

**Title:** Resisting Your Norms: Queer Power in Social Space  
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This project explores the recent history of the safe space, first emerging in the 1970s city as a response to oppressive political policies of the twentieth century. These spaces later emerged on college campuses, resulting from student activism generally, and inspired by the successes of the city safe space. A historic outline of the safe space reveals what political forces these spaces emerged in response to initially, and how their emergence actually contradicts common anti-safe space rhetoric present in popular American culture and rising anti-safe space rhetoric from university administration. The critics contend that these spaces encourage segregation and thus limit free thought.

Yet, a modern critical theory approach, via Michel Foucault and Judith Butler, elucidates how such spaces provide temporary reprieve from the normalizing “gaze” that often restricts and therefore limits the free expression of bodies: a safe space is necessary to perform and reaffirm identity. Moreover, within the university itself, a new challenge has emerged in opposition to the physical, dynamic safe space, which is safe space “sticker culture,” as posited by Catherine Fox. She shows how stickers produce spaces of artificial safety, while reducing the number of sites for self-performance and creating power dynamics tilted against those who are resisting intolerance. Looking at examples of safe space in practice at a local community college, I will show how no matter how socially, culturally, and politically tolerant we become, spaces of resistance to heteronormative behaviours, and especially, spaces of performativity and reaffirming of identity, will always be necessary.

Works Cited

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