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**Finding Satan: From Cult to Cult Culture**

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**Finding Satan: From Cult to Cult Culture**

**by**

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## **Dedication**

I dedicate this thesis to my chosen family who have been there for me for the past ten years pushing me forward and giving me the strength to continue on my journey.

I also dedicate this to my best friend Patrick Vincion, who will forever be missed. He had the heart of a saint and will always be in mine.



## Abstract

### **Finding Satan: From Cult to Cult Culture**

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Gay bars are regarded as special places for the LGBTQ community who frequent them and have existed for many years to serve a multitude of purposes including places of celebration, refuge, health clinics, and venues for fundraisers. In this thesis project, I use autoethnographic methods and theatrical installation to explore my coming out story: from my exit from a religious cult to my acceptance into the gay community and culture. Working from personal reflection and research, this paper explores the design and implementation of the *Finding Satan* immersive installation. The installation reflects on gay bar culture from the 80's to now, sharing examples of small-town bars, how people connect, and how the AIDS epidemic affected how gay bars were utilized. I share my story and journey with others within the installation, as my personal history often echoes and aligns with the experience of other gay people in the United States.

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## Introduction

I was on the dance floor just dancing the night away in a toga that my friend and I had thrown together using a huge piece of silver silk fabric and fastened together with gold twisted rope (see Figure 1). The music was loud, the lights were bright, and the haze was blasting, and I was having a great time when a stranger came up to dance with me. We danced for the rest of the night; it was magical. We parted ways that night and never saw each other again, but I vividly remember this evening. I remember someone thinking I was special.



Figure 1: Ron outside Play Dance Bar, Nashville, TN, in his toga

Source: Ron Collins

This evening and many other nightlife experiences as a member of the LGBTQ+ community are valuable memories. Gay bars are a special place to me and for many gay men. However, gay bars that have been around for years are starting to close. Greggor Mattson, a sociology professor at Oberlin College, has shown in his study published in 2019 that 37% of existing gay bars have closed between the years 2007 and 2019 (Mattson). The thought of bars that have been around for so long closing breaks my heart because these spaces are still vital to the community.

As a younger member of the LGBTQ+ community, I love hearing stories about nights of debauchery and excitement from my friends who have been going out to the bars for the past thirty to forty years. They describe the bars that were open in the early eighties, as simple places where folks went out to have a good time and meet other people. I often find myself in conversations with older gay men, whom I connect with on a spiritual level because I have an old soul. Jokingly, I tell people all the time that I was born in the wrong decade because my coming out journey feels similar to the early eighties stories often told by my older gay friends. When I have conversations with gay men in their late fifties to sixties, gay bars are always at the center of their fond memories of times with their longtime friends or memories of friends who have passed. To them, bars were essential spaces of comfort and belonging. The stories I hear make me want to find out more about the history of the small town American gay bar.

It is commonly said in the gay community that we must share our stories with the future generations of the LGBTQ+ community, or our history will be lost forever. Because the gay community is not connected through blood relations, we must share stories of our history with each other or our history will be lost. Some members of the gay community have lost, disassociated, or been removed from their biological families because they were not accepted and were cut off from their families. I am one of those members. My parents are members of the Jehovah's Witnesses organization, who believe that men and women should live as binary heterosexual beings and that men are to marry women. Married couples are meant to have and raise binary heterosexual children. A homosexual relationship is sin in their eyes. So, after coming out as gay at the age of twenty, my birth parents kicked me out of the family. I was entirely on my own and started building a new life. The people that I had grown up with now thought I was disgusting for my lifestyle they could not accept. The year that I came out, 2011, was the same year that Lady Gaga released "Born this Way," in which the lyrics, "Don't hide yourself in regret; just love yourself and you're set; I'm on the right track, baby; I was born this way," really set the tone for my coming out as I danced to the music of acceptance (see Figure 2).





Figure 2: Ron after Lady Gaga's *Born This Way* concert tour Nashville, TN; Source: Ron Collins

For me, coming out was a challenge because I had been taught to hate the person I am. Thankfully, I had the support of the friends I had made, including JT, who I refer to as my gay dad because he gave me a home when my family kicked me out. I remember

weeping on his couch the night that I officially moved out of my childhood home as he held me and comforted me, knowing that I never was going back. It hurt me that my family could suddenly turn their back on me. I was mature for my age and was supported by the friends I had made but losing everything I had known growing up in a week was painful.

Just a few days before I came out to my birth parents, I told them that I no longer wanted to be a Jehovah's Witness. My decision to leave the church was very difficult for my parents because their faith was special to them. It was not until years later that I accepted that the religious organization I was raised up in was a cult.

The Britannica Dictionary defines a cult as "a small religious group that is not part of a larger and more accepted religion, and that has beliefs regarded by many people as extreme or dangerous" (Cult). This definition aligns with my childhood through early adulthood experiences. I was never allowed to be friends with anyone outside of this organization because they were deemed worldly. I also never celebrated holidays or my birthday because they were looked at as pagan traditions that were never demonstrated in the Bible. Having this type of upbringing made me resistant to share this part of my life story with others. I never wanted people to pity me. To those who do, I always respond, "Don't feel sorry. I am so grateful for what has happened in my life. I have created a chosen family of folks that I want to be around. It's my birth family's loss, not mine."

### **INSPIRED TO DANCE**

I had just finished watching *Queer as Folk*; the hit Showtime series that premiered in 2000 and ran for five seasons, which centers around four gay best friends and their lives

in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, when I was trying to decide what I wanted to research and create for my performative thesis project. One of the central locations the characters in *Queer as Folk* visit is the busiest gay nightclub, Babylon, a high energy multi-level dance club with music that pulsates and a backroom to play. This space is visited in almost every episode of *Queer as Folk* because it is a shared space in the community. However, the experience I decided to create for my performative thesis is not like Babylon. Babylon is an exciting metropolitan gay space, but I found myself more interested in researching what Greggor Mattson defines as “outpost bars” (77).

Outpost bars are bars that are located in smaller communities that are more than an hour’s drive from another gay bar (Mattson 77). An outpost bar might be the only gay bar option for small town community members to seek refuge; many in these communities consider these bars a second home. I grew up in a commuter town outside of Nashville, TN, named Dickson. This town, to my knowledge, did not have a gay bar, so we would make the trek to Nashville when we wanted to go out. I went out more often after coming out of the closet. Visiting the gay bar as a young adult who had just come out felt like I now had a refuge. I had a space I could visit where no one would judge me for being gay. Anytime I went out, I always imagined maybe I meet someone that night, but inevitably, I was always waiting.

In my second year of graduate study at The University of Texas at Austin, I enrolled in a course called Drawing the Storyboard. In the course, I studied how to draw storyboards for film, television, and theatre. The second project was to tell a story that would happen in an hour, so I decided to draw out the story of two men meeting on the dance floor and

falling head over heels. The criteria for the project was that each drawing in the boards show how the film would be shot and how it would tell a story. The first drawing was the opening shot of the exterior of the bar. As the character enters the bar, he walks through a curtain of chains shown in the second drawing, which then brings him to the main dance floor where people are seen dancing and the lights are shining bright in the third board. The main character is ready to have a drink, which the viewer sees him from behind for the first time as he orders at the bar (see Illustration 1).

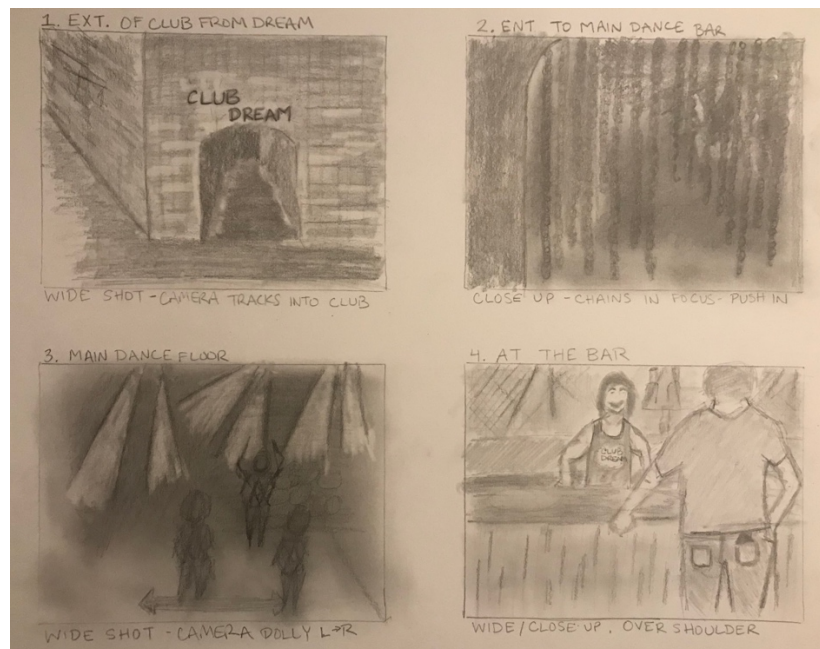


Illustration 1: Drawing the Storyboard Assignment, Boards 1-4, Source: Ron Collins

In the next board, the camera zooms in to show the handkerchief he has in his jeans back pocket and as he turns around after receiving his drink, he sees a guy from across the room

dancing. We see them both connect and then an overhead shot sees them meeting in a spotlight on the dance floor in the eighth board (see Illustration 2).

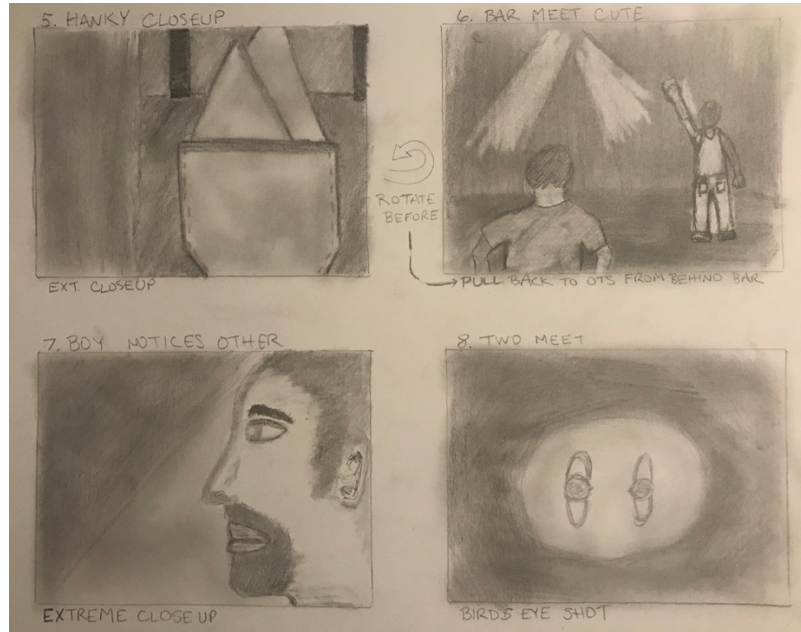


Illustration 2: Drawing the Storyboard Assignment, Boards 5-8, Source: Ron Collins

The camera then tracks around the two men as the other guys on the dance floor surround them. They have such a sexual connection that they cannot wait until they get home, so they take it to the bathroom stall and the viewer sees one of them on their knees in the tenth board just before the eleventh board shows a shot of a sign that says, “No Sex In the Bathroom.” The twelfth board shows the new couple back on the dance floor dancing while the camera moves around them (see Illustration 3).



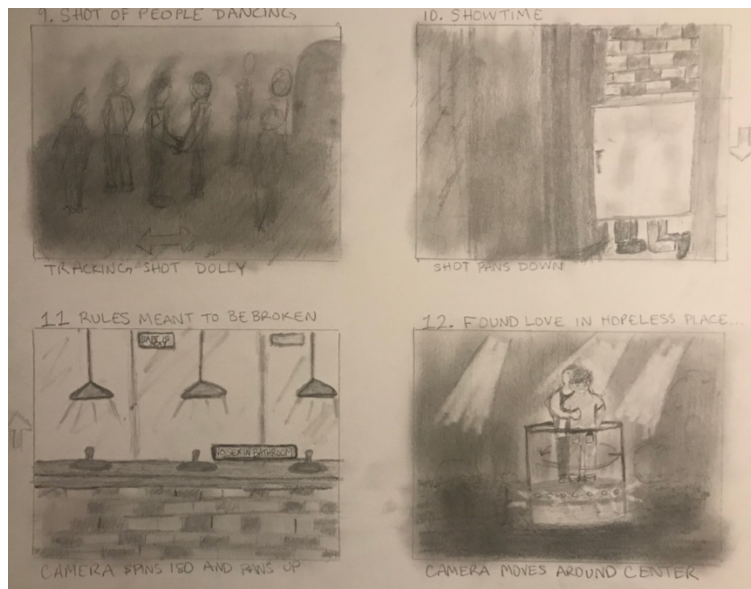


Illustration 3: Drawing the Storyboard Assignment, Boards 9-12, Source: Ron Collins

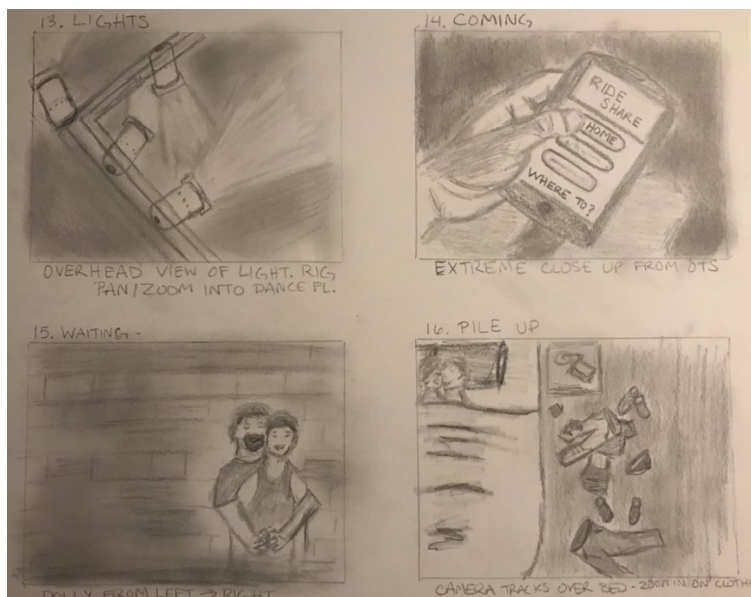


Illustration 4: Drawing the Storyboard Assignment, Boards 13-16, Source: Ron Collins

The couple is then outside ordering a ride home and we see them holding one another outside. The final image in the board is called “Pile Up” as they snuggle with one another

with their clothes thrown all over the floor. This project gave me a chance to express my creative energy as I was able to draw out something I had imagined and get the story across with giving only the necessary information (see Illustration 4).

Around the same time I was developing this project, I came across the documentary, *Small Town Gay Bar*, which is about gay bars in small communities of the rural south of Mississippi. The director Malcolm Ingram featured the Rumors nightclub in the documentary, the only gay bar in Northeast Mississippi at the release date of 2006. Rick Gladish, born and raised in Mississippi, opened the bar to create an open space for anyone whether gay or straight to come and have a good time with other gay people. His focus is not to make money, but to keep a space open for others to enjoy and his achievement is shown through the interviews of the patrons in the first ten minutes of the documentary. With statements such as “I felt right at home,” and “you’re free to let down your hair and be whoever you want,” it is apparent that the community belongs to this space. With my connection to small towns, I felt this immediate connection to the cast of the documentary as they speak to the hurtful things that others in the community like to say to you in public. One of the featured cast members, Jack McCrory, a drag queen at Rumors, speaks to his immunity he has developed to any hate speech he receives from others, which is something I too developed over time after receiving so much hate from the rural community.



Figure 3: *Small Town Gay Bar* DVD cover, Source: Small Town Gay Bar



The documentary speaks to more than the gay bar experience by including the story of Scotty Weaver, who was tragically murdered by three adults in the community who did not agree with his sexuality. The film also includes a heartbreaking interview with Weaver's mother, Martha, who cries, "just because other people didn't approve of him; it didn't give them the right to take his life or to hurt him" (Weaver qtd in Ingram). The documentary then shows the exterior of several trailer homes as they tell what the murderers did to him. Including this story in the documentary brings life to what small town gays live with on a daily basis. A lot of the hatred in these communities comes from church leaders, which Ingram clearly adds to the documentary to shed light on the hypocritical nature that some churches have in these small communities.

My experience also has shown me that hateful speech can also come from a family member. The day after I came out, my biological father gave me an ultimatum that I could only stay at home if I gave up my life as a gay man and lived by the rules of the religious organization. I told him that I could never live my life as a straight man because I am a proud gay man and would never deny that part about myself. He said to me, "Well, I hope Satan is good for you out there." He had never talked like this and I was stunned. It was shocking to hear such hateful language from him. I knew the source of his anger. He was speaking the language he had been conditioned to use from the religious organization he had been in for many years. I grew up hearing a lot of negativity towards anyone who was not a Witness, but after coming out and being around anyone but a Witness, I am keenly aware that there are plenty of kind and generous folks out in the world who do not deserve to be viewed as evil.

My personal journey and research informed the development of my performative thesis project “Finding Satan: From Cult to Cult Culture.” The performative aspect of this project is an immersive installation which explores aspects of queer bar culture from the 1980’s to now. In this installation, I reflect on gay bar culture, sharing examples of small-town bars, how people connected to the bar scene, and how the AIDS epidemic affected how gay bars were utilized. I include my story in the installation to share my journey with others. My personal history often echoes and aligns with the experience of other gay people in the U.S.

In the coming chapters, I will discuss the literature which inspired the installation I created to share with the community as part of my MFA thesis degree. The base of my creative research is my personal experiences and encounters. I am always delighted to share a conversation with someone who has a lived experience because it excites me. I am interested in safe spaces where people can share a personal experience and why it meant so much to them. How might I tell a story, particularly my own, through the lens of a gay bar? With my design experience and production background, what elements are most important in telling my story to others?

## **Chapter One: The Lit Review**

I grew up in a small town and am interested in the quality of connections folks make when they call a small town home. I am also interested in small-town bars, and the unique space and place they provide for local folk in the gay minority to let go and feel comfortable and safe being exactly who they are. In this chapter, I will share the current research I have found relating to the small town gay bar experience alongside my own personal experiences I have had over the years at gay bars.

### **THE SMALL TOWN GAY BAR**

In Greggor Mattson's research article, "Small-City Gay Bars, Big-City Urbanism," Mattson details his findings in 104 interviews held with gay bar owners and bartenders and site visits to 96 establishments in 36 states and the District of Columbia (see Figure 4). Mattson's two years of research identified the role of the bar in the local LGBTQ+ communities where they are located.

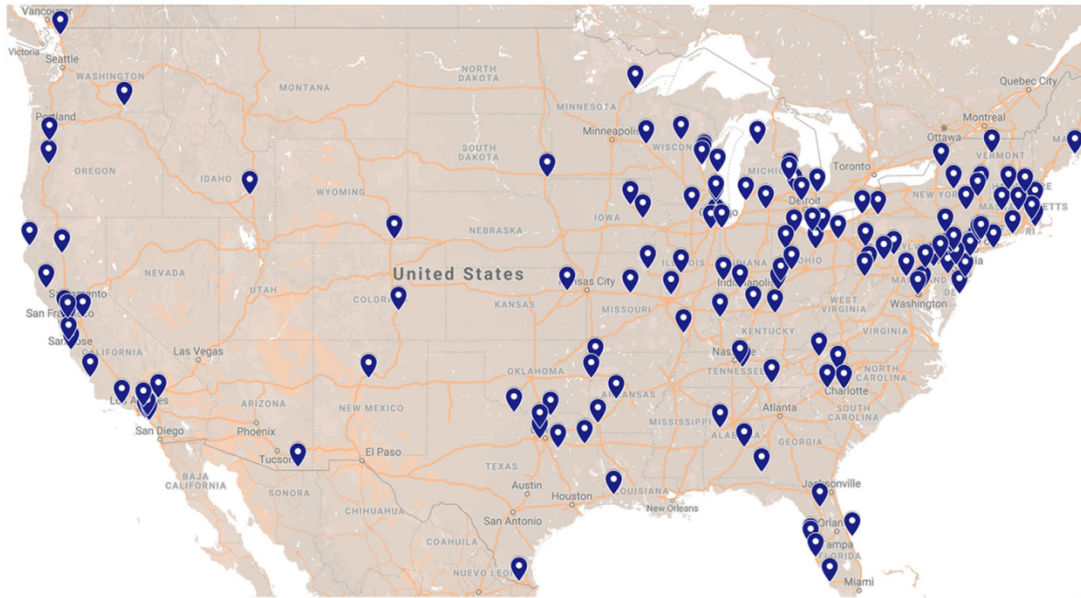


Figure 4: Greggor Mattson's Lone Gay bars, 2017, Source: Mattson

I find this article from Greggor Mattson magical. I know firsthand the comradery felt by the people in the bars he visits; each bar is magical because it acts as a community center. The folks who visit the bar are able let loose and live freely inside, as gay members of the small communities they live in. Fifty-four of the bars that Mattson visits are what he refers to as “outpost bars,” which he defines as bars that are at least an hour’s drive from another bar (77). Mattson notes that one of the striking differences between a small-town outpost bar and a big-city bar is the lack of concern over a mixed crowd of straight and gays in most small-town establishments. Big-city bars are specially designed to cater to the gay clientele, while a small-town bar caters to the gay community, and builds a place for straight folk to feel comfortable grabbing a drink. "Outpost Bars" have a “straight-friendly” policy, and as long as the patrons recognize the bar as a safe space for the

LGBTQ+ community, they are eagerly welcomed. Although many small towns are conservative politically and socially, most small-town bars also have a good relationship with their hometowns. Mattson cites Denton, Texas' Good Time Lounge owner Diva Dee in his article. Diva Dee states, "We haven't had any troubles from the city at all" (86).

Mattson further reflects on the community aspect of the bars, such as The Cabaret Club, in Hickory, North Carolina, which partnered with a local community theater group to produce a production of *Rent*. Many of these bars establish regular HIV testing for the community and for those who might live a good distance from the nearest city with easy access to testing do not have to face the stigma in their hometown when it comes to testing for HIV and other sexually transmitted diseases. Before coming out, I went for testing at the county health clinic and was met with the stigma that I was disgusting because I slept with men. The amount of information required on forms at the community health clinics is daunting and makes me cringe when thinking about all I was required to share. If I had had an option to be tested at the bar where I felt most comfortable, I would have.

Mattson's findings show that drag performances are the main attraction to an outpost bar. Dolly Parton's song, "Little Bitty Pissant Country Place," from the musical *Best Little Whorehouse in Texas*, is a popular hit in these outpost bars and these bars are "the only bar in the area, gay or straight, that played anything other than country music, including Gun Barrel City, Texas, and Johnstown, Pennsylvania" (Mattson 87). Some of the small city bar owners and managers whom Mattson interviewed live in these smaller cities because they care for their biological family members, who are ill and need special

attention. Ron Devane, owner of Club Cabaret Dothan of Dothan, Alabama says, “We are caregivers. That’s one of the reasons God put us gays on this Earth,” (Devane qtd in Mattson 90). Devane moved back home to care for his mother, whom had fallen ill and needed special care he could not offer if he did not live nearby.

As my MFA thesis project was developed, I remembered that one of the phrases I use to describe myself is that, “I am a city kid that got stuck in the country,” but maybe my heart is really in an outpost bar and I am at that bar waiting to meet that special someone. In the early stages, I wanted to create an immersive production. The story I could tell could be of a little country gay boy living in a much smaller country town but is just 45 minutes away from the next city that just so happens to have a small-town gay bar. He starts going there to seek refuge and find others like himself. He visits there regularly, and on a routine visit, while sipping his beer, *he* walks in the door.

### **EXPLORING THE IMPORTANCE OF COMMUNITY IN GAY CULTURE**

In my research on gay bars, the word community was consistently present. Merriam-Webster defines community as “a unified body of individuals” that share common characteristics or interests (Community). In the gay community, there are several types of people in one tight-knit group that share common interests. In *Small City Gay Bars, Big City Urbanism*, Greggor Mattson writes about the multitude of small-town gay bars supported by small town communities. The word community is used throughout to describe the importance of the bar to its regular visitors. Damien, who bartends at Belle’s Basix in Cedar Rapids, IA, says, “We’re the right-sized city to continue to support it. We’re

a small enough community where the gay community is exactly that: it's a community” (Mattson 90).



Figure 5: Exterior shot of Belle's Basix, Cedar Rapids, Iowa

Source: Belle's Basix Website

And on another account, Ron Devane, Cabaret Club Dothan owner, says, “We need a place to meet and greet, and we need a presence in our community. We’re here, we’re queer, and we ain’t going nowhere” (93). These two comments highlight how the word community passionately describes acts of support and togetherness. The word community is a state of being or a state of mind that translates to the gay community and beyond. However, the word is built up by the connectivity through the family. There is a common sentiment in the gay community: we are family. We are not blood-related, but we are connected through the people we know and love. Some members of the LGBTQ+ community are estranged from their blood relatives. I have come to build my *chosen family*, which is made up of those who have made an impact on me in my life, post coming out, and being ostracized from my biological family.

Community is built through interactions with a larger group, which could include dancing under a mirror ball. In *Theatre Journal*, David Román published his article, “Dance Liberation,” which focused on the act of dancing in the gay community. He writes of his own coming out and how he found his community by going out dancing at clubs: “Outside of the annual gay pride parade, no other event would stand to symbolize queer community for me more powerfully than the image of us all dancing together, which we did often” (Román 4). Román continues to explain that he came out in the decade following Stonewall when gays and lesbians were organizing and building a community almost as they were required to. Gays and lesbians were facing adversities, and it was the community building within their queer spaces that pulled them through this effort. They were making their presence known to those who did not accept who they were. The work that his generation did for mine is the reason that I am able to write this paper about my experiences living as an out and proud gay man. Without the spaces they built, the gay bars in the smaller communities that Mattson researched may not even exist.

#### **“WHAT BRINGS YOU OUT TO THE BAR TONIGHT?”**

A gay bar is a place for gay people to gather in a shared space where they can socialize while drinking and dancing or watching a drag show. Many gay men go out to see and be seen. We find ourselves looking for someone to bring home as we cruise the crowd of men. In *Cruising: An Intimate History of a Radical Pastime*, Alex Espinoza writes about cruising, “We never stop looking. The pursuit is in our blood” (135). The act of cruising has become a pastime in the gay scene as the use of popular smartphone hookup



applications such as Grindr and Scruff have become the route that most in the community find sexual partners. With this ease of access to finding a partner, why go to a gay bar these days if you can meet someone online and have them over without having to buy an overpriced cocktail? We can now invite someone directly to our place of residence without paying for that drink at a bar. To expand on Espinoza's statement, a lot of gay men are constantly looking for sex, so we can skip the date and move right to the bedroom. A joke that my gay dad told me starts with the question, "What do gay men bring to a second date?" The punch line of that joke is, "What's a second date?" This punch line rings true to the fact that the focus for many gay men is not who they are sleeping with, but how often.

Published in 2021, Jeremy Atherton Lin writes in his text, *Gay Bar: Why We Went Out*, "We go out because we're thirsty. We go out to return to the thrill of the chase. We want to be in a room full of penises wherein each contains the strong possibility that it is, to use the old-fashioned queer initialism, tbh-to be had" (6). As Lin asks if hookup apps will eclipse gay bars, we have to wonder if there is an end in sight to gay bars (8). Small communities in the South and Bible Belt embrace the gay bar as a safe space in their community as gay people face opposition in these areas. However, in "Hidden Rainbows: Gay Bars as Safe Havens in a Socially Conservative Area Since the Pulse Nightclub Massacre," Julie Croff published the findings in 2017 from a study conducted in gay bars post the Pulse Nightclub Massacre. She notes that due to ongoing acts of violence against gay people, communities are less likely to be comfortable bars and other public spaces that once were seen as a haven (Croff 236). Croff outlines that the remaining gay bars

predominantly in the Bible Belt where the area's legislation is constantly proposing bills to target and restrict the freedoms of the gay minority (233). Unfortunately this conflicts with the original feeling that patrons of gay bars felt safe. Given the trauma associated with the Pulse nightclub when the study was conducted, it is interesting that the results of their first study were that the gay bars were still seen as a place of safety (235). These types of conversations are always coming up in my friend groups deciphering whether or not the gay bar is necessary. I still feel very safe visiting gay bars because I know that the folks in these spaces are there with good intentions. On the weekend of the Pulse Nightclub Massacre, I happen to be at an all male gay campground outside Nashville, TN. The immediate comfort of being able to talk to others about this scary moment in history for gay bars was my realization that as a community, we are safer together. The gay bar should exist forever and always because we are not as strong alone, but together, we can move mountains.

The gay bar is also a place "to dance and to be part of the sense of queer culture that the space enacted," as Román states in his article, "Dance Liberation" (4). His time dancing at gay bars was his entry point into friendship, sex, and employment. He was finding himself through dance in the gay bar. A gay bar is a place for connecting with people you barely know. There is a shared interest in the gay bar by those in the gay community. Yet, as gay people become more accepted in the community, their bars are being invaded. "Straight drinkers now blithely invade our territory like the gaggle of sloppy strangers who show up at the end of a house party" (Lin 11). Lin supports this argument by speaking of a bar owner who had to place an end to bachelorette parties because they

were booking every table in their West Hollywood bar. Yet, once gay marriage was legalized, bachelorette parties were allowed back in, and the management opened an adjacent space devoted to gay men. As I have spent my twenties visiting gay bars, I have seen a decline in interaction with the other patrons at the bar that did not start on a smartphone app. The gay bar is a sacred institution that should not be forgotten. Without our roots in places like Stonewall, where the patrons fought back, gay bars might not even exist in the capacity that they do now. We are fortunate to those who came before us, and it is my generation's responsibility to keep our bars sacred while maintaining acceptance of all those who want to dance with us.

### **THE SACRED BAR**

For some gay men, it can be challenging to step foot into a church because they might have faced heartache when dealing with religious institutions. In the episode titled "Accentuate the Positive," of *Queer as Folk*, the character Brian deals with his mother, who is quite religious and in awe of her new priest. The ironic part is that Brian Kenny is having sex with the priest in the local bathhouse at the start of the episode. Brian realizes whom he is while attending a service with his mother because his sister wants him to be more active in their mother's life. After watching this episode (for probably the fifth time), I realized the juxtaposition of the comfortability of being in a church for Brian's mother and the comfort of being in a bathhouse for Brian is measured as the same by comparison. Our bars are a place of comfort as well. Babylon, the main bar in *Queer as Folk*, is a high-energy sex-crazed dance club where the main characters visit almost every episode as it is

their sacred place. The ritual of waiting in line, buying cocktails at the bar, and dancing to the thumpa-thumpa of the pulsating music entrances its patrons in a hypnotic spiritual state.

In Nashville, my former stomping grounds, most of the gay bars are located on Church Street. Church Street also becomes Gay Street just past First Avenue- I have always imagined that some gay man in city planning was calling the shots on that one. On Church Street is Play Dance bar, the first gay club I ever entered. It was amazing, and I remember being so naïve as I navigated the space, asking for a drink at the bar and seeing my first live drag queen. My upbringing in a religious cult would have never allowed me to step foot into a gay bar. I remember reading in the religious pamphlets I was force fed about the gay community and how their lifestyle of sin was not acceptable in the eyes of true worshippers of God. In *Small Town Gay Bar*, the Westboro Baptist Church pickets the funeral of Scotty Weaver, the young man murdered for his sexuality. “‘God hates fags’ is a serious profound theological statement,” proclaims the Westboro Reverend Fred Phelps. He puts the blame on the death of this young man on his parents saying they were the ones that killed their child. With this hatred from religious institutions, it makes it challenging to ever want to step foot into a church for some. But, I and others do go to church: the church of the “thumpa-thumpa,” and good cocktails. We like to go to the gay bar for our spiritual connection.

## **Chapter Two: Drop the Beat: Project Development**

“So, the thumpa-thumpa continues; it always will; no matter what happens; no matter who’s present, as our lady of disco, the divine Miss Gloria Gaynor has always sung to us, ‘We Will Survive...’” (Character Michael qtd in *Queer as Folk*, S5E13).

To begin my MFA thesis installation development focused on the specific role that local bars play for many gay men, I began by considering what actually happens at a gay bar. Men display themselves as an art piece as they drink their vodka soda in hopes that someone will pick them out of the crowd for attention. The evening’s journey is the scene being played out for all to engage in. With my project, I want to share a slice of the gay history that I have come to know and love over the years while I share my story of coming out and finding comfort in my chosen family. In this chapter, I will describe and reflect on the sections of the installation I produced. I will share what made each of these spaces unique and why I chose to include them in the installation.

### **THE BIG PICTURE**

Initially, I wanted to place my audience in an immersive club where they could be a part of the story. The performers would guide the audience through a scripted story sharing facts relative to the designed experience. The audience experience would be activated by a handkerchief color that they would choose when they enter the room. The performers would have scripted stories that would relate to each color handkerchief they chose. I will discuss the relationship of colors later in this chapter as the handkerchief did make its way into the installation. However exciting they were, some of the ideas I had for

this project proved too broad to produce given my thesis timeline. I decided to scale the experience down to a more tailored one.

With my research on community in mind, I wanted to work with as many people from within my current community of classmates. My collaboration started with media design from Jackson Cobb, who worked to curate the vintage videos and design the system that played them over multiple screens. Ben Randall joined soon after and took charge of the sound design and was the DJ for the evening. My scenic collaborator was Alex Rockey, who assisted in curating set decorations. I also brought in S.Elliot, lighting supervisor, who was able to assist with the lighting setup in the space and the system that controlled them. Collaboration is key to the process, and I believe I had a team supportive of the visionary goals for the installation.

Inspired by the documentary, *Small Town Gay Bar*, the space I actually created was scrappy and not overdesigned (See Figure 6: Bird's eye view of the full installation below)<sup>1</sup>. These bars were simple and the materials used are less expensive than a metropolitan bar. Some of these bars are focused on function and not style, but still are consistent with their charm.

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<sup>1</sup> For a ground plan of the installation, refer to Appendix A.



Figure 6: Bird's eye view of the full installation, Source: Ron Collins

#### **ENTER THE DANCEFLOOR: THE INSTALLATION TIMELINE**

As guests entered the space they were treated to a timeline which started in 1968 and moved all the way up to present day. The timeline began with Sunday Tea Dances, which is an event where men would gather to dance together while a monitor would oversee the crowd to ensure that the men were distanced enough from each other. At least one woman was required to be in attendance to be in accordance with the law regulating the New York bars' ability to serve gay men and women. David Román discusses Tea Dances in his text, "Dance Liberation," suggesting that many scholars overlook a scene in Mart Crowley's play, *The Boys in the Band*, where a reference to Sunday Tea Dances is made

when there is a sudden knock on the door while the group of men is dancing. Emory yells, “Oh my god! It’s Lily Law! Everybody three feet apart!”-a reminder that it was forbidden throughout the mid ‘60s for same-sex couples to dance together. “This scene in *The Boys in the Band* suggests one of the critical roles that dance plays in queer culture and by extension queer history, and it suggests that dance is more central to queer life than scholars have previously acknowledged” (Román 11).



Figure 7: Timeline in the installation, Source: Ron Collins

Also included in the timeline are other important historical moments of gay culture including the Stonewall Riots in 1969. The Stonewall Riots took place in New York City at The Stonewall Inn, a gay bar in Greenwich Village. The Riots are considered the most critical event leading to the gay liberation movement and the modern fight for LGBTQ+ equity and justice in the United States because they mark a clear period when LGBTQ+



activists began to push for their legal rights. The Riots started with police raiding bars in the area including The Stonewall Inn. In 1969, the New York state liquor authority revoked its policy against issuing liquor licenses to gay bars because they were interested in the profits that could come from this reversal of the law. However, gay bars were still dangerous places to socialize because the police would raid the bars for disorderly conduct and other liquor license infractions. The typical raid would include the police officers entering the establishment and raiding all of the alcohol from the bar because the bar was in “violation,” which could be anything because officers have the upper hand. But on June 28th, 1969, the raid at Stonewall Inn did not go as planned. The patrons resisted the officers’ interference and started yelling and throwing objects at the officers as they unsuccessfully worked to calm down the crowd. The violence drew a crowd outside and the officers barricaded themselves inside the building while the protesters fought back. It took hours for the police force to clear the streets that night. The next evening, the crowd grew to the thousands as the community rallied together taunting the police officers. Following the riots at Stonewall, members of the community who were not originally fighting for equality joined forces with those who have been. This led to activists starting the first gay pride march a year later. Every June in cities all across the country, communities celebrate Pride Month to commemorate the Stonewall victory with parades and festivals (Blakemore). In 2012, I went to my first Pride event in Nashville TN and realized how accepting the community is. At the time, I did not know much about the history of the gay community, but this moment made me want to research and discover what makes the LGBTQ+ so special and unique.

The timeline moves on to speak to the '70s, which ushered in a whole new venture into sexuality for gay men living in larger metropolitan cities such as New York. In the documentary, *Gay Sex in the 70s*, released in 2005, several men are interviewed about the culture of sex in prior to the AIDS epidemic. This was a time of sexual freedom. Men were having sex anywhere they could find, including the boat docks in New York City or dark shipping containers or the backs of trucks. Arnie Kantrowitz, an English professor, activist and writer says about having sex in the back of a truck: "...last stop before hell, you went there into some dark container and if you got out of there with your wallet plus an orgasm, you were really lucky" (Kantrowitz qtd in *Gay Sex in the 70s*). Bathhouses were also popular for sexual adventures. In the '70s, Man's Country Chicago was one of the most popular. An advertisement for the popular bathhouse stated,

Come to Man's Country. See what we are all about; what we have to offer. Man's Country is a full facility, multi-level complex that was designed to feature something for everyone. Come to Man's Country and develop your body or a friendship with somebody's else. Visit us once and you'll come again and again. For the best workout in town, it's Man's Country. 28th W. 15<sup>th</sup>. (*Gay Sex in the 70s*)

Not mentioning the AIDS epidemic would be a disservice to the history of the gay community and to the bar culture at large. As the AIDS crisis continue to build in the early '80s, community members were affected by losing loved ones to a disease that until 1985, President Ronald Reagan ignored and did not speak to the crisis affecting the gay community. With no public funding from the current Presidential administration, this led

groups to host fundraisers and auctions for victims of AIDS as seen in the below flyer for one at Renegade [bar] in San Francisco (see Figure 8). Bars became public community centers and places of refuge for those that needed the support. Testing for HIV/AIDS was common to see at a bar and safe sex was promoted through condom giveaways. The promotion of safe sex is still happening today as gay bars have condom packs set in jars near the exit for patrons to take as they head home to have sex.

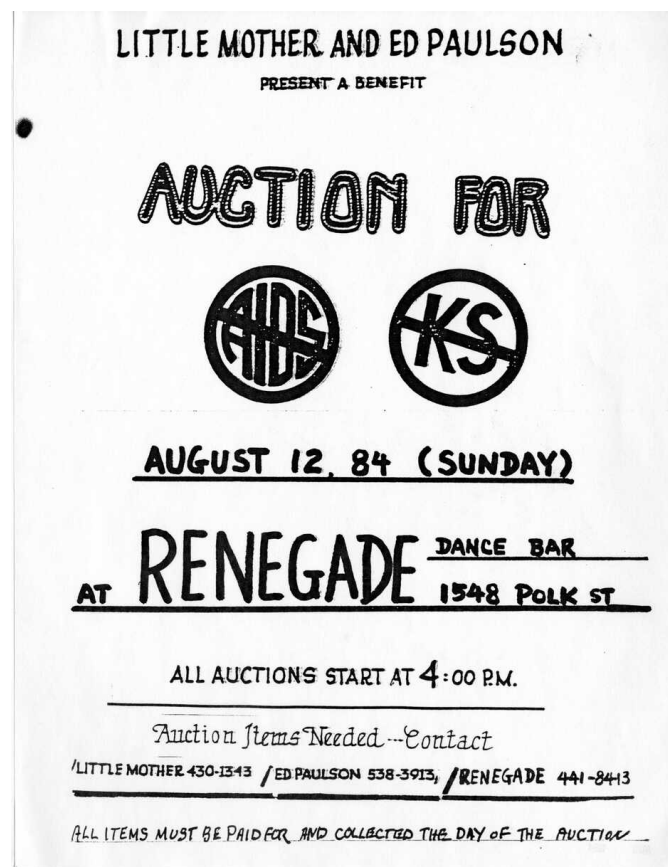


Figure 8: Example of a flyer for an Auction for AIDS and KS at the Renegade [Bar],  
Source: ONE National Gay and Lesbian Archives

## **THE HANKY WALL**

Cruising for sex goes as far back as 200 years ago, but the art of cruising is much different today because with the internet, sex has become much more accessible and widely accepted. Now, we are able to download an app on your smartphone, invite someone over for the evening, and send them home later without even leaving your house. The main concern with meeting someone online and inviting them over is not the fear of being hurt, but the fear of being ignored after a first encounter that seemed somewhat mutually satisfying. On the apps you are able to physically list the sexual interests you have, but well before the internet, gay men created “The Hanky Code,” my favorite sector of cruising culture. The hanky code was a quiet way of expressing your sexual interests through a coded system. Men would wear different colors based on their sexual interest in their jean’s back pockets. The various colors imply an interest such as anal sex, oral sex, rimming, fisting, watersports, and many more. Some bars had their own code that they shared through the use of cards they would hand out that gave a meaning to each color (see Figure 9: Example of a Hanky Code from 501 Tavern).

501 TAVERN		
"THE ULTIMATE HANKY CODE"		
HANKY COLOR	WORN ON LEFT	WORN ON RIGHT
Light Blue	Wants Head	Expert Cocksucker
Robin's Egg Blue	69 Top	69 Bottom
Medium Blue	Cop	Cop-Sucker
Navy Blue	Fucker	Fuckee
Teal Blue	Cock & Ball Torturer	Cock & Ball Torturee
Mauve	Into Naval Worshipers	Has Naval Fetish
Magenta	"Suck My Pits"	Armpit Fetish
Purple	Piercer	Piercee
Lavender	Likes Drag	Does Drag
Fuschia	Spanker	Spankee
Light Pink	Dildo Fucker	Dildo Fuckee
Dark Pink	Tit Torturer	Tit Torturee
Red	Fist Fucker	Fist Fuckee
Dark Red	2-Handed Fister	2-Handed Fistee
Orange	Anything-Anytime	Nothing Now
Mustard	Has 8" or more	Wants 8" or more
Gold	2 looking for 1	1 looking for 2
Rust	A Cowboy	His Horse
Apricot	Two Tons of Fun	Chubby Chaser
Yellow	Piss on You	Piss on me
Pale Yellow	Spits	Drool Crazy
Kelly Green	Hustler	John
Olive Drab	Military Top	Military Bottom
Hunter Green	Daddy	Hunting for Daddy
White	"Beat my Meat"	I'll do both of us
Coral	Suck my Toes	Shrimper
Gray	Bondage Top	Bondage Bottom
Charcoal	Latex Fetish Top	Latex Fetish Bottom
Black	Heavy S&M Top	Heavy S&M Bottom
Blk/Wht Checks	Safe Sex Top	Safe Sex Bottom
Red/Wht Stripe	Shaver	Shavee
Blk/Wht Stripe	Likes Black Bottoms	Likes Black Tops
Brwn/Wht Stripe	Likes Latino Bottoms	Likes Latino Tops
Yellow/Wht Stripe	Likes Oriental Bottoms	Likes Oriental Tops
Gold Lame	Muscleman	Muscle Worshiper
Silver Lame	Famous Personality	Star Fucker
Brown Lace	Has Uncut Dick	Likes Uncut Dick
Brown Satin	Circumsize	Likes Circumsize Cock
White Lace	Likes White Bottoms	Likes White Tops
Fur	Bestialitist Top	Bestialitist Bottom
Leopard	Has Tattoos	Likes Tattoos
Teddy Bear	Cuddler	Cuddlee
Kewpie Doll	Hawk	Chicken
Jockey Shorts	Calvin Klein Model	Calvin Klein Fitter
Kleenex	Stinks	Sniffs
Handy Wipe	Give Hot Motor Oil Massages	Wears it well
Chamois	Rides Motorcycle	Likes Bikers
Dolly	Tearoom Top	Tearoom Bottom
Mosquito Netting	Top for Sex Outdoors	Bottom for Sex Outdoors

Figure 9: Example of a Hanky Code from 501 Tavern, Source: Leather Archives, Chicago, IL

But most important is to note that the wearer of the handkerchief implies their sexual position by which pocket the handkerchief is in. Usually, the right pocket is a more submissive player while the left pocket is a dominant position (Pawsandclawsok.com). This interaction was how men would find sexual partners especially by paying attention to

what pocket your handkerchief was placed. I produced a hanky wall in the installation where guests can pick a handkerchief and learn about its meaning (see Figure 10). I gave this prompt to the audience, “Pick a color. Somewhere in the room is the code. Like it? Keep it. Don’t like it? Pick a different color. Once you pick a color, find someone in the room that you match with. Share a drink and get to know each other.” With the code hidden in the room, the audience had to go on a hunt for the code without any guidance on where it might be.



Figure 10: The Hanky Wall, Source: Ron Collins



## THE DARK ROOM

The audience interaction moves from the Hanky Wall to The Dark Room. This area was a darkened corner sectioned off with scaffolding, black drapes, mylar curtain and chains. As audience members entered through the chains, they were greeted with a few televisions displaying white noise. The room was outfitted with chains and cuffs to inspire an interest in bondage but expressing it is okay to break free from those chains and share something with the other visitors in the space. The chains represent being chained up and not allowed to be oneself, so adding this as a sign is another way to include the story of coming out in the design. Inviting the audience to share a message on the televisions in the space, I left dry erase markers in a glass on top of the televisions with the prompt, “What is your fantasy? Hopes and dreams? What is your pleasure? Use the dry erase markers and share anonymously with the next guests” (see Figure 11).



Figure 11: Audience members drawing on the televisions. Source: Ron Collins

In The Dark Room, visitors could be as sexual as they wanted because no one could see in the space. The room was designed for private conversations that might not be held out in the open. And on record, there was only one make-out session noted happening at the installation in The Dark Room.

### **THE BAR**

The next space in the room is the bar where guests were able to order a drink. Having a bar was quite essential to me because I wanted the audience to feel they are at a bar instead of only at an installation. Guests were allowed to have two drinks, which was regulated through the use of the two drink tickets they were given upon entering the installation. But to receive their drink, they had to enter a raffle for a prize. The prizes were two personal items I have had for a while. One was a leather flogger and the other was a collection of story book porn booklets. These are items I have had for many years. The porn books are something I got back when I was still living in my hometown. I felt that giving an audience member the chance to take away something that was particular to my life was a way of letting more people into my story.

### **THE STORY WALL**

The next space in the room is the bulletin board section. In accordance with my story sharing theme, I offered the audience an opportunity to share something personal with all who visit the installation. I provided the following prompt, “Share a story about a night out you either remember or don’t remember.” The audience could participate by writing



their story on a piece of paper and posting it on the wall (see Figure 12). In the story section, there was also a poster hanging up on the wall telling people to ask me about a night out at the bar that I don't remember. The poster said, "Ask Ron about the night he ripped his jeans."



Figure 12: An audience member participating in the installation, Source: Ron Collins

### **LOOKING BULLETIN BOARD**

Moving to the next area, a third prompt asks folks to consider something they may not think about every day, "What are you looking for?" A bulletin board hung on the wall that allowed the audience to jot down something they might be looking for (see Figure 13). On the board, I had shared advertisements from old pornographic magazines where men

across the country looking for love or sexual partners shared ads for their sexual interests. One of those is a special gift from a friend who gave me a copy of *Jock* magazine produced the year I was born. I shared several images from this magazine in my installation to add that special touch of myself to the thesis work.

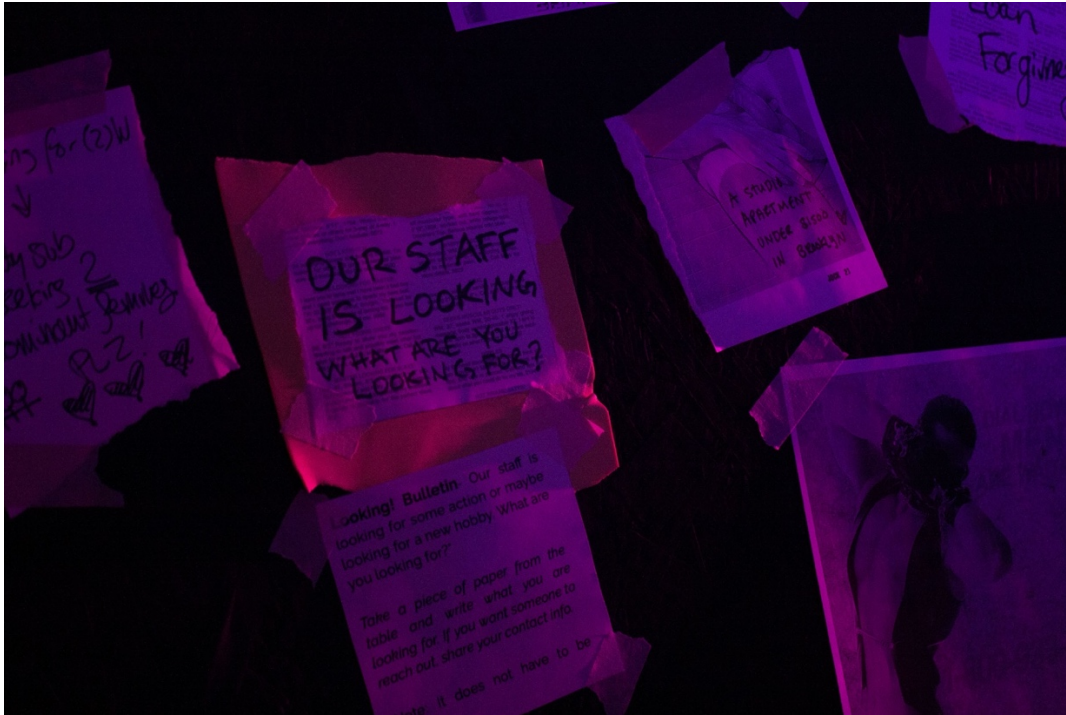


Figure 13: “What are you looking for?” Source: Ron Collins

### THE SOUND, LIGHTS, AND MY STORY

A DJ played live music in the space from the ‘70s to present time with tracks<sup>2</sup> such as Sylvester’s “You Make me Feel (Mighty Real)” to Cher’s iconic ‘90s hit *Believe*. I wanted to vary the music across time and genre to provide a modern feel, while still

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<sup>2</sup> For a full of the music played at the event selected by DJ Ben Randall, refer to Appendix B.

establishing the place as a bar set in the early '80s. The sound design also suggests that the gay community has evolved over time, but still remembers its roots in history.

The main objective of my thesis was to tell my story unconventionally through performance that was not a speech or monologue. This opportunity to creatively research how to tell my story through installation was the perfect route to fulfill my objective. Over the summer of 2021, I celebrated my ten years of being out of the closet by sharing images of my childhood on Instagram along with text specific to each image. I put much thought into the meaning behind the text I was sharing because I wanted to share this milestone as it is crucial to my story. So, after writing this material and sharing conversation with my team, I realized this text could have a place in my installation by using it as an underscore in the club space<sup>3</sup>. Our sound designer, Ben Randall, took these audio recordings and played them within the tracks he was playing during the installation (see Figure 14: The DJ, Ben Randall, playing in the installation). This breaks up the rhythm of the music playing and gives the audience a chance to reflect on information they may not know about me. My hope is that this gives the audience a chance to reflect on their own relationships. To bring the sharing of my story full circle, we brought in images of me growing up through my early adulthood, which pulled the story theme front and center. It gave visual context to the text played throughout the evening allowing guests to see the person behind the project.

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<sup>3</sup> Please see Appendix C for a full list of the text recorded for the underscore.

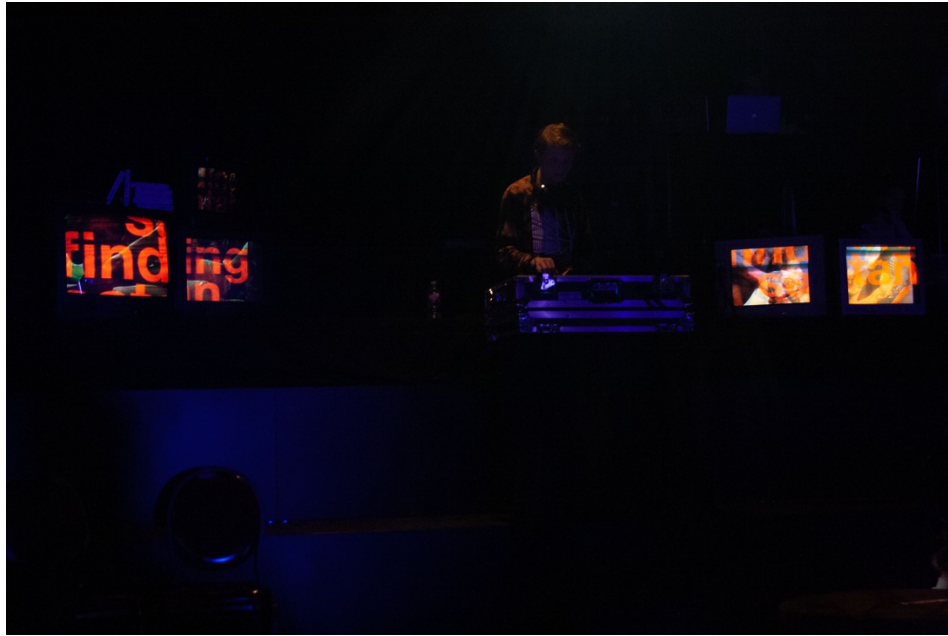


Figure 14: The DJ, Ben Randall, playing in the installation, Source: Ron Collins

In any small town bar I have visited or even the smaller dive gay bars that I have walked into, the lighting is always super simple and sometimes poorly thought out. I wanted to ensure that the lighting in the space was reminiscent of small town bars with its low cost and essence of no design. We used some Pixel LED strip lights, which played effects from chasing rainbows or flashing lights, which were timed to feel they were affected by the music played in the moment (see Figure 15: Full view of the installation before opening). We also used LED Pars that are inexpensive wash lighting and could easily be seen at any small town gay bar. We mounted the lighting to the bar, The Dark Room, and on the wall of the space to give the room more color. The lighting was designed to support the environmental space. Down lighting with template was used to give the room texture and an inviting feel to the space. I used lighting to light the installation areas such



as the Timeline, which had lighting fixtures focused on it, so the audience could read what was written. The Hanky Wall also had a lighting special directly on it because it was the highlight of the space. The Dark Room was an intentional dark area to promote privacy. and was lit with a high saturate blue gel to filter out most of the light. This choice gave the room just enough light to see on the inside but did not allow those outside the pleasure of seeing what was inside until they looked in. LED color changing lighting allowed us to manipulate the mood and feeling of the space with the touch of a button. The lighting was meant to not detract from the happenings in the space, but only enhance the evening.



Figure 15: Full view of the installation before opening. Source: Ron Collins

### Chapter Three: The Installation Opens

Finally, March 20<sup>th</sup>, 2022 has come, and it is the time for the opening of *Finding Satan: From Cult to Cult Culture*. The high-top tables are arranged. The markers and papers for interaction are set. The bartender has arrived. The bar is setup, and the first Ron Collins is poured, a twist on a traditional Tom Collins. The time for people to see the space has come. The moment to share my story with others has arrived. The doors open.

During the first night the installation was open, I heard from several folks that they felt I was incredibly courageous to be so open with my personal coming out story. It was also said that the passion I have for this project and subject matter shines through in the care I put into the design. Personally, I enjoyed all the small details around that were hidden throughout, meant to be little treats of discovery for my guests.

As I observed how folks were interacting with the space at each performance, I realized that the Hanky Wall became a community-building exercise that sparked conversation and allowed folks in the space to choose a color at random without knowing what the color represented. The Code itself was hiding in the space and as several people asked me, “Where is the code?” or “What does the color RED mean?” I continued to push them to find it in the space. I observed more significant audience interaction as people discovered the code. The audience then intentionally researched additional color coded signifiers. I observed community building as a larger population of the audience with the Hanky wall and Hanky code document. People who were not previously known to one another were now sharing conversations.

As I look back at the installation design, The Video Wall remains one of my favorite portions of my installation. The composition of the videos put together was very organized. My favorite part in this section of the installation was in one video where there was a closeup of a guys' cock, it would go across the two screens as he slid it through a glory hole just waiting to be sucked by the guy on the other side. This part of the installation tells a story of passion. Other videos played showed clips of vintage porn where there was usually a narrative. These narratives would showcase all types of men. As said in the documentary, *Gay Sex in the 70s*, the porn produced in this decade was made to highlight the types of men having sex. This ensured that any man could watch a pornography movie and connect to the performers. We dressed up this space with VHS tapes labeled with porn titles we created that either referenced gay culture or the story I was sharing with others in the room.

I do realize that with every project there are failures. One of the elements that not many folks talked about was the audio tracks played underneath the music in the space. I felt that a few things worked against me with this design element. There was not a huge shift in music, and we did not play the repeating tracks often enough to fulfill the impact I hoped they would offer at the installation event. I saw a few people stop their conversation and listen but would not tune in for that long. If I have a chance to do this project again, I cut the text for the audio tracks down to just a few sentences. This is one of those elements that I would like to evolve in a next iteration. I would like to have someone in the space performing within the crowd telling stories to the audience and pushing them to share with each other in a future iteration.





## Chapter Four: The Ugly Lights

*Finding Satan* was the most personally and physically draining project I have ever done because I was the producer and the creative director of the installation. I said to colleagues afterwards that I feel like I have ripped out my soul and everything inside me and threw it down on the floor in the space for everyone to see. However difficult, it was also cathartic. I released information into the world that I usually bottle up and do not share.

As I packed up the elements of my thesis installation, I realized that all of this was now complete and my bar was closed. It felt like the final scene in *Queer as Folk* when Babylon is quiet because it was destroyed weeks before by a bombing. Brian and Michael stand-alone solemnly remembering what the space is to them. It's the special place they have called home for so long. Michael has to remind Brian he is "Brian-fucking-Kinney." In the same respects, my thesis space that I had created in the last week and for the past years was empty, but I was full of love from everyone who came and shared in the experience.

Striking a set is always faster than putting it up. I feel this symbolizes how quickly our community can be torn away if we do not try to build relationships. It takes effort and work to strengthen the bonds. But as I closed *Finding Satan*, I thought about some of the bar spaces that also do not exist anymore. For instance, here in Austin, Texas, a bar named Chain Drive existed many years ago, but tragically burned down. In a video series titled "Streets" produced by Vice, they feature Austin, Texas, where they speak to the city being a sanctuary for the gay community. Rebecca Havemeyer, a present-day local drag queen, leads them to the former location of Chain Drive near Sixth St. In 2015 on the night the bar

burned down, the community rallied and mourned the space they come to love over the years. “It was our living room; this is where we hung out, where we like to see each other, suck dick and have a good time,” Rebecca says as she speaks about what this bar meant to the community (Havemeyer qtd in “Streets by Vice: Austin (6<sup>th</sup> St.).”). As she says these words in the video, you see her passion for the space and note what has been lost to a tragic event.

While writing my thesis, I went out on a Saturday night to The Iron Bear, a local bar in Austin, Texas, hosting their monthly Country night playing the hits from Shania Twain to George Strait to Reba. Just weeks prior, it was shared in the news that the building’s owner had submitted a request to demolish the building. The owners of the bar sought Historic Landmark status for the building to save it. The Austin Monitor shared that the bar has recently moved locations after another landlord decided not to renew a lease at their previous location several blocks East. Now at their new site, they face the same issue that many spaces face where areas of the city experience growth. Developers see that constructing residential towers is far more valuable than renting to one business. It is heartwarming to see the community invested in the bars they love visiting as the night I was at The Iron Bear; it was rather busy with a larger crowd of people investing in a business. Bars are in danger, even in my current home town of Austin. However, I have hope that gay bars will continue to exist with support from the community that has been around for many years.

In my final semester at The University of Texas at Austin, I decided to enroll in Drawing for Designers, a drawing course to expand my portfolio and use the course to

reflect on my artistic goals. In this course, we are tasked with designing five different drawings with a theme or assignment given to each one. I enrolled in the course after speaking to the instructor Jason Buchanan about connecting the drawings made in the course to my thesis. This would keep me focused on my thesis research and express myself in another way. The first drawing assignment was a composition of drawings where I took elements of my story and put them into one image. Because I love modern contemporary design with clean lines, I decided to put these images into individual squares that would come together to create one image. In the middle of the drawing is a figure flying as if he has just jumped into the universe hoping for a change. He is flying above a city skyline underneath a rainbow as he descends into the evening stars. Other elements in this drawing include a window looking out into a dance club with the mirror ball shining light in the square. I also include two different bookshelves that are definitely opposites. One of the bookshelves are full of text with negative words, but the other is full of positive text that reinforces the positive outlook that I have put into my life since coming out. I add the text at the top of the drawing with the phrase, “Be You Be Free,” to reinforce that this drawing is all about being free to make our own choices (see Illustration 5: Drawing for Designers narrative drawing).

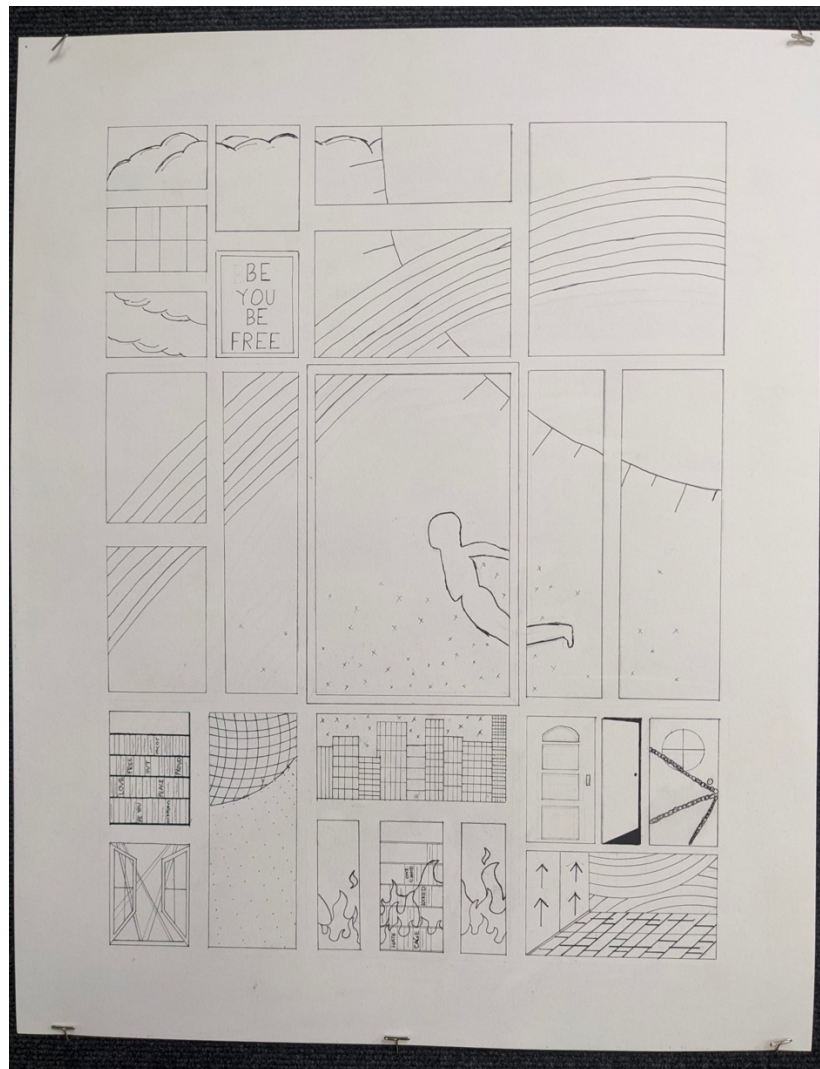


Illustration 5: Drawing for Designers narrative drawing, Source: Jason Buchanan

The second drawing in the series is a reflection on the statement, “I’m a city kid that got stuck in the country,” that I brought up earlier. The assignment was to have a focal point in the drawing, which I decided to draw on this city theme. I grew up in a small town and had never visited a city larger than Nashville or Memphis until I was an adult. I remember the first time I visited Chicago, which was the first major metropolitan city I

traveled to. I really was excited to see how bustling the city was compared to smaller communities. I have always felt like a person with a big city mentality, who has been dropped into the country. However, I love my country roots and will always cherish my upbringing. At this point in the course, I was fully invested in drawing these drawings that connected to my telling my story as seen below in Illustration 6 (Drawing for Designers: Focal Point Drawing) where I used the focal point to express the sense that the city was towering over the viewer, but had a sense of joy attached with a rainbow reflected in the buildings.

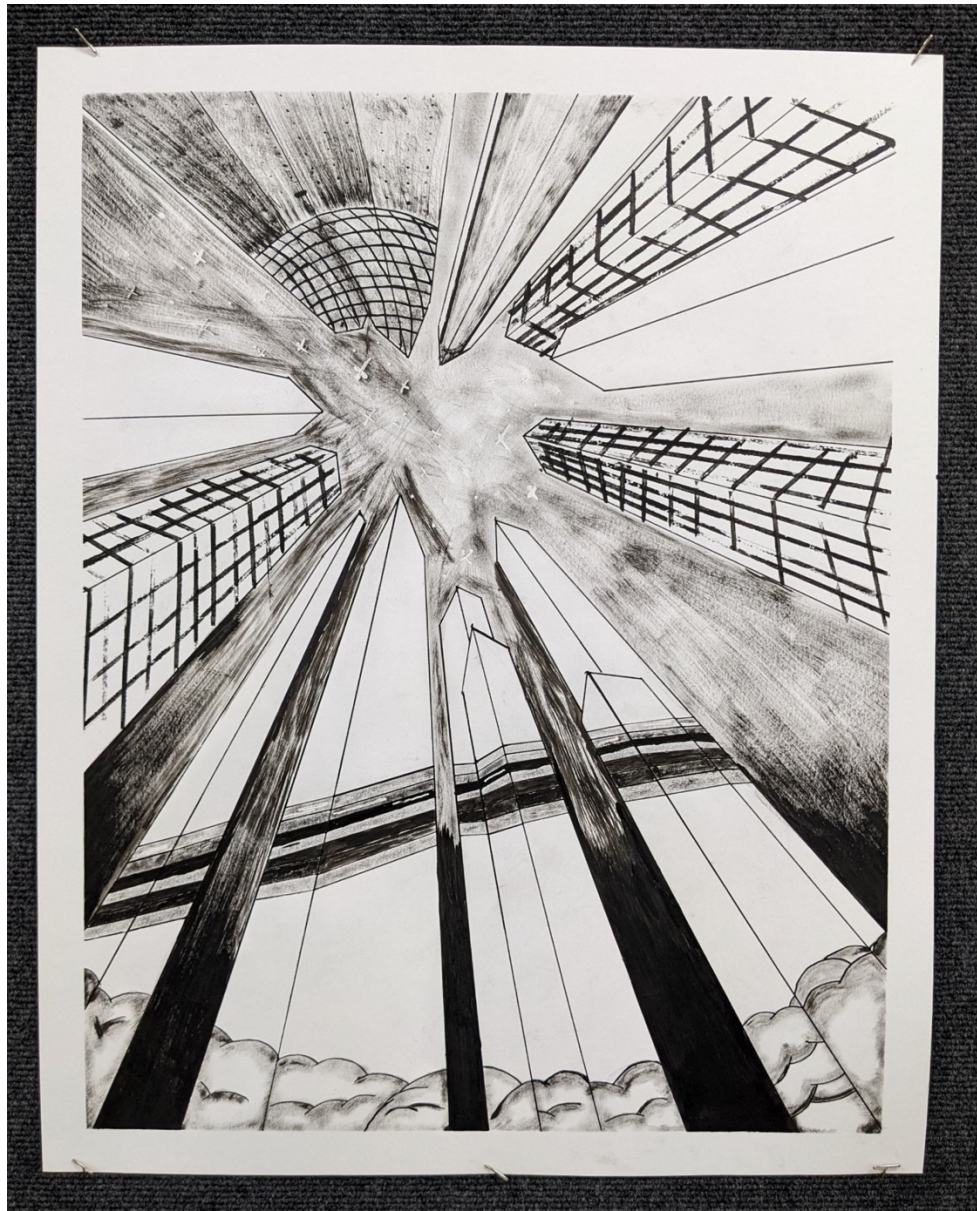


Illustration 6: Drawing for Designers Focal point drawing, Source: Jason Buchanan

The third drawing assignment was a symmetry drawing, which we were able to interpret this in whatever way we wanted to as long as the image had symmetry to it. I decided that I wanted to really go for it in this drawing and take things that I find in gay

culture to be quite normal to the gay community, but might appear vulgar to anyone who is not familiar with these images. These items included poppers, cans of Crisco, dildos, jars of Albolene, and jockstraps. I will not divulge the reasons for all of these items, but will speak to the fact that this drawing is one that is very intentionally sharing that I am very open with my interests and do not hide who I am anymore (see Illustration 7: Drawing for Designers Symmetry drawing). My time in graduate school has really pushed my agenda that I do not hide who I am anymore because I had to hide who I was for twenty years before coming out and I am never going back to hiding my lifestyle.



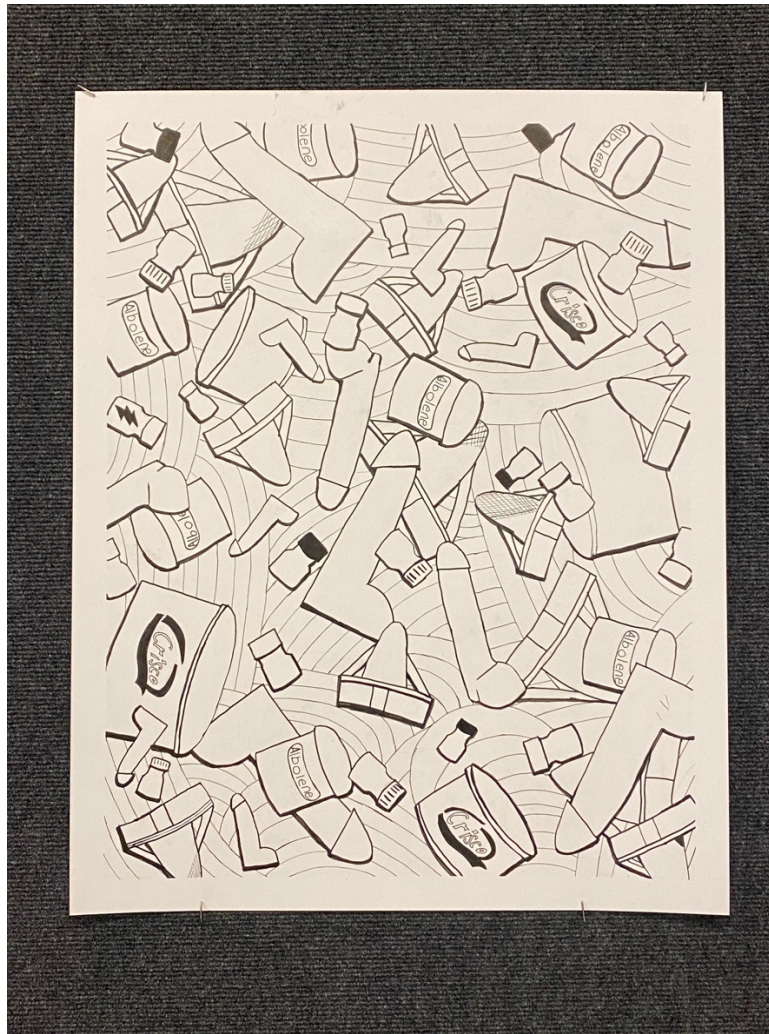


Illustration 7: Drawing for Designers Symmetry Drawing, Source: Ron Collins

The fourth drawing was to combine three drawings to create a narrative. This assignment was the perfect opportunity to draw something that could be considered a title drawing. Inspired by the drawings of the famous illustrator, Etienne, who made a lot of advertisements for local bars in the '80s. He used text in his drawings, which gave me the perfect opportunity to add the title of my thesis to this drawing. The three panels include a large bottle of poppers from one of the oldest brands, Rush, a figure of a naked man ripping



the paper and coming through, and a handkerchief in a jean pocket. The third panel said “Choose Your Pleasure,” underneath the handkerchief, a direct connection to the hanky code, which played a prominent role in my installation (see Illustration 8: Drawing for Designers Triptych drawing).

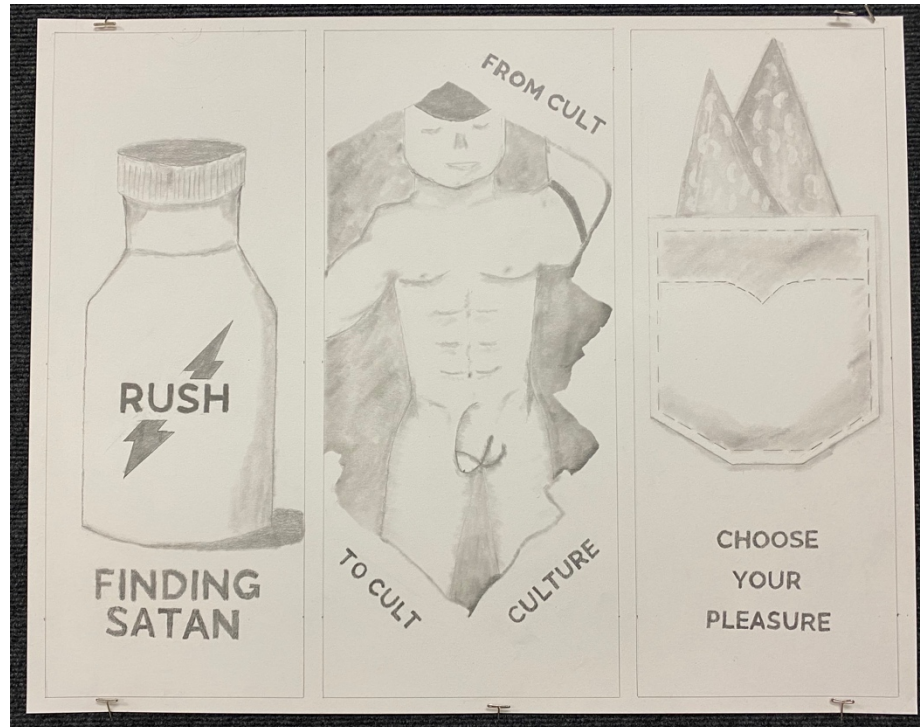


Illustration 8: Drawing for Designers Triptych Drawing, Source: Ron Collins

The final drawing of the semester is a portrait combining the image of a figure and another element. In this image, I am combining eleven portraits of myself. The first two show me before coming out and then the other nine are from the last eleven years. This gradual transformation gives the viewer an insight into who I was and who I have become. The main feature noticed in my before coming out image is that I did not have facial hair because it was forbidden for men in the Jehovah’s Witnesses Organization to grow their

facial hair, so after coming out I started growing it out and have never shaved it off. My facial hair became a symbol of freedom and was something that anyone who knew me before recognized that I was now out of the cult because I was able to grow it out. Ten of the portraits are recreations of images I have taken and shared on Instagram. These images are glimpses into my journey to now.

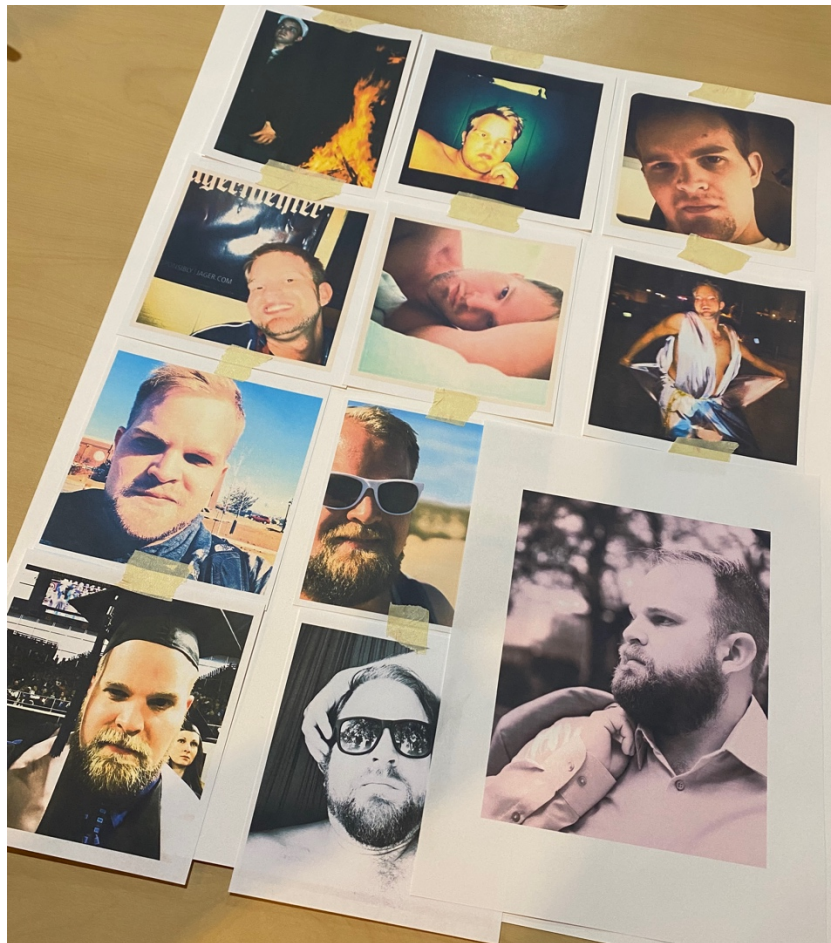
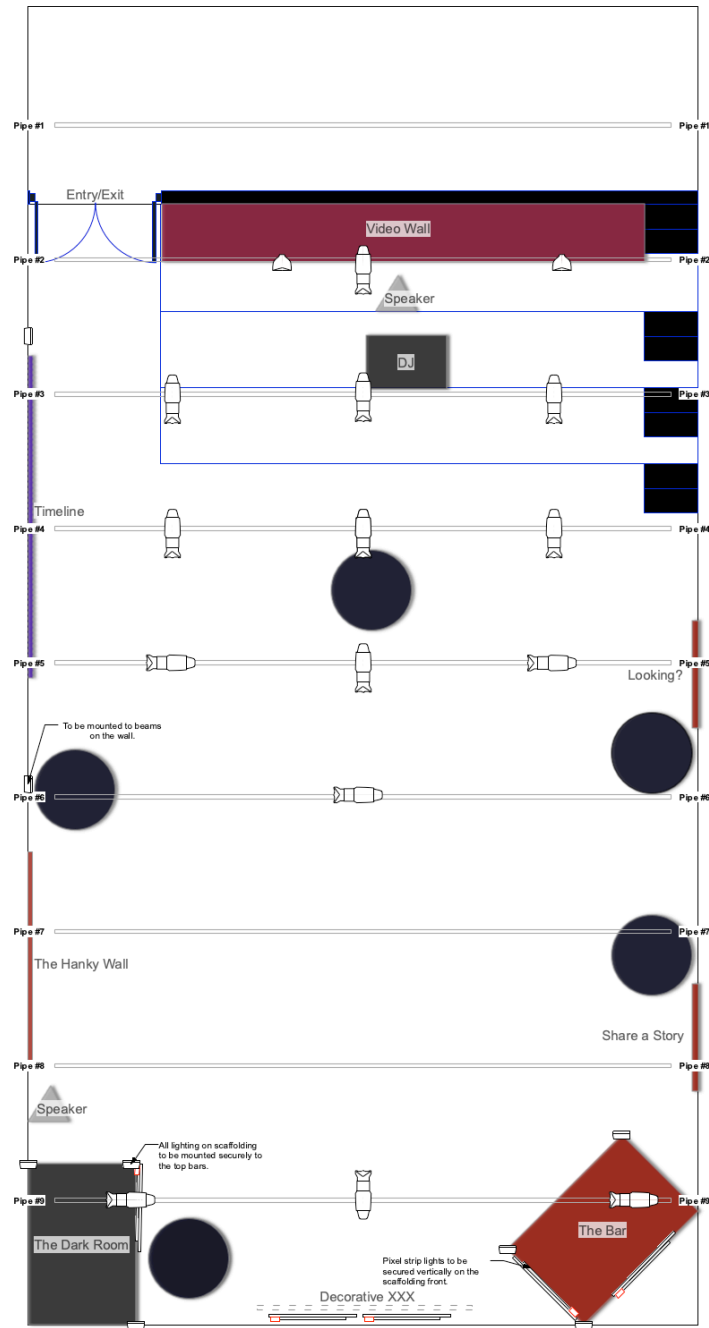


Illustration 9: Drawing for Designers Portrait Drawing, a work in progress, Source: Ron Collins

I conclude with the discussion of these drawings because I realized that these drawings became a source of cathartic release and allowed me to express myself in another artistic way. In my final semester here at The University of Texas at Austin (UT), I was able to express my story through a new medium. I never considered myself an artist. It was not until my second semester at UT that I finally realized that I am an artist and art can come in many different ways. I finally realized that the term artist does not only refer to someone who draws or paints. I can create something unique either through many different mediums. It is now that I know I can call myself an artist. I created an entire installation to tell my story through interactive audience engagement. I am still out there trying to find Satan. I have been able to express my creativity in a physical way that is not always possible through other mediums. I am now prepared to leave graduate school and become the working professional artist that I intend to be. This is my second “coming out.”

## **Appendices**

### **APPENDIX A: GROUNDPLAN OF THESIS INSTALLATION SPACE**



## **APPENDIX B: LIST OF SONGS PLAYED DURING THE THESIS INSTALLATION**

Finding Satan Playlist from Sunday, March 20th 2022				
#	Track Title	Artist	Album	Genre
1	Dino	Dinamarca	Sol De Mi Vida	Electronica/Dance
2	Fuck Music (Session Victim Remix)	Kapote	Fuck Music	Deep House
3	Timeless	Superlover	Timeless EP	French House
4	007B1 (Original Mix)	Apparel Wax	AW007	Deep House
5	Esteban Peligro	Axel Boman	Lucky Tiger	Deep House
6	Reaching The Highest Pleasure	Roy Ayers	BBE Staff Selections 2020	Jazz
7	Ginga	Robson Jorge & Lincoln Olivetti	Robson Jorge & Lincoln Olivetti	Soul / Funk
8	Ti voglio	Ornella Vanoni	Un Pugno Di Stelle	Pop
9	It Looks Like Love (LP Version)	Goody Goody	Goody Goody	Pop
10	And the Beat Goes on	The Whispers	Mastermix Classic Cuts 8 - Disco	Club
11	Acaríciame	Susana Estrada	The Sexadelic Disco-Funk Sound	Disco
12	The Last Funk (Disco Tech rework)	Disco Tech		Disco Edit
13	Be Your Lover	Tow Zone	Midnight Magic	#upbeat #fun #boogie
14	Holiday	Madonna	Madonna	Dance-Pop Synthpop
15	01 - Supernature	Cerrone	Supernature	
16	Bee Gees - Night Fever (Official Music Video)			
17	05 - Love Is Here	Cerrone	Supernature	
18	Take Me	Cerrone	Cerrone's Paradise (II)	Disco
19	I'll Do Anything For You (Patchworks Remix)	Lee McDonald	12inch Extended Remixes Vol.1	
20	3. Steve Monite - Only You	Various	Doing It in Lagos Boogie, Pop & D	Boogie
21	4. Oby Onyoha - Enjoy Your Life	Various	Doing It in Lagos Boogie, Pop & D	Boogie
22	Dance, Dance, Dance	Chic		Pop
23	Daddy Cool	Boney M.	Take The Heat Off Me (2006 Japa	Disco
24	9. Rick Asikpo & Afro Fusion - Too Hot	Various	Doing It in Lagos Boogie, Pop & D	Boogie
25	Bee Gees - You Should Be Dancing 1976(HQ Audio)			
26	Cerrone's Paradise	Cerrone	The Best Of	Disco
27	Cerrone - Love In C Minor			
28	Hagámoslo Juntos	Susana Estrada	The Sexadelic Disco-Funk Sound	Italo
29	17. Tobey Foreh - Ore Mi	Various	Doing It in Lagos Boogie, Pop & D	Boogie
30	Give Me Love	Cerrone	Supernature	
31	Ahija	Kano	Greatest Hits	Soul and R&B
32	Voy Desnuda	Susana Estrada	The Sexadelic Disco-Funk Sound	Disco
33	Do You Wanna Funk	Sylvester	Mastermix Classic Cuts 8 - Disco	Club
34	02 - Sweet Drums	Cerrone	Supernature	
35	Spaced Out	Cloud One	Atmosphere Strut	'70s Disco/Funk
36	16. Godfrey Odili - Let's Do More Music	Various	Doing It in Lagos Boogie, Pop & D	Boogie
37	Se Tu Vuoi	Flavia Fortunato	Rincontrarsi / Se Tu Vuoi	Electronic, Pop
38	Histoire D'Un Soir	BIBI FLASH		Other
39	Funky Is On	Funky Family	Lovefingers.org	Lovefingers
40	Feel The Drive	Doctor's Cat	Gee Wiz	Electronic
41	05 Danny Keith - Love Me Again			Italo
42	Idol	Mind Enterprises	Idol	Italo Disco
43	Hini Mi (1986)	Kojo Antwi		
44	Livin' Up	B.W.H.		Italo Disco
45	I.O.U. (12" Version)	Freeez	Mastermix Classic Cuts 31 - Pop D	Club
46	Faces (original extended version)	Clio	Back To 80's Party Disco	Italo Disco , Eurodisco
47	Fotonovella	Ivan	De Pre Historie 1985 - Vol 3	Oldies
48	Problemes DAmour	Alexander Robotnick	Space Ibiza 1989-2016 (Mixed by	Dance
49	Cori Josias - Takin' It Straight Extended Version			
50	Sasà	Oro	Napoli Segreta Volume 1	
51	Breathe On Me	Britney Spears	In The Zone [Japanese Edition]	Pop
52	Unwind	Viceroy	Shiny Disco Club	Future Funk
53	Stay	The Black Madonna	Stay / Venus Requiem	Nu Disco
54	Heart Of Glass	Blondie	Atomix	New Wave
55	14. Sony Enang - Don't Stop That Music	Various	Doing It in Lagos Boogie, Pop & D	Boogie
56	The Way I Are	Timbaland	Shock Value	
57	Strong Enough	Cher	Believe	Pop
58	Believe	Cher	The 90's	Pop
59	Better Off Alone	Alice Deejay	Who Need Guitars Anyway?	Eurodance
60	Toxic	Britney Spears	In The Zone [Japanese Edition]	Pop
61	You Make Me Feel (Mighty Real)	Sylvester	Grand 12-Inches	Pop
62	SPLAT (firedrill remix)	Orlando Boom	SPLAT REMIXES	
63	Mr Cake	Ikonika	Aerotropolis	Electronic
64	Dimly Lit	Lxury	Trinity Lounge EP	
65	Ignore Obstacles	Joi Lau	3 UR MIND	Breaks
66	Walking Away (12" Version)	Loods	Walking Away	House
67	WE FOUND LOVE	RIHANNA	TALK THAT TALK	
68	Hey QT	Qt	Hey QT	Pop
69	Lil Bit (Retrospect Edit)	50 Cent		Funky
70	Song For Aubrey	DJ Streaks	CHAPTER THREE EDITS (Free Download)	
71	Bossy (Original Mix)	BLASTAH	Blastah & Homies #1	Jersey Club
72	Get'cha Head In the Game (Akira Akira Flip)	High School Musical		Jersey Club
73	This Deezy	Amadeezy	Eastside G-Ride EP	

Finding Satan Playlist from Monday, March 21st, 2022				
#	Track Title	Artist	Album	Genre
1	Deep Distance	Ashra	New Age Of Earth	Ambient
2	Transmission 5 (Instrumental)	Paranoid London With Mutado Pinta	Transmission 5	House
3	My Man (KiNK Remix)	Lovebirds	Focus on Freerange: Nils Penne	Deep House
4	My Beatbox	DJ Punk-Roc	Coastal Breaks II [Disc 1]	Breaks
5	Residents	Randomer	Residents	Lo-Fi House
6	maverick	Susumu Yokota	Fruits Of The Room	Lo-Fi House
7	Ghetto Bootie Remaster	Player	Remixed Remastered Reissued	Lo-Fi House
8	VIP (Pity Party Edit)	Subjoi	It's You	Lo-Fi House
9	dntstp	sam gellaitry		Lo-Fi House
10	Thinking of You	Sister Sledge	NOW - Yearbook Extra 1984	Dance
11	We've Only Just Begun (Patchworks Rem)	Lee McDonald	12inch Extended Remixes Vol.1	
12	Oriental Workload (1979)	James Asher		
13	My Way Home	Obas Nenor		
14	Last Night A DJ Saved My Life (12")	The Paradise Garage/Indeep	Garage Classics 83	Classic Dance
15	Se Tu Vuoi	Flavia Fortunato	Rincontrarsi / Se Tu Vuoi	Electronic, Pop
16	The Last Funk (Disco Tech rework)	Disco Tech		Disco Edit
17	Histoire D'Un Soir	BIBI FLASH		Other
18	Funky Is On	Funky Family	Lovefingers.org	Lovefingers
19	4. Oby Onyioha - Enjoy Your Life	Various	Doing It in Lagos Boogie, Pop &	Boogie
20	And the Beat Goes on	The Whispers	Mastermix Classic Cuts 8 - Disco	Club
21	Feel The Drive	Doctor's Cat	Gee Wiz	Electronic
22	05 Danny Keith - Love Me Again			Italo
23	Tru Dancing	O'Flynn	Aletheia	Electronic
24	Ti voglio	Ornella Vanoni	Un Pugno Di Stelle	Pop
25	I.O.U. (12" Version)	Freeez	Mastermix Classic Cuts 31 - Pop	Club
26	Faces (original extended version)	Clio	Back To 80's Party Disco	Italo Disco , Eurodisco
27	Problemes D'Amour	Alexander Robotnick	Space Ibiza 1989-2016 (Mixed b	Dance
28	Everybody	Madonna	Madonna	Dance-Pop Synthpop
29	Fotonovella	Ivan	De Pre Historie 1985 - Vol 3	Oldies
30	Hagámoslo Juntos	Susana Estrada	The Sexadelic Disco-Funk Soun	Italo
31	5. Kio Amachree - Ivory	Various	Doing It in Lagos Boogie, Pop &	Boogie
32	Give Me Love	Cerrone	Supernature	
33	Ahija	Kano	Greatest Hits	Soul and R&B
34	Mesablanca	O'Flynn	Aletheia	Electronic
35	Voy Desnuda	Susana Estrada	The Sexadelic Disco-Funk Soun	Disco
36	SPLAT (firedrill remix)	Orlando Boom	SPLAT REMIXES	
37	You Make Me Feel (Mighty Real)	Sylvester	Grand 12-Inches	Pop
38	Do You Wanna Funk	Sylvester	Mastermix Classic Cuts 8 - Disco	Club
39	Get Into The Music [B2]	Player	UnTechno EP	House
40	Never Had This Feeling	Hatiras	Never Had This Feeling	Nu Disco
41	On My Mind (Original Mix)	Heart Saver	On My Mind	French House
42	Suddenly Funk	Renato Cohen	Suddenly Funk	Future Funk
43	Do This Forever	Lxury	No Real Rush	
44	Paris 2006 feat. Kornel Kovacs	Axel Boman	Nattsudd EP	
45	Touch My Body	Plush Managements Inc.	Magic Plush	
46	The Way I Are	Timbaland	Shock Value	
47	(This Is) A Song For The Lonely	Cher	The Greatest Hits	Pop
48	♡-Stroonger-♡	Drippy Dolphin		Jersey Club
49	Bossy (Original Mix)	BLASTAH	Blastah & Homies #1	Jersey Club
50	Pull Ova	Jubilee	Pull Ova EP	Miami Bass
51	Go Dumb (BITCH I TWERK)	UNIIQU3 ft Addy OMG	Juke Bounce Werk Presents I JB	Jersey Club
52	Werk (feat. Nyema)	Tana	The Bounce Tape 2	Jersey Club

## APPENDIX C: TEXT FOR AUDIO TEXT PLAYED DURING THESIS INSTALLATION

1. I was born and raised in a religious cult. I did not have friends outside of it. I left this cult ten years ago. I celebrate the fact that I am free every day. This is my milestone!



2. I remember the first time I danced at a gay bar. I remember dancing with a guy for the first time. I remember making out with that guy as others on the dance floor moved to the music and faded away into darkness. I remember feeling the most free.
3. To get away from the crazy world that I was living in, Britney Spears has always been my escape from reality. Once I came out, I constantly played her music over and over and instantly felt “stronger than yesterday!”
4. A former teacher once said to me “Education is the one thing no one can take away from you.” I took that to heart and I realized education would get me where I want to be. Higher education gave me a new direction on my path.
5. Listening to Britney Spears was always my safe space before coming out. And just a month after coming out, I was seeing her live for the second time, but this time, I was out and free to be me. Free to “dance until the world ends!” (Till the World Ends by Britney Spears)
6. I grew up in a small town in a religious household held me down. And I was constantly reflecting on what I really wanted out of life. Now here I am picking up the pieces I want. Moving forward! I’m out here finding Satan. Remember if life gets you down, you just have to take a moment to stand back up and remember why you are on the path you chose.
7. A table. A table has four legs. A table can serve a multitude of purposes-meals, board games, study, and confrontation. A table also served as the place where I came out to my biological mother and father. The 19th was a day I will remember forever. I finally told my family that I was a proud gay man. My mother and father sat on either side of me while I told them I liked men. I had always liked men. My mother even acknowledged that I never spoke about girls the way most boys would. // I was finally free at that table. The table served as a place for the meals we ate as a family. I was no longer recognized as a member of my biological family on June 19th, 2011. I was free. I am free. Free to start my own table. Build my own family. A family worth having. I have my chosen family. The ones that I selected to be close to. Those who accept me for who I am. And that family is forever growing. And growing.
8. I always knew I was gay. My family always had a suspicion, but never admitted it was the truth until I affirmed it ten years ago. I’m proud to say I’ve been out of the closet and away from this hateful religious organization for ten years. That’s ten years of me being me. Proudly who I am and not hiding from it. I was unique. Now I’m happy to tell that young boy back then that his life is so much better

now. Better than ever!

9. I knew I was gay. Never ever would this part of me be erased, and I did not want to suppress it. Why should I hide who I am to be something I'm not? So, I started meeting guys and started to live a double life. I was discovering desire. Passion. Love. Two years later, those two lives intersected and became one and the flame grew brighter and brighter.
10. I am so glad to be away from that negativity. All I see is positivity in the community. We keep fighting for equality. Day in and day out.
11. Going out is about building community. Friends meeting each other or making new connections. Getting that drink bought for you from a secret admirer. Meeting that guy on a dance floor. Wearing your toga proudly. Having a good time with complete strangers. That's what Finding Satan is to me! It's all about being who you want to be while finding your community.

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