

QUEER GEOTRAUMA: AN ANALYSIS OF THE COLORADO SPRINGS QUEER
EXPERIENCE

A Thesis
Presented to
The Faculty of the Department of Sociology
The Colorado College
In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Bachelor of Arts

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I have neither given nor received unauthorized aid on this thesis.

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ABSTRACT

The construction of place, referring to the political, social, religious, and military contexts, impact every individual's lived experience. Groups often experience harmful aspects of place through geotrauma, a collective trauma intertwined with place and geography. I pose the question of how place contributes to the realization of geotrauma for queer residents in Colorado Springs. Colorado Springs is the second largest Colorado city and is widely associated with the military and Evangelicalism. In the 90s, Colorado passed a ballot measure that legalized discrimination on the basis of sexuality that imposed the groundwork for conditions of geotrauma even after it was overturned by the Supreme Court. To answer this question, I evaluated and analyzed public Colorado Springs Oral History Projects. I found that queer people experienced geotrauma through harmful mechanisms of anti-queer religious and military institutions, but the geographic dispersion of Colorado Springs protects queer residents by creating different 'bubbles.' These bubbles help residents maintain physical barriers between communities that hold anti-queer sentiments.

At the end of 2022, Colorado Springs made national headlines for an event rooted in anti-queer sentiments and values. Thirty years ago, the headlines pertained to legislation preventing anti-discrimination laws on the basis of sexuality. Today, the headlines depict a devastating mass shooting at Club Q, one of Colorado Springs last remaining queer nightclubs. This tragic event raised questions in the community and around the country regarding queerness and homophobia in the city previously referred to as ‘Ground Zero’ of the ‘Hate State.’ Hateful rhetoric targeting queerness often stems from religion, and Colorado Springs is no exception as it is considered to be the Evangelical Vatican (Dunn 2014). Despite this, the political and religious beliefs of Colorado Springs residents is very diverse as much of the conservative rhetoric comes from large religious institutions headquartered in the Springs, such as Focus on the Family and New Life. Using literature and theories surrounding place, geotrauma, religion, activism, and queerness, I pose the question of how place contributes to the realization of geotrauma for queer residents in Colorado Springs.

To answer this question, I analyzed and coded public Colorado Springs LGBTQ+ Oral History archives. This research allows for a deeper understanding into the queer experience, as well as begins to address Colorado Springs unique and difficult history with anti-queerness and religion. I found that the geography and institutions of Colorado Springs impacts how queer residents view and access their communities, but external dominant religious beliefs acted as a significant rallying point. Due to these diverse communities, commonly referred to as ‘bubbles’, queer activists were able to successfully combat anti-queer legislation. First, I will review relevant literature regarding place and geotrauma theory and describe the historical and political contexts of Colorado Springs. Then I will explain my methodological process into my research. Finally, I will discuss my findings and connect them back to the literature, showing how the case

of Colorado Springs exposes implications of place, activism, and queerness and their intersections with geotrauma.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Place

Place plays a large role in every individual's lived experience. Cresswell (1996) argues that place can be understood as a combination of location, locale, and a sense of place. While location and locale refer to objective facts about places, sense of place is a subjective experience related to an individual's position within socially constructed hierarchies and 'social spaces.' This concept works in conjunction with the gay consciousness, the idea that queer individuals see themselves through a distorted lens due to the ostracization of the LGBTQ+ community (Frank 2017:58). For LGBTQ+ individuals, both the environment that surrounds them and the way that they are viewed contributes to how they experience their queerness.

Scholars have long studied the intersections of place and the experiences of being queer. Using an ethnographic study of four small cities with similar characteristics, Brown-Saracino argues that existing research into queer identity does not adequately factor in the context of place. While sexuality plays a large factor in identity, people have characteristics and perform actions that are unique to their cities. The differences between these experiences are distinct even between cities that have very similar demographics. Brown-Saracino also finds that many queer people do not prioritize their sexuality or gender identity when it comes to deciding on a location since other factors, such as family, are considered to be more important (Brown-Saracino 2018). Place is a concept that cannot be forgotten in relation to identity, therefore there is a possibility for this research to be extended to every place. Additionally, Frank (2017:77) explains that gay communities became a large part of the queer experience in the late 80s. The literature supports

the conclusion that place, whether it be a city, rural town, or suburb, will impact queerness since there are significant aspects of identity that are intertwined with the experience of existing within the context of a broader community.

Geotrauma

The original idea of trauma is defined as a negative experience outside of the human experience (Brown 1991). This definition implies that traumatic experiences are rare and abnormal. Brown (1991:119) pushes back on this definition by using a feminist perspective to understand how traumatic experiences and stressors are constantly upholding the status quo. Rather than viewing trauma as an exception to the human experience, it is one of many impacts of existing systems of oppression. Additionally, people who identify as queer have historically been considered deviant, also meaning ‘out of place,’ in the eyes of society and the law (Cresswell 1996:24; Frank 2017:19). These identifications are exacerbated for trans and nonbinary individuals, (Crawford-Lackey and Springate 2020). The meaning of place, and in turn the actions and people that are ‘deviant’ are constructed ideas that are constantly changing in regards to historical contexts (Cresswell 1996:24). The combination of these theories strengthens the idea that since queer people live in a heteronormative society, trauma will likely follow.

The perception of queerness as deviance promotes a unique set of spatial experiences in relation to queerness. Pain (2021) defines these negative experiences associated with identity as ‘geotrauma’: “the ongoing clasp of collective traumas and place”. The ideas of deviance and oppression combined with place lends itself to these types of traumas. Additionally, trauma is not an exclusively individual experience. Trauma pushes past physical and metaphorical boundaries since people often communicate and share their experiences (Adams-Hutcheson 2017). When a

common denominator of trauma is deviance in relation to place, these shared experiences lead to connection and mutual understanding. Further research into the connection of place and trauma tends to focus on environmental concerns in relation to place (Anguelovski 2013). This research does not address the intersections of additional place factors, such as political contexts, diversity, and geographical dispersion, therefore it is important to investigate how trauma is impacted by the entire construction of a city.

Southern Queer Experiences

Societal perceptions of queerness are entangled with place and location. Being queer in the South is a niche of this broad topic that has been researched in depth. Whitlock (2006) described her experience of being a lesbian and a feminist in the South as a constant battle between those aspects of her identity, as well as the more conservative values of her identity that are associated with her experiences of place. Many scholars explain that the conception of the South as a place is closely tied with religion (Brown-Saracino 2018; Hollier, Clifton, and Smith-Merry 2022; Lund, Burgess, and Johnson 2021; Strunk 2019; Whitlock 2006). Southern culture is often associated with “small town values”, but they are linked with influential anti-queer sentiments (Cartwright 2021:168). The dominance of these Southern views cause queer people to be subjected to anti-queer views in their day-to-day lives. Additionally, Bible Belt states witnessed the increase of both queer movements and anti-queer religious movements in the 1980s, but the media and societal norms depicted queerness as something that only existed in progressive states (Cartwright 2021:165). The identities of queer people in the South have been suppressed due to these depictions, as they are constantly faced with the false assumption that queerness is wrong and different in these places.

The association of place with religion, along with some of the views that come along with it, has caused severe emotional harm for queer people. As the South tends to be more religious, these instances are seen and studied significantly in that region. For queer people of color, the harm is perpetuated further through the intersection of race. A 2022 study using participant survey data revealed that queer Christians of color experienced significant challenges in finding communities that supported both their identity and religion (Lockett et al. 2022). Overall, there are significant challenges that queer people face due to the relationship between religion and place. Brown-Saracino (2018:99) argues that despite these “inhospitable conditions,” the uniting force of identity politics, especially queer identity politics, acts as a uniting force for LGBTQ+ communities. By applying this theory, it might be assumed that all cities regardless of societal conditions will have some form of queer communities for queer people.

Other Queer Experiences in Relation to Place

New York is an example of a city that is considered to be more accepting and safer than others for queer individuals. Through a research study of queer conditions and experiences in two New York neighborhoods, Goh (2018) finds that queer individuals in New York are still experiencing high rates of homelessness and other problems associated with urban places. However, Goh also argues that the safer conditions unique to progressive cities allows for more avenues of activism that fights for better conditions for queer individuals. As places grow into cities, towns, and other types of communities, their values and beliefs grow with them. Research into these beliefs continuously reveals the consequences of harmful views towards queer people, while simultaneously analyzing the positive impacts of accepting cities.

An important conversation when addressing queer experiences in relation to space is the notion of acceptance. Queer residents of Portland, Maine described the existence of spaces

within the city where they accepted, but these spaces are not the norm. They must be sought out (Brown-Saracino 2018:122). Additionally, a queer resident of Greenfield, Massachusetts explained that the increase of visible queer communities has allowed for progress towards acceptance. Abundance leads the way to acceptance, therefore cities with large and visible queer communities are likely to be more accepting compared to other cities (Brown-Saracino 2018:164). In cities that do not feel inherently safe for queer residents, whether that be due to their ties with religion or other factors entirely, it becomes difficult to find these communities and use abundance as a tool for acceptance. Since queerness is considered 'deviant,' a lack of acceptance and abundance lends itself to further trauma than what is already experienced. It is important to understand that while some cities may feel safer than others, no city is entirely safe for its queer resident.

Activism and Place

Since place has meaning associated with it, challenges of meaning in the form of transgressions will occur (Cresswell 1996:9). These transgressions are a reaction to trauma, portraying how trauma is not restricted to be an exclusively internal experience (Adams-Hutcheson 2017). One form of these transgressions is through the use of activism, ultimately requiring an efficient use of place. Queer activists all over the world have taken great strides in using place in order to promote legislation, ideas, equal rights, and treatment. The Aids Coalition to Unleash Power (ACT-UP) created graffiti, a form of place art, in frequented locations in order to most effectively spread their message. Additionally, they used physical institutions, such as religious buildings, as protest sites (Cresswell 1996:171-172; Frank 2017:72). The intentional use of place was able to effectively mobilize the movement and allow it to grow, an event that would have been unlikely had they disregarded the place while planning

their activism. In addition, cities have distinct characteristics that activists use to their advantage. For example, Frank (2017:65) describes how AIDS Project LA used the spatial contexts of their city by collaborating with celebrities to spread their movement. The accessibility of influential people in Los Angeles allowed for ample conditions to promote awareness and financial support towards AIDS and the people impacted. Another city that largely contributes to activism is Washington, DC. People flock to Washington for marches and protests due to its political location, and queer activists used the space to have a mass wedding (Frank 2017:72). These examples all depict specific instances of manipulating places for activist movements in major cities, but there remain gaps in the research of smaller cities, such as Colorado Springs.

Unfortunately, place also acts as a boundary for acts of transgression. Research based on twentieth century experiences argues that acts of transgression can only push against societal norms to a certain extent since they do not have the power over the place (Cresswell 1996:175-176). The same forces that are pushing toward progressive societies are also the exact drawbacks of such conditions. During the fight for marriage equality in the United States, religious organizations were able to rally conservative voters around anti-queer legislation using the successful mobilization of queer organizations as both a call to action and a ‘threat’ to religion (Frank 2017:65). Anti-queer activism was motivated by queer organizations, communities, and individuals pushing the boundaries of transgressive actions.

Naturally, activism in relation to place is intertwined with the time period. At the end of the twentieth century specifically, political and social conditions formed by media and television exposure to anti-gay sentiments, policies, and institutions motivated many queer activism efforts (Frank 2017:360). Access and exposure to others' experiences, whether similar or different from one's own, acts as a form of mobilization that late-twentieth century queer movements took

advantage of. On the other hand, religious institutions that promoted anti-queer sentiments were also able to mobilize under these conditions. Additionally, scholars have explored the connection between gay and lesbian communities and found that the AIDS epidemic was the turning point for mutual activism. Prior to the AIDS epidemic, lesbian and gay communities tended to be at odds with each other, but as the inner workings of AIDS and homophobia isolated gay men from society, lesbians came flocking in as caretakers, (Frank 2017:249-250). Support from the lesbian community united aspects of the queer movement that may not have happened if conditions of the time period did not exist. Activism has made major strides towards equality for queer communities through the use of place and community.

Violence Against Queer People

People who identify as queer experience disproportionately high rates of violence compared to people not part of the LGBTQ+ community. This violence manifests in physical, emotional, psychological, and other outlets, such as bullying and medical treatment (Abreu et al. 2016; Crawford-Lackey, Springate, and Batza 2020; Frank 2017:26; Kolysh 2022; Lund et al. 2021; Sapp 2019). In addition, policies regulating queerness, drugs, and women that were promoted in the 1980s have exacerbated violence towards 'deviant' individuals (Cresswell 1996:66). The association of these conditions with religion and other aspects directly relating to place explains the need to understand exactly how violence and place manifests itself for queer individuals. Once again, these conditions are exacerbated by the intersections of class and race. Kutateladze (2022) found that 50% of Queer Latine Miami residents have experienced anti-queer hate crimes, but only 15% have reported these crimes to the police. Additionally, safe spaces for queer white people do not adequately translate to safe spaces for queer people of color, since they have to seek acceptance based upon their intersectionality as well as just their queerness

(DasGupta and DasGupta 2018). Trans women of color face disproportionate rates of murder (Crawford-Lackey and Springate 2020:9), a crisis that tends to be swept under the rug by many groups due to the lack of recognition towards intersectionality.

While it is important to recognize that not all religion and religious people promote and hold anti-queer views, it is also important to note that on many occasions, the right is directly associated with harmful religious views and the violence associated with it (Utter 2001). Lefevor et al. (2021) studied religious congregant's attitudes towards members of the LGBTQ+ community and found that participation in religious congregations promotes anti-queer perspectives. Additionally, while the United States was meant to be built upon the separation of church and state, the right has worked to promote their views on the basis of religious freedom, and Boston (2006) argues that these attempts have been successful. The 1970s witnessed the drastic increase of the religious right as a reaction to progressive legislation, and they ultimately chose to target queer communities (Frank 2017:44-45). Anti-queer legislation can be considered as a form of violence towards queerness.

Dominant literature surrounding anti-queer legislation highlights the conversation surrounding marriage. Numerous studies have found that the lack of legal recognition of partners and families has severe traumatizing implications for queer people and their families (Bernstein 2022; Bourke 2021; Cahill and Tobias 2007). These studies directly expose the relationship between religious anti-queer policies and the violence and harm that it perpetuates onto queer people. Christian organizations all over the country played a massive role in Proposition 8, a California proposition that aimed to restrict marriage to exclusively heterosexual relationships, through funding, calls to action, and dictating the narrative (Frank 2017:179-180). Religious anti-queer policy, promoted and supported by organizations in Colorado Springs such as Focus

on the Family, have been essential to this political climate (Blumenfeld 2014; Ridgely 2017). The violence stemming from legislation backed by religious organizations simultaneously exposes impacts on queer experiences as well as the transformation of space. These concepts create room for further questioning pertaining to the interconnectedness of place and queerness, along with the cultural and geographical conditions associated with individual cities.

QUESTIONS

Scholars have determined that place has a large impact on people and significant literature has examined the intersections of these experiences. Experiences within a place are influenced by political and cultural contexts, such as the presence of religious institutions and the military. Queer residents are subjected to the anti-queer sentiments of these institutions. Due to these intersections, I pose the question of how the construction and characteristics of a place impact how queer communities experience geotrauma. To answer this question, I will study Colorado Springs. Colorado Springs is a complex city that is deeply intertwined with religion and the military, yet the residents of the city have extremely diverse beliefs. Studying queer experiences within Colorado Springs exposes the unique geotrauma that comes from a city grappling with different political perspectives. Furthermore, Colorado Springs is able to answer questions pertaining to how place and religion impact the queer communities, activism, and experiences.

COLORADO SPRINGS

Colorado Springs is referred to as the 'Evangelical Vatican'. According to Dunn (2014), this name comes from the politics of religious conservatism and the presence of over ninety religious organizations based in the Springs. Additionally, the economy of Colorado Springs is built upon a mix of tourism and government spending for the multiple prominent military bases

(Pearson 2021). The presence of Evangelical organizations and military bases creates the conditions for the conservative hub that Colorado Springs has come to be. The queer experience is not compatible with these conditions due to anti-queer sentiments of both religious organizations and the military (Metz and Groves 2022). It is important to study the path that Colorado Springs took to encompass this type of culture, as well as the natural push back that came from its diverse religious beliefs, cultures, and politics of the residents.

Evangelical Christian organizations, such as Focus on the Family, moved to the Springs in the 70s and 80s, imposing their cultural and political views on the city (Schultz 2017). In 1995, Focus on the Family and other religious organizations with headquarters in Colorado Springs joined the National Pro-Family Forum - an organization committed to preventing gay equality and marriage. This took place as Congress passed the 'Don't Ask, Don't Tell' policy within the military that silenced queerness under the name of inclusivity by preventing queer people from talking about their relationships and identities (Frank 2017:104). Due to the presence of the military and religious organizations, queer conditions in Colorado Springs were negatively impacted.

In the 90s, liberal Colorado cities began to pass legal protections for queer people inciting immediate backlash from Colorado Springs based religious organizations. This pushback led to the creation of Amendment 2: an approved Colorado ballot measure that prevented local Colorado governments from implementing legislation protecting LGBTQ+ individuals from discrimination (Frank 2017:115-116). Before Amendment 2 was ruled unconstitutional by the Supreme Court in *Romer v. Evans*, supporters of LGBTQ+ rights participated in the Colorado Boycott. This boycott was considered to be the largest boycott in U.S. history sparked by civil rights threats at the time (Hill and Sen 1996:313). The movement sought to boycott all Colorado

tourism and products. There were economic losses for the state, but they weren't necessarily enough to cease Amendment 2; however, these boycotts set the stage for companies and businesses to evaluate their internal policies surrounding LGBTQ+ treatment. It is important to understand the impacts of these events on queer Colorado residents while also tracking the changes that preceded and followed within Colorado Springs.

In an essay depicting the experience of growing up queer in Colorado Springs, Brandon Sward explained that he struggled with his identity and coming out due to the conservative nature of the city (Sward 2022). This essay provides important insights into queerness in Colorado Springs, proving that there is room for more investigations into these experiences. While Colorado Springs has made strides away from its anti-queerness, it is not considered a safe place to be queer. On November 19th, a queer nightclub in Colorado Springs, Club Q, was the target of a mass shooting where five lives were taken (Bushard 2022). This shooting shocked the community while simultaneously forcing Colorado Springs to evaluate its anti-queer past. Past anti-queer legislation pushed forward by organizations that remain in the Springs to this day have consequences that are still being examined. Therefore, Colorado Springs can provide a unique insight and explanation into the conditions surrounding the construction of a particular kind of place in relation to queerness and religion.

METHODS

I collected data from two Oral History Projects in Colorado Springs: the Colorado Springs LGBTQ+ Oral History Project (Colorado College 2021-2022) and the Colorado College LGBT Oral History Project (Colorado College 2011-2012). Both projects have been posted digitally as a public resource. Each project contains interviews of people who identify or are associated with the LGBTQ+ community to understand and share stories of queer experiences in

Colorado Springs. I chose to analyze oral history interviews that addressed the experiences of being queer in Colorado Springs in connection to activism, legal battles, religion, community and identity. This archival data provides insights into queer lives in relation to Colorado Springs, allowing queer residents to tell their stories and highlight what is important to them.

To supplement this data, I also conducted an interview with a community activist to further understand how geotrauma has shaped the queer experience. I contacted organization leaders and queer Colorado Springs residents through extensive research on impactful Colorado Springs organizations and people. I formulated questions pertaining to knowledge about Colorado Springs and how queerness has been experienced. Additionally, I visited Focus on the Family's Visitor Center and took a self-guided tour to expose myself to the rhetoric and goals of religious institutions in Colorado Springs.

I created a cohesive coding scheme to effectively analyze the Oral History data. I created five coding categories: Colorado Springs, activism, queerness, and religion. Within each category, I created subcodes to specify the statements. These codes included queer experiences such as community and homophobia and notions of place, such as geography and resources. Once all the data was coded, I reviewed the data within each coding category and subcode. I looked for sentiments repeated by multiple individuals regarding each topic which allowed me to effectively analyze and interpret my findings.

FINDINGS

Pre-Amendment 2 Conditions

Prior to Amendment 2, queer communities in Colorado Springs functioned extremely differently and uniquely from other time periods. A lesbian who has lived in the Springs since 1979 explained that:

We had a... gay bar... that was one of the hot spots in town and straight couples would be there... We had drag shows, we had Pride Fest celebrations there. It was an amazing time... Before we had Focus on the Family and some of the religious institutions moved here. It was a live and let live kind of place... The world wasn't as religious and oppressive in the late 70's and early 80's and even though... being gay was illegal... we had to be aware of that... But with each other, I was out at work and never even thought about... getting fired.

This depiction of Colorado Springs is very rare since it does not fit the dominant political climate. Though equality was far off, there were phenomenal strides towards the acceptance of queerness. Another man explained that:

The 70s were probably the most sexually liberated times in the 20th century... I tell my students... about what it was like in the 70s. They're flabbergasted as a teacher what you can do and so the 70s really were a very interesting period where absolutely anything went. You could do anything.

The culture of Colorado Springs in the 70s greatly matched cultures elsewhere in the United States. Despite Colorado Springs' negative reputation, it was a historically anti-queer city. This begins to expose the dichotomy of Colorado Springs before and after Amendment 2 and the religion associated with it.

Even though there was mass migration of conservative religious groups to Colorado Springs in the 80s and 90s, there were still prominent conservatives within the city. A man described the difference between the different eras of conservatism:

Colorado Springs in the early 70s was very sort of live and let live... The conservatives have run Colorado Springs forever. The conservatives in the 70s were not the conservatives of the 90s, 2000s. Very prominent people in the community were gay, it was sort of widely known that they were gay. They in fact could be seen at certain cruising spots, but people simply didn't care. So that was a period of freedom, where even in conservative circles, things were allowed that now... would not be thought of. The live and let live sentiment was repeated multiple times, emphasizing the point that queerness was not necessarily a topic of discussion, primarily because people didn't care. Conservatism has always been present in Colorado Springs, but it did not look like the 'Evangelical Vatican' at this point.

A lesbian couple that lived in the Springs during the 70s emphasized these indifferent attitudes: It was really more like people minded everyone. You weren't best buddies, but people minded their business... You'd have your Republican friends and your Democrat friends. And the bikers, and the witches, and the hippies.

The disconnect between different groups in Colorado Springs were not present to the same degree that they are now. These comments expose the dichotomy of Colorado Springs before and after Amendment 2 and other changes in queer culture around that time period. Additionally, the same lesbian couple shared the sentiments of queer communities at the time, saying "People did not get together to push any kind of rights until someone tried to yank away their rights... Don't Ask, Don't Tell... we were comfortable in that." They don't deny that these experiences were difficult, but many queer people were content with their situations up until they began to face increased threats.

Unfortunately, AIDS started spreading in the 80s, dramatically impacting the queer community. One man sadly recounts the past, ending his statement by saying "There were as many bars then as there are now even though the population was much smaller. It was just a different time, but then of course AIDS came and that changed everything." This statement draws the direct connection between AIDS and the ending of Colorado Springs as a live and let live kind of city. Furthermore, a lesbian describes the devastation of that time:

I don't think you can underscore the impact AIDS had on the queer community... I lost 33 friends to AIDS. I did scores and scores of memorial services... I sat with many dying, young men, younger than me, and that was... in a time when Evangelicals... were saying... AIDS is God's gift to the gays.

The AIDS epidemic caused a drastic shift towards focusing on survival while simultaneously exposing deeper issues of homophobia within culture. Queer people were no longer 'comfortable.' Therefore, it is unsurprising to see drastic changes in the years prior to Amendment 2.

Amendment 2 Geotrauma

The impacts of Amendment 2 were felt all around the country, but Colorado Springs was ultimately considered ground zero for these movements. A gay woman living in the Springs during this time described her shock:

We did not think it was going to pass but it did, and we were... devastated. It took away some of the rights as far as employment, protection, things like that... That was a huge statement to the community. I did not think our community at the time would have passed such a thing... It was a personal attack that most of us felt.

The passing of Amendment 2 was such a contrast to the previous culture of Colorado Springs that queer folks were extremely shocked. Geotrauma associated with queerness was not a prominent phenomenon in Colorado Springs prior to Amendment 2. This amendment drastically changed the conditions and experiences of queerness, associating Colorado Springs with harm and hate rather than the liberation experienced previously. A gay man further explained the consequences of these actions on queer communities, comparing it to the present time period:

I think the younger community... don't realize the struggles we went through. They're in a generation that's not gonna get fired for being gay... It still happens, but I think we had it a lot harder... Just to have equal rights finally... death benefits and being able to be married... This younger generation is growing up with it. We had to fight for it and... up until a few years ago, I felt like half a citizen 'cause I didn't have equal rights under the law.

The idea of being a second class citizen has been repeated throughout the queer community, particularly prior to equal access to heteronormative marriage structures. Queer residents of Colorado Springs during this time had little choice but to face and fight against local oppression, further exacerbating the trauma associated with living in the midst of these movements. Now that rights look more equal on the surface, a lot of the fight has been forgotten, including in Colorado Springs. Regardless, the geotrauma experienced throughout this time is ingrained in the memory of queer people who lived through it.

The nature of legislation such as Amendment 2 breeds itself to further violence within the community. A gay man living in Colorado Springs depicted an instance of this violence that occurred outside of a well known Colorado Springs queer bar after Amendment 2 passed:

A friend of ours was giving us a ride home and we were backing out of the parking spot and there was a group of guys that showed up in the truck and they parked behind us and they got out with bats and they busted all the windows in the truck and left... I actually had friends that were walking through the parking lot by themselves and they'd get jumped and robbed and beat up... Things started getting better, little by little... I think the more people that came out and showed that we weren't afraid of all these big bullies... So they... don't bully no more.

These types of experiences occurred in the midst of Amendment 2, showing the correlation between legislation and attitudes towards queerness. The dominant rhetoric of that time in Colorado Springs was associated with violence and harm towards queer people. Therefore, the conditions for queer people worsened in connection to their city. Fortunately, as this rhetoric became less popular so did the violence, exacerbating this connection.

Legislation on ballots is often confusing and wordy. Amendment 2 is no exception to this.

A lesbian from Colorado Springs explained these confusions:

I even had friends who voted for it at the time... One of my friends says... it's one of the things where people read things and that's how they make their minds up right? And she reads about... special rights... I don't want any more special rights than what you have. All I want is equal rights.

Many voters felt as though queer people were searching for extra rights, so they voted for Amendment 2. These miscommunications surrounding the purpose of Amendment 2 were intentional and played a large part in passing anti-queer legislation. Additionally, this also implies that Amendment 2 passed on the basis of confusing and manipulating many voters.

These findings are a direct contradiction to the negative reputation of Colorado Springs residents and their views pertaining to queerness.

During the time of Amendment 2, Colorado Springs queer communities saw drastic changes due to the homophobic roots of the legislation. A prominent Colorado Springs lesbian explained the changing conditions of the community:

The queer community was exhausted and felt like age is God's gift for the queer community. There was a lot of fear at that time, and tension. But also that created, as opposition does in any community, it created... a strong sense of, 'We're in this together,' right? It was more grim.

Despite the harmful nature of Amendment 2 on queer communities in Colorado Springs, people were able to come together in order to fight together. These notions of community are significantly associated with activism, portraying the notion that oppression and opposition is able to mobilize and unite groups.

For many queer people in the Springs, the 90s were defined by fighting Amendment 2. However, this crisis was not necessarily intersectional. A bisexual woman of color explained her experiences at this time:

There was a lot of organizing. They were really worried about it, I wasn't... I have bigger problems than Amendment 2... With people of color, Amendment 2 was the least of our worries. We are still busy trying to... get that job.

Queer people with other marginalized identities were not necessarily concerned with Amendment 2, since their queerness was not the only source of inequality and discrimination that they experienced. Additionally, Colorado Springs is a predominantly white city, and the queer communities within did not represent and highlight voices of color at the time of Amendment 2.

Religious Organizations Geotrauma

Religious organizations in the Springs aggressively pushed Amendment 2, and many motivations are associated with religious conservatism and the fundamental ideals behind Evangelicalism that fight against queerness. In an interview conducted with a queer woman in Colorado Springs, the physical movement of religious organizations was revealed:

El Pomar is a big foundation here in Colorado Springs and back in the 90s they... started courting Focus on the Family to move here... So El Pomar paid Focus on the Family to relocate... its headquarters here and that invariably changed the outcomes of this community to date.

The organization that played the largest part in pushing forward Amendment 2 came to Colorado Springs due to financial motivations. Rich donors in Colorado Springs were able to convince organizations to come here, as opposed to the natural movement towards cities with common ideologies. The motivations of these religious organizations shaped the trauma of queer residents, as donors meticulously created the conditions for religious institutions to shape the culture of Colorado Springs.

Once the fight to pass Amendment 2 began, religious organizations were extremely supportive. A man who actively practiced religion and supported the queer community throughout Amendment 2 explained how he witnessed and experienced religious organizations at the time:

They would put their message... about why they supported Amendment 2... what was fear mongering about the homosexual agenda... But when confronted with the kind of tactics they were taking, they would often say, 'This is just a small part of what we do. This is just a fractional part of our ministry... Mainly we're here to help families be healthy Christian families... Our radio broadcasts... publications... They don't say anything about homosexuality.

According to this religious activist, Focus on the Family privately claimed to not view queerness as a threat of Amendment 2 as the issue of utmost importance. Regardless of these claims, they still continued to publicly support Amendment 2, and the same man explained why:

'If it's such a small portion of what you do,' we would ask... 'Why not stop if it's not important and just a small part of what you do?... Let us go back to being part of one community instead of this deeply divided community... He said, 'We can't stop because almost all the money that comes in comes when we do approaches to people about traumatic social issues like pro life and anti homosexuality.'

People within these organizations privately admitted that the biggest motivation behind the hate speech associated with Amendment was due to financial support of the cause. Additionally, Focus on the Family does not mention anything about queerness through their free public tours,

but the rhetoric within their bookstore promotes anti-queer views. These findings are compatible with the financial motivations of these types of religious organizations. Ultimately, the relocation and public support of Amendment 2 was not at the hands of residents of Colorado Springs, but rather from the support and funding of external individuals. Importantly, these individuals were able to change the culture of the Springs, creating the conditions for further geotrauma.

While Evangelical Christians are the dominant voice of religion in Colorado Springs, they are by far not the only religious voices. One queer woman that values religion explained her experiences with religion in Colorado Springs saying, “The UU churches in Colorado Springs... they were fiercely pro-queer inclusion, even though they were almost exclusively heterosexual... I noticed that immediately they were taking a very clear stand against homophobia in Colorado Springs.” As religion was proving itself to be homophobic and harmful for queer people, other religious congregations in the Springs were providing people with accepting and inclusive spaces without already having a large proportion of queer people within their congregations. Additionally, a Reverend in Colorado Springs explained the different types of religion in the city by stating that “We have strong relationships with congregational churches in town... Pretty much all the progressive churches, we have a good working relationship. All the conservative congregations we don’t.” Colorado Springs has retained the reputation of religious conservatism, but many religious congregations in the Springs are progressive and pro-queer. This finding pushes back on the foundation of religion in the Springs, revealing that Colorado Springs might not be as conservatively religious as it has portrayed itself to be. Regardless, Colorado Springs experiences dominant Evangelicalism, which contributes to the construction and experiences of Colorado Springs queer residents.

Military/Air Force Presence Geotrauma

Due to the five Military bases, the military and the Air Force is closely tied with the culture of Colorado Springs. A non binary individual raised in a military family explained how this dichotomy shaped their mindset saying, “the military is like, “don’t ask, don’t tell”... You don’t talk about it, if you talk about it you’re fired... Growing up here and growing up in the military, I grew up with a very negative viewpoint of homosexuality.” Living in a city that is not open to queerness combined with the historic use of anti-queer legislation in the Springs contributes to internalized homophobia for queer folks. This hatred, often directed internally, can harm queer youth into their adulthood lives. The conditions of this city are deeply intertwined with the military, perpetuating the experience of geotrauma as it relates to dominant institutions within Colorado Springs. Additionally, the military has been a very hostile place for queer people within it. One interviewee describes the experience of her friend:

Her Sergeant was helping her move from the dorms to off-base, and she realized she was missing a box... of love letters from her girlfriend, and he had taken it and... called her on the phone and said, “I had this box of letters, you will go out with me,” like he was blackmailing her and so she turned him in and... she got expelled for being a lesbian. Due to homophobic military policies, queer people were forced to hide their sexuality or lose their jobs, which continued to cultivate a culture of fear and control. These policies have since been repealed, but change is not immediate, as described by a non binary member of the military:

Most soldiers, they don’t care. You’re getting shot at. You don’t care if the person next to you is gay. Still there’s this super conservative culture and that doesn’t go away just because you let people in, it’s kind of just that slow change. While these changes did not happen overnight, the military was gradually becoming more tolerant of queerness. However, queer people are still being subjected to conservative cultures within the military. Their choice of job consistently imposes a unique system of harm.

Queer communities have responded strongly to the conservative military culture in support of queer folks within it. A former military member who identifies as a lesbian explained

that there were underground queer communities within the military through “the gaydar... A lot of them are on the base softball team... There is a knowing that happens and then you kind of band together.” While queer communities were often silenced within the military, they still existed if you knew where to look. The ‘knowing’ refers to the idea that while others assumed the military lacked queerness, it was really just hidden. Additionally, queer communities in Colorado Springs that are not involved with the military have made efforts in the past to include queer military members. A woman who has long been a significant part of the Colorado Springs queer community recalled:

We invited all the gay people who were enlisted who could not... go home for Christmas and walked around the neighborhood singing Christmas carols and... trying to provide... kind of a home celebration for them... That was no different than what the heterosexual officers were doing for the heterosexual enlisted people... We had our own underground in the military.

Relationships and communities for straight people in the military were replicated by local queer communities in Colorado Springs, showing the dichotomy between how Colorado Springs is perceived and experienced by queer individuals. Ultimately, the complex relationship between the military and homosexuality is experienced by living in Colorado Springs, effectively shaping queerness.

Geographical Dispersion and Diversity

In an oral history interview in 2022, a trans man compared the queer experience in Colorado Springs to that of other larger cities stating that the Springs “is a lot more insular and harder to find partially because there’s not designated physical places... it’s probably a lot harder to find because there’s not a sign on the door.” Even though the Springs is classified as a city, people do not have the same access to queer spaces as bigger cities. In order to find communities and spaces, queer people need to actively search for it. Due to these conditions, a gay man explained that “we would always go to Denver really because the Colorado Springs scene wasn't

very- it wasn't very big.” Some queer individuals need to travel in order to find communities that they are able to feel safe and comfortable in due to the nature of Colorado Springs as a place.

Downtown Colorado Springs functions as the city center of Colorado Springs. It is the ideal location for queer events such as Pride, but it unfortunately is not a practical location, so Pride is currently held elsewhere. An individual explains this dichotomy by saying “Would I have loved for it to stay at Acacia park? Absolutely because to me visibility is important. And I think it got bigger because the space got bigger because there was more room... Our downtown's really not that big.” Physical limitations of space have pushed events away from the city center which has created an increased separation between communities due to lack of visibility. In addition to space concerns, the same individual said:

It also affects small businesses... streets get blocked off and with a lot of folks in this city probably not being as accepting of Pride... you don't really need a bunch of... protesters standing outside of your small business while you're trying to sell some soap.

Since Pride in the Springs is more likely to have counter protestors than more liberal cities, queer communities need to consider implications of exposure and safety. The space of downtown Colorado Springs does not adequately allow for Pride festivals, emphasizing the trauma that is faced in connection to place. Colorado Springs promotes further harm due to the geographical layout of the city.

In conjunction with physical limitations of space, Colorado Springs is made up of many neighborhoods that often feel very different and disconnected from each other. A bisexual woman explains that “there really is a CC neighborhood bubble effect in that there are three zip codes that have more liberals in them than almost anywhere in Colorado Springs.” Queer residents of these neighborhoods are able to remove themselves from dominant anti-queer conservatism of the Springs due to the city's layout. The notion of Colorado Springs having bubbles is echoed by another resident who stated that “People are just so separate, everyone is so

individualized here. Everybody's kinda on their own... You're not going out to these events and seeing what's happening and learning how to get involved, you're just kinda staying in your bubble." The individualistic culture is emphasized by the separation of neighborhoods, actively limiting the reach of activism and organizing. According to a nonbinary resident talking about the layout of Colorado Springs, "Everything's so spread out. There are no real community centers. There's a few, but not really a space where the community will always get together." This type of city set up affects both community building and activism efforts. The lack of cohesiveness amounts to extra work for community leaders, even if the neighborhood separations might make pockets of the city safer for queer residents.

The lack of centralized space in Colorado Springs combined with isolated neighborhoods leads to further issues concerning transportation. When asked what they would like to change in the Springs, a resident said:

If I could snap my fingers and say this is what I want the city to have, it would be a mass transit system... If you don't have a car in the city, you're screwed... You have to walk 30 minutes just to get to the bus stop. And then you have to get on the bus, go downtown, wait another 30 minutes... to then get on another bus... This transportation in this city is just garbage.

The combination of a city that is very spread out with lack of good public transportation makes the concept of place harder to navigate. People without cars are limited in their means of transportation, which can harm community building, activism and many different aspects of life that are not necessarily unique to queer residents. In addition, a gay Springs resident raised safety concerns for "Folks who maybe aren't the smartest at like finding a designated driver to drive all the way down from America the Beautiful Park, all the way up to Club Q." The lack of a mass transit system creates large concerns over the safety and wellbeing of residents, especially as it pertains to drinking and driving. None of these problems are unique to queerness, but the intersection of queerness and lack of transportation exacerbates these limitations. Additionally,

transportation is required to access many physical resources that may not be available in the Springs, such as gender affirming and mental health care. A trans man describes these struggles saying:

A lot of people here in the Springs have to opt to going to Denver to get sufficient, reasonable mental health care or just health care in general that is friendly to them and their needs. It's just extremely limited here in the Springs and it's disappointing... I would never have been able to have surgery in the Springs. There isn't a surgeon here... that does reassignment surgery.

The lack of transportation to big cities like Denver mixed with a lack of resources in the Springs prevents people from having easy access to necessary services. While these drawbacks of Colorado Springs harm everyone, queer residents experience these lack of resources in a uniquely harmful way.

Since the Springs holds its reputation of being anti-gay, many queer people are asked why they stay. One person who identifies as a lesbian explained that:

It's important that we stay in Colorado Springs... that we make this community something that we want it to be. That we leave it better than we found it... Not every queer person is going to be able to move to... wherever it is, like, super accepting. Some of us are going to be here... Wouldn't you want to make the world a little bit better for the people who are here now, and the people who are going to stay?

Another queer interviewee shared similar sentiments when asked why she moved to the Springs, saying "Dorothy Day says go where you're least wanted because that is where you're most needed, and if you're gonna combat Nazi fundamentalism, at least do it in a scenic place."

Beyond the fact that people do not always have agency over where they live, it is important to recognize places for what they both are and can be. Colorado Springs may not be an ideal place for queer residents, but it is still a home and should be considered as such.

Queer communities in Colorado Springs have seen drastic changes since the Amendment 2 era. For the most part, the queer communities are much quieter and less prevalent in the Springs. One woman explains this to be due to the lack of necessity to have a loud community in

this present moment. She said, “The community sort of dispersed once we got more rights... Once things started to flow, there just... weren’t any of those gatherings where we always... come together.” As the community became more accepted by Colorado Springs and rights were granted, the need for a defined queer community began to fade away. In conjunction with the community becoming less prevalent, many queer spaces in Colorado Springs have also closed. A lesbian in the Springs described these closures:

A lot of places closed... The Pride Center which closed in 2015, lack of funding and debts that they owed... Mountain Fold Books... 2016 that it closed... I wish we had more of that because I think the reason we’ve seen... queer spaces... fading away is because... It’s not enough to just be a queer space anymore... These are no longer the only places we can go and feel safe having a date... ICONS and Club Q have had to make sure they also have... entertainment and really good food... Those are the ways that they’re staying relevant.

Since queerness is more safe in current cultures than it once was, people are seeking out queer spaces less so than they once were. The fact that queerness is more acceptable has led to the closing of many businesses and spaces, alluding to the idea that queerness is not necessarily a central topic to people within Colorado Springs like it once was when the community was more divisive.

Intersectionality is one of the most important aspects of all movements, but it tends to get forgotten. In Colorado Springs, the lack of intersectionality is a particularly difficult issue, due to the racial makeup of the city, according to a trans person of color:

Colorado in general is a very white state. Colorado Springs - El Paso County is a very white town. That’s just how it is... The LBGT community you’re going to get is going to be mostly white just because those are the statistics. That’s who’s here... There’s really no avoiding it.

It is important to recognize the whiteness of Colorado Springs to understand how people of color are impacted, as well as understanding the limitations of the city. Within the city, there are pockets of racially diverse communities, as described by a man living in the Springs who said that “In the way that Manitou is nice for me... Eastern Colorado Springs is great for people who

are racially diverse and a number of my junior colleagues are of color - they live out there.”

While different areas of the city are accepting for different groups, the idea of intersectionality is forgotten once again. Queer people can move to Manitou Springs to feel safe and BIPOC can move to Eastern Colorado Springs, but that implies that queer people of color must create their own safe spaces in the absence of their own.

Colorado Springs as a white space lays the groundwork for queer people of color to experience isolation or oppression within queer communities that are predominantly white. A trans man of color explained his intersectional experiences in Colorado Springs:

It is like a flower trying to come up from the concrete... You have this group of oppressed people and their... only leg up is to conform and assimilate with their oppressor... It's easier to step on people beneath you to reach up to where your oppressor is than have to help people along the way.

The harm from other oppressed groups directly harms people who identify with multiple of these groups. Multiple structures of oppression working at once further progresses the idea of isolationism, stressing the importance of intersectionality. A non binary person of color further explained these concepts:

Issues for our community come up and people tend to not listen until you slap some blonde hair and blue eyes on it... When a white person says what I say... people want to listen... It's probably the reason why a lot of our people of color feel like we don't have a voice because... people don't listen.

These frustrations stem from the constant prioritization of white people, which is a general problem for the LGBTQ+ community. Regardless, the diversity statistics of Colorado Springs emphasize this problem to mean that much of Colorado Springs queer movements and issues are not intersectional and all encompassing.

Activism

It comes as no surprise that people actively worked against the passing of Amendment 2. When there is oppression, resistance tends to follow. The mother of a queer child explained the conditions of activism and people showing up at the time:

It gave Colorado Springs a very, very unflattering reputation in the rest of the country... It was so hurtful and so awful and the first PFLAG meeting which we had after Amendment 2 passed, we had 75 people, where we had normally had... 20... People were outraged. I mean, these were people who didn't even have gay kids. They just had a conscience.

Many residents of Colorado Springs were not supportive of Amendment 2, and more people began to offer support who did not even have a direct connection to the cause. Contrary to popular belief about Colorado Springs, many people wanted to put a stop to this regardless of their positionality and personal impacts. Another woman in the Springs also explained the increase of people and activism efforts following these events stating that "People just got really angry and just stood up, started coming out everywhere in the Springs... This is not going to happen. Tim Gill put a million dollars into fighting this amendment and won... took a couple of years." Amendment 2 acted as a rallying point for the queer community. People were able to come together to fight this Amendment, and even though it took a while, they were ultimately successful. To further emphasize the reactionary nature of this activism, a queer woman explained that "We would have stayed there... if old boy had just kept his mouth shut, that's on him." Much like the idea of comfortability prior to Amendment 2, queer people were content with their lives until lawmakers and influential people began to strip their rights. If Amendment 2 never happened, the activism that followed never would have happened either.

Colorado Springs was the site of significant activism during Amendment 2, but that activism has since slowed down. This has contributed to the nature of conservatism in Colorado Springs. Multiple people interviewed associated the slowing down with burnout:

I would protest during the morning, go to work in the evening, maybe get an hour of sleep, go back out, and protest. All the time... You just get burned out, and you can't get people involved. There's no one to take over for you... Some of the protests have gotten smaller because people have jobs.

This feeling of burnout was reported in relation to the Black Lives Matter protests of 2020, but it applies to all movements. Momentum inevitably slows down, especially when the threat no longer feels as harmful. Pertaining to the era of Amendment 2 specifically, a woman described her own burnout:

I think that once everything settles down, they go back to living their life. Who wants to be fighting 24/7? I don't... Could it be better? Yes. And here's how it could be better. And I'm going back to work now... You can't be doing this all day, every day. It'll wear you out.

Conditions for queer people in the Springs, the country, and the world are not ideal, but people are tired and need to work. The idea that queer activism and progress slowed down in the Springs is associated with activism burnout and the lack of current legislative threats, rather than the dominance of right wing conservatism.

Club Q

Regardless of strides towards equitable conditions for queer people, the queer community of Colorado Springs has remained as a target of hate. Club Q has been a crucial part of the queer community in Colorado Springs. It is important not to undercut the significance of the club to the community, especially considering the tragic shooting that occurred at Club Q at the end of 2022. Years before Club Q was the target of a mass shooting, a non binary individual described the type of place that it was:

Club Q has literally become a second home to me. I've known most of the people who've gone there, performed there... for literally... 13 years... I love Club Q because it was home for a lot of us. It became that safe haven for us to go and express ourselves. But now for me it is that sense of community. It is that sense of watching the next generation come in and being able to just live their authenticity, to be themselves and just be them and now that's what it is. That's what it is for me. It's home.

It is devastating to witness recollections of Club Q like this following the shooting. Club Q is a home for people, and the safety associated with it was stripped away by this tragedy.

Following the shooting, Colorado Springs had the responsibility to provide resources, but one interview participant explained how this did not end up being the case. She explained that “When a mass tragedy happens... the cities and the counties come together and set up a Resiliency Center for victims... That’s happened in every case, except for one. And that case is the shooting at Club Q.” Rather than providing resources like it does for every other tragedy, the city left the brunt of the resiliency responsibility on organizers. The city exposed their intentions and motivations towards queer communities when they did not provide basic resources for people following a mass tragedy. Regardless of the trends seen in Colorado Springs over the years, this event shows how the city is not willing to take care of their queer residents.

DISCUSSION

Queer residents of Colorado Springs have had a multitude of experiences in relation to the place that they occupy. My findings expose the complexities of Colorado Springs and the continued impact on queer people. The lives of queer residents of Colorado Springs have been informed by the notion of trauma. Brown (1991)’s feminist perspective of trauma being shaped by societal norms is consistently experienced in Colorado Springs, since queerness has not yet been regarded as part of the status quo. The religious and political contexts combined with the large military presence, geographical dispersion, and lack of diversity in the Springs has constant impacts on the queer experience. These factors have all contributed to Pain (2021)’s concept of geotrauma for queer residents in Colorado Springs, creating room for a complicated relationship between the city and its residents. Additionally, the nicknames associated with Colorado Springs reveal the preconceptions of the city, but people part of and associated with the LGBTQ+

community have pushed back on these notions. Colorado Springs is a city framed by religion and the military, but the geography allows for a separation between communities. This finding expands upon Cresswell's (1996) idea of place framing individual's experiences since the geography of Colorado Springs acts as a sort of protection for queer residents. The geographic dispersion protects queer residents against harm from their smaller communities, informing and mitigating the geotrauma experienced in Colorado Springs.

The evolution of Colorado Springs does not follow a linear path. The history of Colorado Springs has been defined by its history starting with the immigration of religious organizations, but there is a forgotten liberated queer history. These histories have been overlooked by the extreme hate that Colorado perpetuated against queerness during the time of Amendment 2, which is a trauma in itself as it erases the vibrant queer histories of Colorado Springs. Additionally, the present subtlety of the queer community in Colorado Springs is due to the acceptance that queer residents have achieved from much of the city since the political debates surrounding queerness. These achievements came in the form of the transgressions that Cresswell (1996) describes. His claims that transgressions are inevitable within the intersection of place and oppression are directly represented in Colorado Springs. This pushes back against assumptions of Colorado Springs and the impacts of Amendment 2 on present conditions. Queer communities in Colorado Springs have been stronger and more resilient than they are given credit for.

The religious organizations in Colorado Springs have manipulated the city for their own benefit through their support of Amendment 2, but the impacts of accepting religious institutions has been forgotten in these contexts. Queer residents of Colorado Springs have similar traumatic experiences to queer people living in the South, but Colorado Springs has the space for many

different perspectives towards queerness. The literature supports that religion can perpetuate harmful views towards queer folks, but multiple religious institutions in Colorado Springs were adamant about respect and acceptance. Rather than acknowledging the positive religious institutions, the focus has remained on institutions that fund and outwardly support harmful policies. Colorado Springs religion is viewed through the perspective of hateful ideologies that only some religious institutions hold. Regardless, queer people have experienced Colorado Springs geotrauma in relation to hateful religious ideologies.

Brown-Saracino (2018)'s concept of acceptance and abundance is extremely vital to understanding geotrauma in Colorado Springs. The motivations of the queer communities in Colorado Springs have constantly been in pursuit of these ideals. During the 70s, queerness was accepted as part of the sexually liberated norms, and when these conditions began to change due to AIDS and Amendment 2, the queer community got louder and prouder to ensure that Colorado Springs would be forced to listen to the voices that were being threatened. Additionally, the geotrauma of Colorado Springs has not been an internal experience. The nature of sharing stories highlights Adams-Hutcheson (2017)'s conception of trauma transgressing internal boundaries. These oral histories are a collection of the collective geo traumas experienced by queer people in Colorado Springs.

The lack of protections towards queer people from Colorado Springs, highlighted especially recently due to the lack of resources following the Club Q shooting, has contributed to the idea that queer residents have trauma associated with experiencing their queerness within Colorado Springs. Queer folks living in Colorado Springs emphasized the difficulties of the time of Amendment 2, perpetuating the lasting impacts of trauma. Regardless of the complex histories of Colorado Springs, the dominant narrative portrays the city in a negative and oppressive light:

a geotrauma in itself. The beautiful aspects of queerness in Colorado Springs have been overlooked due to its complex and hateful history.

My research was somewhat limited due to methodological constraints. I was unable to include every queer oral history of Colorado Springs, but each participant provides important stories and insights into the city. Future research should interview more queer residents, particularly about present contexts to understand how queer residents have interpreted these changes and evolutions.

The implications of this research reveal more truths behind the city of Colorado Springs. The factors that make up Colorado Springs have perpetuated significant harm and trauma onto queer residents, but queerness in Colorado Springs is defined by more than its trauma. The current perception of queerness in the Springs victimizes Colorado Springs' queer residents under the assumption that they suffered through Amendment 2 until the Supreme Court overturned it. Through this analysis of Colorado Springs oral histories, it is clear that queer residents did not want to be victimized but rather celebrated their sexuality to ensure that one day they would face total acceptance and abundance. That day has yet to come but it seems to be much closer than people tend to assume.

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