers how, in a period of shifting away from legal oppression, young LGBTQ+ people and educators create community in educational spaces in the absence of access to bars, coffee houses, hair salons and other adult 'third place' spaces of sociability and connection (Oldenburg 1999). Given "how the meaning of space is reframed when the same space is used for very different activities" (Keating 1999, p. 235), data is drawn from an ethnographic research project in secondary schools in London, focusing on one group's after-school gatherings of LGBTQ+ students (ages 11-17), called the 'Pride club', to observe how queer affective connection is formed and articulated. This occurs not simply by chance socialisation outside of lessons, but through acts of talk and play between young people and teachers that build solidarity and create an othered place of belonging or affective community in the periphery of the urban-like school space. It is one in which the mood is playful, and the ensuing discussion of films, weekend plans, romantic interests, and the playing of boardgames, is light-hearted for young people and adults alike. At other times, it is a space where the proliferation of spatial activism (Misgav 2015) can be observed, challenging the centralisation of hegemonic cis-heteronormativity and the peripheralisation of historically minoritised groups.

Keywords: spatiality; third place; queering space; LGBTQ+ discourse; education; community; activism.

(1) Sakura (11 years old, transmasc student) and researcher (RES). Interview, 1.

RES: Why did you come to the Pride club then?
Sakura: mmm… Mostly because like
I felt like, this would be kinda like a s- a safe place for me
that I could go to if something happened like
I want to get away from some things
and also because I-
I just kind of had a feeling that I would be accepted here

Introduction

Schools are intended primarily as sites of nurturing and development, which in turn requires them to be places of safety and safeguarding in which teachers and school staff are able to support the progress of the young person towards adulthood (Baginsky 2008). The educator's duty of care (Department for Education 2021), often referred to as of acting *in loco parentis* (e.g. Hunt 2002), encapsulates the educator's duty of protection, through ensuring the young people are cared for in a safe environment, just as would be expected of the child's own caregiver. However, as the student's description of the LGBTQ+ school group in

(1) highlights, the wider school spaces are not necessarily safe places for all, particularly for students from minoritised backgrounds.

In England, Scotland and Wales in 1988, a period of government-mandated legislation was imposed to regulate discourses around queer identities and relationships in schools and local government organisations, which inflicted a lasting legacy of discrimination against minoritised genders and sexualities. This legislation, referred to as *Section 28*, stated that 'A local authority shall not – (a) intentionally promote homosexuality […] (b) promote the teaching in any maintained school of the acceptability of homosexuality as a pretended family relationship' (Local Government Act 1988, §28). The symbolic effect of Section 28 was profound and had wide-ranging ramifications for the support for young LGBTQ+ people and their teachers, serving as a signal of "official and legal disapproval of homosexuality" (Epstein 2000). Section 28 was finally repealed in England and Wales in 2003, having been in place for 15 years. However, the continued effects of the legislation, colloquially referred to as the "shadow of Section 28" (e.g. Nixon and Givens 2007, p.31) influenced teachers, students, and the wider community, even after the legal reform (ibidem).

The present study draws on findings from an ongoing ethnographic research project in London secondary schools, documenting the organised LGBTQ+ student groups from 2022-24, twenty years after Section 28. In combination with the "shadow" of Section 28, the current public discourses against self-identification, rights, and indeed existence of trans and nonbinary citizens in the UK raises many questions around the experiences of young people facing the cis-heteronormative hegemony and hostile climate of society, but also within school spaces.

Unlike studies that have previously analysed such school spaces of queer collective and community space in education settings as "safe spaces" (c.f. Dumont 2012), or as organised or organic activist spaces (e.g. Misgav 2015), the aim of the present research is to use frameworks of urban structure and spatiality to consider how the students from one school within the project engage in reconstructing and manipulating spatial resources and relationships to create a "third place" away from the place of home and the place of work. Sociologist Ray

Oldenburg and behavioural scientist Dennis Brissett (1982) coined the term "third place" for such spaces, which Oldenburg explored further in *The Great Good Place: Cafes, Coffee Shops, Community Centers, Beauty Parlors, General Stores, Bars, Hangouts, and How They Get You Through the Day* (1989). As the book's title suggests, these are public spaces which act as regular places of meeting, often for local residents. Against the backdrop of the apparent loss of spaces of public community in American society, Oldenburg proposed that alongside the first and second places of home and work, third places are "informal public gathering places" where a sense of community can be salvaged (1997, p.6). He explains that "life without community has produced, for many, a life style consisting mainly of a home-to-work-and-back-again shuttle", which impedes the benefits to social well-being and psychological health obtained through community (ivi, p.7). Many, if not all of the stereotypical "third places" are adult spaces, places to which young people are not able to go of their own volition and without the supervision of adults or young adults. Therefore, the study of young people and spaces where community is felt must look to atypical locations, accounting for the geographies of interactional space that young people can access.

Taking a youth- and child-centred perspective, the complex density of large school populations can reflect characteristics of urban spaces and space-making processes, aside from of the physical geographical location of the school itself. As the data in this study illustrates, students create a "third place" through discursive and spatial reconfiguration of school space, out in the periphery of the large, dense school crowds. In this space, students succeed in establishing community, whilst also participating in activism that is in most cases a secondary product of queer space-making.

Greatmarsh High School and the research context

This paper focuses on one school from the research project, Greatmarsh High School, which is situated on the outermost limits of what might be considered London. It borders on rural space and serves both socioeconomically disadvantaged and more affluent communities in the area. Recruited through professional connections, teachers in this study facilitated initial visits to the

school and the group, after which students and parents were given the option to consent to participate in the study. Recordings with small, non-intrusive, clip-on microphones were used in the sessions, as well as during semi-structured interviews.[1] Recordings were transcribed in combination with observational data collected as fieldnotes.[2]

This data discussed here is taken from a range of interactions across the span of an academic year and is meant to provide enough diversity of perspectives to sufficiently portray the community under study.

In the crowds of the "schooltropolis"

Why should an urban lens be applied to the study of spatiality and queer third places when researching within a school? I argue that the need for third places depends on an understanding of the nature of relations being dependent on the scale and quality of interactions within spaces. By drawing parallels between the experiences of urban space as an individual in the crowd and the experience of the queer individual in predominantly cis-heterosexual space, the significance of space, belonging and activism in the making of queer third places becomes more salient. This section takes a brief detour to consider the wider context of the school's internal geographies in terms of urban characteristics of locality, space, networking and interaction.

In the city, "[e]veryday urban life has the potential to bring you into contact with any number of people in any number of more or less impersonal ways" and people in cities "might have more frequent and numerous encounters with others, but these tend to be transitory, instrumental or accidental" (Tonkiss 2005, p.13). Moving through the crowds in urban life may seem far removed from any sense of community, though Tonkiss argues that this solitude and indifference of interaction can be seen as a "key social relation between urban subjects - one premised less on any face-to-face ideal of community than on the 'side-by-side'

[1] Not all students present in this group were participants, therefore sections of transcriptions are elided. Equally, teachers were not asked to be recorded, therefore any contributions in the transcribed interactions have been paraphrased with their permission, in order to preserve representation of the students' interactions.
[2] As a white, able-bodied, gender nonbinary, gay-identifying academic with previous experience both as an adolescent and as a secondary school teacher, my positionality as a researcher is a complex one in this space. The various ways in which my own identity and lived experiences are more or less significant in interactions and in analysis is worthy of discussion in a longer format.

relations of anonymity typical of being with others in the city" (p.10). Drawing on Simmel's (2004) account of 'The metropolis and mental life', Tonkiss emphasises that indifference towards others or refusing interaction in urban space is not "merely a matter of social withdrawal but is instead a primary condition for urban social life, securing individual calm together with relative social peace" (Tonkiss 2005, p. 11). However peaceful such a framing of urban anonymity may be, this alone does not paint a particularly good picture for the endeavour of seeking out the kinds of community formed from the connection between individuals based on identity that may not be visible outside of interaction. In urban sociology, these kinds of communities, such as queer communities, have previously been regarded as 'subcultures' of study in their own right (e.g. Fischer 1995; Knopp 1987; Forsyth 1997; Fortier 2002; Valentine and Skelton 2003). Considering that the "density and diversity of urban populations supports the formation of numerous subcultures, often located in space" (Tonkiss 2005, p. 108), it is no surprise then to find students forming a subcultural group in a school on the basis of LGBTQ+ identities, just as we might expect from some urban contexts.

At the same time, the size and density of school spaces being perceived as rural or urban is also by no means new. There have been calls for schools in cities to be downscaled, stemming from a concern that smaller schools allow for the development of relationships which in turn support the development of the young person (Wetz 2009). As one influential political columnist and former government advisor remarked:

> The government should announce the end to the monolithic secondary school. All children should be taught in schools (or schools within schools) with no more than 500 pupils, where they can form sustainable relationships with teachers, support staff and peers. (Leadbeater 2008, p.16)

Unlike the larger schools in the present study, Wetz (2009) outlines a model for 'small' schools in cities as Urban Village Schools, describing them as "a learning community where individual members of staff teach no more than 75 pupils a week, and relationships are placed at the heart of its organisation and design." (Wetz 2009, p.70). Wetz's call for needing the supposedly closer relationships of

rural life mirrors a concern of isolation and solitude of being in an urban crowd, a spatial experience seemingly incompatible with relationship- or community-building. Of specific interest here is how Wetz emphasises that the "urban village school" model requires a regulated school population in order to achieve the formation of meaningful relationships (ibidem).

As a counter-model to the Urban Village School, the present study refers to the *schooltropolis* as a large and dense school in terms of population, but also one where characteristically urban side-by-side interactions, relationships, and networks proliferate. Greatmarsh High School is one of many typical large "monolithic secondary schools" that Leadbeater rallies against. The school has around 1,000 students - twice that of Leadbeater's 500 maximum - and is one of a number of similar sized schools in the area. If I arrived too early when conducting fieldwork at Greatmarsh High School, it often resulted in having to wade shoulder-to-shoulder through corridors teeming with students, eager to leave school at the end of the day and begin their weekend. Despite the frequency of my visits for over a year, it was rare to recognise any students amongst the hundreds exiting the small West Building. While larger communal areas do not exaggerate the closeness of mobile individuals – or strangers – in the same way as the corridors, the lack of linear direction one finds in the corridors in the open spaces presents a different but equal sense of being an individual amongst teeming masses.

From a lens of mobility and the perspective of the child such as those in this study who have moved from smaller primary schools (early-years, middle school or kindergarten setting, up to age 10) into a large secondary school (high school), the experience could be seen to share characteristics of rural-to-urban mobility. In school-centred interactional settings for younger children in smaller schools, students develop close, local ties and a form of small neighbourhood life more similar to the rural 'village' (Wetz 2009). Moving into the large secondary school is a migration into space with far more interactional opportunities in a busy population consisting mostly of strangers at first. Like the vastness of the geographical-spatial periphery that lies at the edge of urban space, the masses of the schooltropolis and its many interactional spaces also form a much larger social

periphery that can be inhabited. However, it is through pockets of social connection within the vast space that young people in the schooltropolis can form community-like relationships: subject classes, year groups, form or registration groups, sports groups, extracurricular activity groups, and organised social groups are all sites for building relationships, networks and a sense of belonging.

Returning to the notion of urban space once more, the influence of politics is of course a component of the experience of minority or minoritised identities in urban or any other space. The city of Brighton in the UK, for example, is seen by many as more inclusive of LGBTQ+ people (Browne and Bakshi 2013). In as much as the social and historical context, as well as the efforts of current municipal administration and the citizens themselves influences the LGBTQ+ people to perceive a place to be more or less inclusive, fostering a culture of inclusion in a school is a large and complex task requiring many agents of change. As Bell et al. (1994, p.32) point out "not all space is "straight"", but in a hegemonically cisgender and heterosexual society, most space is read as the unmarked "straight" space. Therefore, whilst LGBTQ+ adults alight from the train into Brighton, into space that feels more inclusive and in which they can feel their authentic selves without the looming opposition of default "straight" space, we cast our attention to the young person who walks through the crowds of cis-heteronormative school space, perhaps seeking a space of disrupted normativity.

Creating a queer third place in Greatmarsh High School

Oldenburg remarks that "[t]he *raison d'être* of the third place rests upon its differences from other settings of daily life and can be understood by comparison with them. In examining these differences, it will not serve to misrepresent the home, shop, or office, in order to put a better light on public gathering places" (1999 p.22). Indeed, the walk through Greatmarsh High School to the group is perhaps unremarkable, as the unmarked often is. By the point of arrival at the room where the students meet each week, the contrasts with the "settings of daily life" in the school are clear.

There are eight main characteristics of Oldenburg's third place (1999, p. 22-41), which Langlais and Vaux (2021, p. 1-2) summarise as:

Neutral: Informal settings, the primary attribute of a third place is to promote sociability.
Levelers: No membership is required; all are welcome.
Conversation Main Activity: The main activity of a third place is conversation.
Accessibility and Accommodation: Third places are physical locations easily accessed in a user's daily routine.
Regulars: Third places are often frequented as a customary practice so that individuals are known to one another.
Low Profile: Third places are ordinary physical environments.
Playful Mood: Playful banter keeps conversation light and friendly.
Home Away from Home: Third places are a home away from home for patrons.
(Oldenburg 1999, p. 22-41; summarised in Langlais and Vaux 2021, p. 1-2)

Not all groups, activities, or places within school meet the characteristics of third places. Social conversation is not the main activity of a classroom, nor is anyone welcome into any class of their choice. For 11-18 year old students, lessons may not necessarily entail a "playful mood", nor do most educators conduct classes as informal settings with the levelled relationship of student and teacher as hierarchically equal. Instead, a third place in school would need to subvert the structures of educational space and create a place that is open, accessible, social, playful, informal, level, regular, and homely.

The space as accessible place

Firstly, returning to (1) at the beginning of this article, the extract was taken from an early interview with Sakura. He explains that after a positive experience coming out as bisexual to his parents, his coming to the club was partly motivated by the feeling that the group was "a safe place for me", which he "could go to if something happened." He expresses feeling "that I would be accepted here", a "place" to which Sakura can go, away from concerns of acceptance at home, or hostility, harassment and verbal assault at the hands of other students in the school, which he discussed in sessions. As a "place" then, it meets Oldenburg's characteristics of an accessible and accommodating space – albeit only on certain days at certain times (Oldenburg 1999, p.32). On the one hand, Oldenburg states that third places traditionally kept long opening hours, often from early in the morning and into the evening or night, such as pubs and

coffee houses (ibidem), although many other examples of his are more limited in their opening times. That being said, he remains conscious that 'basic institutions – home, work school – make prior claims that cannot be ignored" and that therefore the third place "accommodates people only when they are released from their responsibilities elsewhere" (ibidem). This group is nevertheless an open, physical location to which Sakura and the others are able to escape for a few hours each week, when their obligations to the school week are concluded, and is accessible in its physical proximity at that very time.

Accepting space as levelling place

Sakura and others feel "accepted" in this space. This requires more than an open room, but social inclusion by others, contrary to the exclusionary membership categories that exist elsewhere. As a "leveler", third place is "by its nature, an inclusive space" (Oldenburg 1999, p.24), which does not exclude by social rank. This extends here to hierarchies of gender and sexualities as a result of cis-heteronormative hegemonies in communities within and beyond the school. This is echoed in a second interview transcribed in (2) with Valerie.

(2) Researcher (RES) and Valerie (14 year old, cis, lesbian student). Interview 2.

RES: Tell me about the group, Pride club

Valerie: I like it [laugh]. [inaudible]. I think it helps with like, you can talk about like stuff that's going on in the world and like, if you've experienced homophobia in school, like, I don't feel pressured to go to [the teacher who also joins the sessions] and tell him about it. so yeah, I think it helps. it's like a safe place.

RES: that's nice. What makes it a safe place?

Valerie: Everyone's accepting and like, understanding, like, they'll just listen to you that's it. it's nice

RES: it sounds really nice. What brings you to the club?

Valerie: I was actually the first one to come here [inaudible]. But um

RES: sorry, what did you say?

Valerie: um I was the first one to come here. I started it [inaudible]. But um. I think I came to it just because, I wanted to make more friends that weren't just like, the homophobic people in my class and, it just seemed fun and interesting.

[…]

RES: how would you describe this to someone who's never been before?

Valerie: I would say that it's fun and like, [the teacher] always brings in food, so that's good. Umm. And then we can play boardgames, but. It's not just a time where you mess about, it's like, you can actually talk about serious problems and talk to people about what's going on in your life without any judgement.
[…]
RES: umm what made you decide to come today?
Valerie: I just thought it was open [laugh] and I was like ooh okay. No it's just fun, I think. I enjoy coming here.

In the final line, Valerie echoes the expectation of this group being "open" that afternoon after school. She also makes reference to food, which has been observed to be provided by teachers or students and distributed to those who would like to share it. Students also often use their mobile phones freely in sessions, despite school rule against their use at any time inside the school building. As with many British schools, a school uniform policy requires students to wear correct uniform on school grounds also. Yet, during these sessions, students often change or modify their clothing, from changing formal shoes for trainers, adding comfortable jumpers, keeping on outdoor coats in the colder months, or removing ties or blazers to sit more comfortably. The consumption of food, mobile phone use and changing attire all transgress the localised rules of school, and yet continue without challenge from teachers present or in passing. This contributes the third place's characteristic 'home away from home' environment, making themselves comfortable in ways that subvert expectations of school space.

For others passing by the group, the non-regulars, the routines of the space do not go unnoticed. In (3), four students and two teachers are playing a roleplaying boardgame during the session, a regular activity from this extract onwards. Between turns in the game, Valerie interrupts to report that a teacher and other students had been discussing the group during a class.

(3) Researcher, Valerie, Claire, Louise, Sakura, teacher (T1), another teacher (T2) playing a roleplaying boardgame. Interview 2.

Valerie: Mr Smith was talking about Pride club in [a humanities class] the other day
T1: ((speaks concern))
Louise: Why?
T2: ((asks which teacher))

Valerie: Mr Smith
T2: ((asks for details))
Valerie: He wa- the kids were like "Oh what is gay club?" uh, yeah, gay club. And "do you support it and stuff" and he was like "but all they do is play boardgames and eat" [and I was like
Louise: [[hh.] [laugh] I mean that's what we do
T2: ((expresses joyful agreement))
T1: ((expresses joyful agreement))
((inaudible overlapping))
Valerie: I guess some stuff we talk about
Claire: We're here to have fun
Valerie: Alright
Louise: And eat
((Claire, Louise and T1 return to playing the game))

Here, the students and teachers of the Pride club are surprised to hear that the group had been spoken about by others, particularly a teacher not associated with the sessions in any way. Other students in Valerie's class had asked Mr Smith for his opinion on the group, or "gay club". She then conveys that Mr Smith replied to the students, "but all they do is play boardgames and eat". Valerie's report suggests that the teacher's response focussed on describing the homely, sociable behaviours of the group, again reiterating a focus on playing boardgames and eating.

From prior experience in education, talking to other teachers who support or run school-based LGBTQ+ social groups, support groups or activist groups for students, boardgames are anecdotally typical features of these spaces and their activities.[3] In these sessions, the students (ages 11-17) and teachers sit around the table and game as equals, sharing management of the game. This further reinforces the spatial arrangement of the group as "a leveller" (Oldenburg 1999), where the space is momentarily liminal in terms of social hierarchy. This is also reflected in the students' discursive negotiation of relationships with adults in the space, as seen in (4).

[3] A comparison of such activities across varying schools' contexts from an anthropological and sociological perspective would certainly yield interesting discussion of the role or influence of roleplaying games in queer UK school spaces and formation of third places, though that is not the focus of the present discussion.

(4) Researcher, Valerie, Claire, Louise, Sakura and teacher (T1), playing a roleplaying boardgame. Interview 2.

Claire: ((to teacher)) Put it on the thing
T1: ((looks for board games sticker))
Claire: I need to sign it
T1: ((goes to take the sticker Claire is signing by accident, causing her to slip))
Louise: Oh fucker!
T1: Oh jeez! What are you doing?
Claire: Because you took it from me!
Louise: Honestly!
Claire: This is going to be rubbish signing.
T1: ((Informs students that the roleplaying boardgame will not take many more sessions to complete.))
Claire: What are you on about!
Louise: What happens if we run out of [game tokens]?
T1: ((explains he's not sure of the specific rules))
Louise: Can you let us out? ((points in direction of window at school gate which is now closed))
Claire: Where's ya' bin? Over there.
T1: ((points at bin))
Claire: You're in the way.

It is worth noting that Claire is widely regarded as being very polite and an excellent student. Here, her remarks to the teacher, such as "put it on the thing", "what are you doing?" and "you're in the way" subvert the manner and tone expected of student-teacher interactions. Louise's exclamation "oh fucker!" is perhaps even more surprising, although again, she receives no policing of this language from the teacher. This contributes to the sense that this space is "a leveller", however this talk also contributes to the mood of this space being "playful" (Oldenburg 1999, p.37). It is facilitated by both literal play and playful interactions, either language that would normally be taboo or discursive constructions that could be perceived as confrontational, jarring or rude, which are taken lightly in the playful spirit. The teacher and students are both insiders of the third place here, in the respect that, "the outsider may certainly know neither the characters nor the rules by which they take one another lightly" (ivi, p.38).

As Louise moves to the boundary of the space, the door of the room, the playful mood and levelling effect is challenged. The role of teacher as guardian and gatekeeper of the space (here, quite literally) the teacher-student hierarchy is

re-established for Louise and politeness norms are reasserted. As space, it is not just the physical building blocks of room arrangement, or the subversive deployment of food, clothing and boardgames. For interaction in this space – interaction that *makes* this space - talk is a key component. Indeed, Oldenburg states that for third places, "conversation is the main activity" (ivi, p.26). But in the case of this group, it is not only idle chatter between food and boardgames, or the playful banter between participants that creates meaningful space.

(5) Researcher, Valerie, Claire, Louise, Sakura and teacher (T1), playing a roleplaying boardgame.

Valerie: I like how [since September=
Louise: [that is all my [game tokens]. Can I add more?
((T1 continues game))
Valerie: =we haven't spoken about Pride=
Claire: I- wait, Katie?
Valerie: =since year 9
Claire: ((to Katie)) I offer you a bribe
[…] ((Playing resumes for 26 secs))
Valerie: But yeah=
Louise: Can I have half of it? ((half of Claire's extra tokens))
Valerie: =since year 9. Since February, we've not discussed, Pride or gay people at all.
Claire: Hello. I'm gay.
Valerie: Oh my god!
Claire: We've now discussed gay people.
Valerie: Okay but seriously
Louise: That's thirty more [game tokens]. I just wanna win.
Valerie: I'm not complaining, but
((T1 replies to L))
Claire: Why did you think I was here? [hhh.]
Valerie: Well I thought you came in for the boardgame club
Claire: I will bribe you [Louise] to not
Louise: How much?
Valerie: I almost died
Claire: I don't care I don't care. I can overrule your bribe with my bribe.
((Students continue playing))

Discourses and place for queer space

On an afternoon some months prior to the previous extract in (4), Valerie addresses the others during the boardgame in (5) regarding the discussion (or lack thereof) pertaining to "pride or gay people at all". Valerie highlights here the

importance in this space of queer discourses, particularly those that touch overtly on LGBTQ+ lives, experiences, and activism. Resulting in a humorous interaction and extending the "playful spirit" (Oldenburg 1999, p.37), Claire responds with the greeting "hello", then a statement of her sexuality, "I'm gay", followed by the evaluation "we've now discussed gay people." Claire comically models, in the first two utterances, perhaps the smallest possible units of an overtly queer interaction, as opposed to the implicit relationship created by being two participants of this space. In Valerie's surprise that "I thought you came in for the boardgame club", it becomes clear that for her, cohabiting this space with Claire is insufficient for making assumptions about Claire's sexuality. Identity discourses are a component of negotiating queer placemaking and disrupting cis-heteronormative dialogues that obscure the identities of queer individuals in the masses of "straight" space. This intensifies the challenge of seeking out others on the shared queer "elective bases" on which to build connections with others, a community of affective solidarity (Tonkiss 2005, p.107-8). This speaks to the 'why' of Claire's motivation to attend the group. In an analysis of this connection from the perspective of urban scholarship, this would not be due to a *social* or *locality* model of community holding people together by shared network, institution or neighbourhood, but an *affective* one, based on "shared identities and interests [which] provide a sense of belonging" even when "spatially dispersed" (Tonkiss 2005, p.15-16). As Claire explains, as if obvious to all but Valarie, "Why did you think I was here?"

Queer spatial activism in a third place

In interviews, students also refer to the group and its activities as being a space they associate with discourses which can be broadly categorised as discourses of activism. For example, when first asked about the Pride Club in the first interview with Sakura (6), he begins by detailing their current plans for national dates or events for the observation of either protest or celebrating identities, including "Pride month", "nonbinary day" and "culture day".

(6) Interviewer and Sakura (11 years old, transmasc student). Interview, 1.

RES: Umm what can you tell me about Pride club?

Sakura: Umm well we are trying to like figure out something to do for Pride month because well. Not many people are really like su- like- supportive of it they're like "it's just June, not Pride month" you know? I think it's June. Yeah [inaudible]

RES: This month yeah

Sakura: Yeah an:d umm. Well now we're trying to organise something we're also gonna try organise something for nonbinary day an:d the like culture day? Because: umm well I think things like this should be more like be s- pr- like aware of because like it's twenty first century

[…]

RES: So what normally happens in a Pride club, tell me. So do you just come straight here?

Sakura: Yes: after school on Fridays we just come straight here. Usually have to wait for a bit until class is over for sir an:d then we come in just set up the tables in the middle of the classroom. Just two tables or three. Put a flag on the table cause why not. umm: Then: ev- when everyone's here we either play a game […] or just talk about random things

Situated in a room away from large communal areas that would also be used outside of lesson time, but also situated in a time at the end of the week, where most students and teachers have left the surrounding buildings, the group is located upon a temporal and spatial periphery. But it is also a periphery that contrasts the "centre", a hegemonic space which dominates peripheral space (Soja 2010). During sessions, the room becomes set apart from the "centre", the masses of "straight" space. However, Tsfati and Nadan's (2021) study of students, activism, and spatial locations found that transgender students in education in peripheral locations felt more supported, as spaces of social activism were not only confined to the central urban sites. In Greatmash High School, the students of this study, though in a peripheral setting, still engage in activism through organising or planning such awareness-raising events as Sakura mentions, but also through other, less overt forms of activism.

Spatial activism is action that seeks to play a role in constructing physical, social and symbolic space in an effort to "radicalise conservative and semi-hegemonic space", raising visibility of minoritised communities or of power imbalances in society, and to promote social change (Misgav 2015). This is partly achieved through the group's efforts to engage in "centre"-facing activism for

Pride Month, International Non-Binary People's Day and Culture Day, but also through the spatial reconfiguration of the classroom in this peripheral space. Students move rows of tables (two students per table facing the front, where a teacher would typically lead the educational instruction) into a square formation of two tables and chairs facing the "middle of the classroom" (6). This reconfigures the teaching and learning space into the place as a "leveler" as mentioned already. However, the addition of the "flag" on the table – usually a large trans, nonbinary or pride flag – embellishes the space in a way that seems out of keeping with Oldenburg's description of third places as "low profile" spaces (Oldenburg 1999, p.36). "Low profile" places are frivolous spaces, often lacking the polished refinement or modernity of less sociable spaces. These places are "low profile" in the minds of those who frequent them also (ivi., p. 38). This space, much like whichever flag is used to cover the table, is symbolically significant to the students, as is clear from the interviews (1) and (2). However, the room itself is a classroom until the reconfiguration performed by these students, and so the space begins as one of a "low profile" within the school.

Oldenburg also associates the "low profile" of third places with "seediness", protecting the space from "one-time visitors" (p.37). He uses the example of female-exclusionary spaces, most likely misogynistic spaces, stating that "if it's a male third place in which women are not welcome, a definite seediness still goes a long way toward repelling the female customer" (ibidem). Instead, then, a "definite" queerness through deploying physical artifacts of queer symbolism such as the flag, as well as the communal arrangement of seating, surely serves to delineate the space as queered space. By such reconfiguration, the group engages in a local spatial activism within the physical and social periphery against the hegemonically cis-heterosexual school "centre".

The peripheral nature of this space and the students' participation in spatial activism puts the current analysis of this space at odds with Oldenburg's third place. As a space which, although it is not one in which excluding outsiders is practiced, it is not a space that many students and teachers in the central schooltropolis commonly pass by. Partly motivated by the opportunity to seek out other "elective bases" of affective solidarity (Tonkiss 2005, p.108), others will

look for community elsewhere and feel no need to be close to such a group. However, to students in this study, the regulars of this space, it offers a place in which they can feel seen, accepted, and be sociable. This speaks to the sentiment of third places and the connections they sustain, despite the potentially isolating density and diversity of the urban crowd.

Discussion

In the shadow of Section 28, teachers and young people come together to create an important space for LGBTQ+ identities within the periphery of the school. From the perspective of this large school as an urban space, as a *schooltropolis*, connection can occur through local or social institutional enclaves, or as identity-based community formed though affective ties. The students achieve the latter through the reconfiguration of classroom spaces, imbued in which are spatial arrangements and relationships with social hierarchies, such as those between students and teachers, but also cis-heteronormative hierarchy of the school and wider social arenas.

Through spatial reconfiguration and discourses that disrupt local norms, the classroom becomes a third place for LGBTQ+ students, one that is an open, accepting, levelling and homely, and where "conversation is the main activity" (Oldenburg 1999, p.26). This space, however, diverges from the traditional examples of third places, in that it must be assembled by participants and does not come into being in their absence. In weeks when no students are able to attend, the classroom in disuse remains a classroom in disuse. However, even when assembled, the identity discourses that are so valued by participants remain a key feature in the queer placemaking process. As components of spatial activism in the periphery of large school space, students openly discussing their identities in school allows them to make visible the unseen points of connection through which affective solidarity can be sought and formed. Even after the removal of Section 28, current calls by right-wing activists, right-wing thinktanks and the conservative government (Topping 2023) seek to impose legislation requiring schools to inform parents in the event that their children disclose any information about their trans, nonbinary and gender creative identities at school. Not only

would such requirements risk exposing young people to harm at home, but also impose on the open discourses described in this article. Amidst the bustling schooltropolis, schools should endeavour wherever possible to support the proliferation of "those gathering places where community is most alive and people feel most themselves" (Oldenburg 1999, p.20). Queer spaces such as this third place provide valuable opportunities for support and connection in affective solidarity of identities made visible through interaction.

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Transcription conventions

:	phonic lengthening	[ ]	overlapping
[hh.]	salient exhale	[word]	data anonymisation
[HH.]	loud exhale	(( ))	transcriber's comments
[…]	elided section	=	turn extension after overlap
-	truncation	<u>doing</u>	loud emphasis

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