“WHAT A WONDERFUL KIKI!”: MUSIC AND QUEERNESS AT MIXTAPE, A WASHINGTON DC GAY DANCE PARTY

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ABSTRACT

CHRISTOPHER BOWEN: "What a Wonderful Kiki!":
Music and Queerness at Mixtape, a Washington, DC Gay Dance Party
(Under the direction of David Garcia)

This thesis explores the relationship between queerness and music through two case studies: a monthly Washington, DC gay dance party called Mixtape and a recent song by the band the Scissor Sisters, called "Let's Have a Kiki." In so doing I examine and analyze the discursive categories of "alternative" and "mainstream" to show on the one hand the ways in which the party and song are constituted and experienced as truly alternative; on the other hand, I show how within this carved-out space new norms and regulatory ideals begin to function, creating mainstreams against and through which behavior and identity are judged and created. I find that these terms partially embody a complex reality of power structures in queer communities, articulated through music.

To my Mom and Dad

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

"Queer!" Once a slur used to denigrate non-straight individuals, the word has since been reclaimed by the very people it used to shame, who then turned it into a concept underpinning a whole academic discipline. Queer means a wide variety of things for a wide variety of people, but most centrally it has stood for all those people who fall outside the heteronormative concept of "straight." Within that broad category, however, a whole galaxy of identities and groups have arisen and constituted themselves as queer in myriad ways. Some groups have been more visible and popular than others and have in turn assumed a kind of regulative force: the fact that I, as a gay man, can jokingly say to another gay friend of mine that I am bad at being gay and be understood suggests that there are broad categories of tastes and comportment that seem to fall into a recognized "right" way of presenting one's own gay identity. Music is a sphere in which such kinds of homonormative expectations exist, but also a realm in which new and alternative ways of being gay can be created. Here I explore two particular ways in which queer identity is constituted and negotiated through music.

Given the shifting and contested approaches to queer studies, it is necessary to clarify the use of terminology throughout my thesis. I am employing the term "gay" to refer to a male cohort that internalizes certain homonormative expectations about race, gender, class, and sexual object choice. Queer, on the other hand, I use as an umbrella term for all those identities that fall outside the gender and gender-presentation binary

and as a term that does not presuppose a specific sexual object choice – thus it can include men, women, gays, lesbians, trans* people, bisexuals, pansexuals, etc. [1]

This resonates with the use of the word "queer" as a verb, where it signifies something slightly different than, but related to, the above definition. Wayne Koestenbaum's introductory essay to the landmark volume *Queering the Pitch* offers a large number of different definitions of the word "queer." It can mean to interfere with, to spoil, or to put out of order.[2] It can also mean to be in favor of, in the sense of "to be queer for."[3] This is connected to the adjectival definition, but also related to the last definition of the word, which is "to make one feel queer."[4] Here queer may be understood as either the gender/sexuality term defined above or a more prosaic word meaning something along the lines of "strange." Taken together, all these various significations, both as a verb and an adjective, suggest a crucial subversiveness for the term queer. To name something queer with respect to gender is to destabilize binaries, to bring into question our assumptions about sexual preference as an identifying characteristic. In the

[1] For an interesting and at times provocative discussion of the idea of gayness and (in part) how it relates to queerness, see David M. Halperin, *How to Be Gay* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012), especially 3-128. Halperin's take on Foucault and the history of homosexuality in general has also been helpful to my thinking; see David M. Halperin, *How to Do the History of Homosexuality* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002). While I am on the subject of the gays, this thesis refers very little to queer women. Mixtape as a party is aimed primarily at gay men and its relationship to queer women is somewhat complex (see Chapter 1, below). The references to queer cultures that "Let's Have a Kiki" makes generally come from queer men (as well as some trans* individuals), and in my experience has been most celebrated as a song by queer and gay men (see Chapter 2). In many ways, though, this thesis commits the usual sin of gay men writing only about their cohort.

[2] Wayne Koestenbaum, "Queering the Pitch," in *Queering the Pitch*, ed. Phillip Brett, Elizabeth Wood, and Gary C. Thomas (New York: Routledge, 2006), 1-2.

[3] Koestenbaum "Queering the Pitch," 3.

[4] Koestenbaum "Queering the Pitch," 4.

overarching sense, to queer something is to question it.[5] With this lexical explication out of the way, I now turn to the case studies of my thesis.

The Pride celebrations of Washington, DC are typically a multi-day affair, with parties, community gatherings, parades, and street fairs taking place over the course of a week, aimed at queer individuals of all kinds. In the summer of 2012, one particular party capitalized on the weekend's celebrations and its gay participants. This dance party, Mixtape, posted its largest crowd ever in attendance the Saturday night of Pride weekend, with over 1,000 people moving through the dance floor over the course of the night.[6] However, this party was not solely convened for the Pride celebrations. It is a monthly party that has been in existence since 2008, the brainchild of two DJs, Shea van Horn and Matt Bailer. On the party's website it is described as "an eclectic mix of electro, alt-pop, indie rock, house, disco, new wave, and anything else they think you can dance to."[7] It is primarily targeted towards gay men, but also welcomes people of any sexual orientation or gender expression, partially by using the word "queer" in its advertising.[8] The DJs have positioned the party as an alternative space for dancing in the larger context of gay DC nightlife, but while the kinds of music the DJs play has changed little over the years, the popularity of the party has grown tremendously. What once started out as a less than

[5] Judith Peraino, in her *Listening to the Sirens* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), describes "queer" as opposed to labels of "lesbian" and "gay," as these identities "were rooted to a large extent in gender separatism and in a naturalized, hetero/homosexual binary." This understanding of the term as an intentional way to decentralize binaries is made explicit when Peraino quotes Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, who says that queer is "the open mesh of possibilities, gaps, overlaps, dissonances and resonances, lapses and excesses of meaning when the constituent elements of anyone's gender, of anyone's sexuality aren't made (or *can't* be made) to signify monolithically." See Peraino, *Listening to the Sirens*, 5-6.

[6] Matt Bailer and Shea van Horn, interviewed by author, Washington, D.C., June 28, 2012.

[7] Mixtape DC, "About Mixtape," http://www.mixtapedc.com/about.htm (accessed March 5, 2013).

[8] Mixtape DC, "mixtapeDC Music Blog," 8tracks.com, http://8tracks.com/mixtapedc (accessed March 5, 2013).

one-hundred-person affair now regularly hosts dance parties at DC's largest gay club, Town; the party was recently listed by the *Washington Blade*, a Washington area gay-interest newspaper, as their best men's dance party for 2012.[9]

The party's popularity is in large part predicated on the musical choices of the DJs – indeed, when I first became aware of the party, two years before I began fieldwork, it was because a friend had told me they played good music. This "good" music was in large part defined as such because it was not the typical kind of music one might find, say, on a Friday night at one of the main DC gay dance clubs. This taxonomy relies on a mesh of ideologies and assumptions about the construction not only of "good" music, but also of what "typical" music might be in a gay community. While "typical" is a rather nebulous category, the question of opposition to a perceived gay mainstream or "typical" music is in fact a central concern of the DJs of Mixtape, and one that has deep resonances with larger questions of gay identities and their constitution.

My argument posits that gay identities are constituted in part through the consumption of music. This in and of itself is not a particularly noteworthy argument: scholarly works exploring the connections between gay men and the music they listen and dance to are legion.[10] However, I believe that the discursive categories of "alternative" and "mainstream" play a large role in the particular example of Mixtape. As it is constructed by the DJs, Mixtape represents a locus of identificatory possibility somewhat

[9] "Best of Gay D.C.: Nightlife," *Washington Blade*, http://www.washingtonblade.com/2012/10/25/best-of-gay-d-c-nightlife/, October 25, 2012, accessed February 21, 2013.

[10] For example, see Kai Finketscher, *"You Better Work!": Underground Dance Music in New York City* (Hanover: Wesleyan University Press, 2000) and Fiona Buckland, *Impossible Dance: Club Culture and Queer World-Making* (Middleton, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 2002). For a seminal take on discussions of dance clubs and their (sub)cultures more generally, see Sarah Thornton, *Club Cultures: Music, Media, and Subcultural Capital* (Hanover: Wesleyan University Press, 1996).

outside the idea of the mainstream of Washington DC. I say somewhat because the party has grown and become more popular in the four and half years since its inception, and with the increased popularity the alternative character of the party (and the possibilities for the constitution of an alternative gay self through its music) has changed. Before I proceed further, I should say that my ethnographic exploration focuses mainly on the DJs of the party; as with any club scene, there are going to be multiple realities and worlds of perception that are constituted in and around the party. Many other people are involved in the production of the party, not least of which are the dancers, and what the music means to them may be completely and totally different from what it means to me or the DJs. In short, I can only (tentatively) speculate as to the kinds of identities that might be produced through the discursive space of the party, and to that end I try to let the DJs do much of the speaking in the parts of the thesis that deal with Mixtape. While I add my own interpretive voice, it is my hope that it forms a polyphonic counterpoint to the DJs' statements rather than becoming a dominant voice.

Returning to the discursive categories of alternative and mainstream, the DJs stated the following in an interview:

> **MB**: And if 1000 people are coming [to Mixtape], then no matter how alternative we are, isn't that kind of mainstream? […] What we're playing is going to be mainstream if 1000 people are hearing it.
> **SvH:** I mean, Mixtape to me, now, even though we can bill it as an alternative party, it's really not necessarily an alternative party, it's kind of established.
> **MB**: Like, take "Let's Have a Kiki." Like, that's an alternative song, but every frickin' gay in DC is like – **SvH**: Let's have a kiki! […]
> **MB**: Got a thousand people dancing to that, but it's still Scissor Sisters.[11]

Not only does this statement show the DJs' opinion about the size and status of their party, it also seems to suggest an analogy with the song they mention, "Let's Have a

[11] Bailer and van Horn, interview, June 28, 2012

Kiki." This song, not coincidentally, was played at Mixtape that summer night of Pride weekend, and I believe it represents a unique way to investigate the discursive nature of "alternative" and "mainstream" in parallel to the ethnographic investigation of Mixtape.

"Let's Have A Kiki" is a track from the Scissor Sisters's fourth album, *Magic Hour*, released on May 26, 2012. By June 24, "Kiki" was the best-selling song from the album, surpassing even the official single, "Only the Horses."[12] The song quickly became a kind of gay anthem over the course of the summer, receiving a great deal of playtime in dance clubs across the country. It was officially released as a dance club single in the last week of July and peaked at number one on *Billboard's* Dance/Club Play songs chart on the week of September 22.[13] However, it had been unofficially garnering playtime in many clubs, especially gay ones,[14] in part because the band intentionally released the song early.[15] The lead singer, Jake Shears, encapsulated the reaction to "Let's Have a Kiki" when he said in late June that "I really had no idea the response would be so nuts.

[12] Keith Caulfield, "Scissor Sisters' Viral Video 'Let's Have a Kiki' Kicks Up Sales," *Billboard*, July 16, 2012, accessed October 20, 2012, http://www.billboard.biz/bbbiz/others/scissor-sisters-viral-video-let-s-have-a-1007586152.story#82etoVZ30UE4JulI.99. The popularity of the song was in part enhanced by a fan-made YouTube video which referenced a practically encyclopedic amount of gay pop culture, including "Liberace, RuPaul, RuPaul's Drag Race, Cher, Queen, Donna Summer, Candy Darling, Dressed to Kill, The Boys in the Band, Myra Breckinridge, The Wiz, Boy George, Showgirls, Perfect, The Phantom of Paradise, Cher's workout video, Richard Simmons, Lisztomania, Can't Stop the Music and, of course, The Golden Girls." See Rich Juzwiak, "Gay Anthem 'Let's Have a Kiki' Is Everyone's Anthem," *Gawker*, July 17, 2012, accessed October 20, 2012, http://gawker.com/5926487/gay-anthem-lets-have-a-kiki-is-everyones-anthem.

[13] "Dance/Club Play Songs," *Billboard*, accessed October 20, 2012, http://www.billboard.com/#/charts/dance-club-play-songs?chartDate=2012-09-22. This chart is "compiled from reports from a national sample of club DJs," indicating the song's widespread popularity.

[14] See, for example, the June setlist for Mixtape, where the song was played on the 9th of that month – the Saturday night of Pride weekend: "Mixtape Setlists, June 2012 Mixtape", accessed December 4, 2012, http://mixtapedc.com/setlist-2012-06.htm.

[15] Doug Rule, "Shears Force," *Metro Weekly* June 28, 2012, 38.

The gays are really, really freaking out about it."[16] That said, outside of a small loyal following (largely gay) the Scissor Sisters have never really succeeded on as large a scale with American listeners as with British ones.[17]

The party and song are both sites of resistance to a dominant heteronormative culture, but as in any system of values and hierarchies, new divisions arise and propagate their own hierarchies. How do Mixtape and "Kiki" interact with the new cultures they help to create in pushing against the dominant one? Both Mixtape and "Kiki" must make certain aesthetic and musical choices that exclude other available artistic and identificatory possibilities in their respective realms; in short, they must choose which parts of larger cultures, gay and musical, they consciously reflect. While the popularities of the party and song have grown so much that they now approach their respective mainstreams—gay male DC nightlife in general on the one hand and pop music on the other—there are other elements to the discursive categories of alternative and mainstream beyond simply numbers. Not least of these is the sonic character of what is referenced by these terms, and along these lines the party and the song both seem to subsume parts of both alternative and mainstream soundworlds. Mixtape and "Kiki" lie in a strange borderland, claiming and realizing a certain level of distance from the normative force of the mainstream; at the same time they become normatizing through their popularity. Mixtape and "Let's Have a Kiki" shape a space simultaneously alternative and

[16] Rule, "Shears Force," 38.

[17] For a recent interview in which the band discusses the differences in its popularity with British audiences versus American ones, see Neil McCormick, "Scissor Sisters Interview for *Magic Hour*," *The Telegraph* May 28, 2012, http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/music/rockandpopmusic/9279268/Scissor-Sisters-interview-for-Magic-Hour.html, accessed February 26, 2013.

mainstream, and in so doing, provide a framework for this community to experience what they believe alternative and mainstream to be.

Both of these spaces—that of the party, on the one hand, and that of the song, on the other—complicate the notions of alternative and mainstream. Within their own milieu, these spaces are the norm (one might even go so far as to call them the mainstream), for example in how Mixtape has become the most popular gay dance party in DC or how "Kiki" rose to the status of a gay anthem. Yet they remain almost irreducibly outside of, or alternative to, the dominant heteronormative world in large part because of the markers of queer identity both of them incorporate. Through the power of performance, especially of a queer or gay identity, party and song become their own spaces removed from the mainstream. The DJs of the party and, perhaps to a less extent, the members of the Scissor Sisters are acting out what they believe to be alternative. Most importantly, it is meaningful for them as such – it is real. Especially in the case of the party, the music and the scene constitute what they believe to be alternative and become experiential. The DJs are of course aware of the rise in popularity of their party and maintain a sanguine attitude about its alternative status, as noted in the above quotation. However, it is my central goal in this thesis to examine on the one hand the ways in which the party and song are constituted and experienced as truly alternative; on the other hand, I hope to show how within this carved-out space new norms and regulatory ideals begin to function, creating mainstreams against and through which behavior and identity are judged and created.

In this introductory chapter I will lay out concepts useful to the discussion of queerness and identification as they relate to Mixtape and "Let's Have a Kiki." It will

also deal with the idea of community and the problems of obscuring and erasure that accompany the formation of communities, whether internal to a song, as with "Let's Have a Kiki," or external, as with Mixtape. Having discussed a few of these ideas, I will turn to a brief discussion of the relevant literature on dance music and dance as it relates to gay men. In my first chapter I will explore Mixtape's culture as seen through the statements of its DJs and my own field observations. Through these ethnographic techniques I hope to depict the simultaneous conflict of alternative and mainstream that lies at the heart of the party's project. My second chapter takes the form of a close reading of "Let's Have a Kiki" that again explores issues of alternative and mainstream but also engages with issues of technology's power in shaping queerness. In my fourth and final chapter I will return to Mixtape as a way of wrapping up my larger point: these two case studies, one ethnographic and one musical, show a way in which queerness is constituted and negotiated through music and how that music can itself also be active in a larger process of identity negotiation.

A Collection of Queer Terms

In their article "Beyond 'Identity'" Rogers Brubaker and Frederick Cooper helpfully problematize the usage of the term "identity," showing the ways in which the term has come to mean a multiplicity of sometimes contradictory things; they also lay out a more processually-oriented, actor-centric way of thinking about identity that will prove useful in the subsequent discussions about queer identity. The authors lay out five broad categories which identity can reference simultaneously. The first is a very general way of understanding identity where it is comprehended as "a ground or basis of social or

political action" and is usually used in opposition or relation to something else.[18] The term can signify a fundamental sameness among a group. Identity can be understood as a central characteristic that defines a sense of self. It is also used to denote the "processual, interactive development" of "collective self-identification."[19] Finally, identity can be understood as the "evanescent product of multiple and competing discourses" which serves to emphasize the disjointedness of the modern self – "multiple and competing discourses" also neatly encapsulates the status of the idea of alternative and mainstream throughout this thesis.[20]

The authors note the inherent contradiction between the second and third definitions, where identity is based on something fundamental or central, and the fourth and fifth definitions, where the term refers to a fluid, constantly changing state. Furthermore, the first of these definitions is so broad as to be applicable to the other four. It thus becomes necessary to specify what we actually mean when we speak of identity. Brubaker and Cooper suggest three constellations of terms that might stand in for the use of the word identity. It is in these constellations that I believe we can find highly useful terms for examining Mixtape and what goes on there. However, this is not to say that the word identity should be done away with entirely. For one thing, it is nearly impossible to escape from a purely semantic perspective. Moreover, its very generality makes it a useful shorthand or catchall in discussion once adequately defined.

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[18] Rogers Brubaker and Frederick Cooper, "Beyond 'Identity,'" *Theory and Society* 29 no. 1 (Februrary 2000): 6.

[19] Brubaker and Cooper, "Beyond 'Identity,'" 7.

[20] Brubaker and Cooper, "Beyond 'Identity,'" 7.

The first of these constellations introduces the notion of "identification" rather than "identity." The authors argue for it as follows: "As a processual, active term, derived from a verb, "identification" lacks the reifying connotations of "identity." It invites us to specify the agents that do the identifying."[21] It is this concept of agency that is most important for discussing Mixtape and "Kiki." It allows for a distinction between self-identification and identification by others, be they individuals, groups, or institutions. The DJs that organize Mixtape become active agents in the formation of the party's character, and the party itself is partially an agent in how it affects our perception of the dancers' identities. This agency-centric approach allows for a specific and nuanced examination of the multivalent space this party occupies in the greater discourse of gay "identity."

The second constellation of terms includes "self-understanding" as a useful replacement or refinement of identity. Similarly to "self-identification," it posits an agency that works against the reification that the word identity can generate. In differentiating the two, the authors have this to say:

> Two closely related terms are "self-representation" and "self-identification." Having discussed "identification" above, we simply observe here that, while the distinction is not sharp, "self-understandings" may be tacit; even when they are formed, as they ordinarily are, in and through prevailing discourses, they may exist, and inform action, without themselves being discursively articulated. "Self-representation" and "self-identification," on the other hand, suggest at least some degree of explicit articulation.[22]

Thus self-understanding is distinct from self-identification in its subtlety, but also in its notion of social location.[23] As it is constructed from within discourses, it stands in

[21] Brubaker and Cooper, "Beyond 'Identity,'" 14.

[22] Brubaker and Cooper, "Beyond 'Identity,'" 18.

[23] Brubaker and Cooper, "Beyond 'Identity,'" 17-18.

relation to them, and from there one may triangulate a specific location by understanding the discursive positions. Gay identity, at least as I am using it in the context of Mixtape, may more generally be viewed as a kind of self-understanding – by existing within the various available discourses, be they sexual/gendered difference, social otherness, or music taste, a sense of self is created. This exists in distinction to a somewhat more common version of gay identity that exists as a *homo*normative ideal: the image of gay men as "HIV-negative, young men…of a certain physique…and enjoying the privileges of their whiteness, youth, beauty, health, and disposable income," though this formulation says little about music taste.[24] Mixtape is constructed as representing an alternative discourse to mainstream notions of gay music taste (both as perceived by those within gay cultures and American society writ large) and thus a point for contesting these notions. Mixtape provides a space in which gay men can express aspects of these identities—especially musical ones—that otherwise are marginalized in other gay spaces. It is important to note, as Brubaker and Cooper do, that self-understanding cannot do all the work of identity creation because it is necessarily limited to the self.[25] This is where the notion of identification becomes useful.

The word discourse has been repeatedly invoked in the above discussion of identity and alternative/mainstream, so it is time for an explication of that term. Judith Butler's examination of discursive power structures proves extremely useful in illuminating the term. In the introduction to her book *Bodies That Matter*, Butler argues

[24] Buckland, *Impossible Dance*, 142. The DJs of Mixtape provide some interesting statements on what constitutes the mainstream in terms of gay dance music, as we shall see in Chapter 1.

[25] Brubaker and Cooper, "Beyond 'Identity,'" 18.

that sex itself, and through it gender, is constructed through Foucauldian power structures. She states that:

> The category of "sex" is, from the start, normative; it is what Foucault has called a "regulatory ideal." In this sense, then, "sex" not only functions as a norm, but is a part of a regulatory practice that produces the bodies it governs, that is, whose regulatory force is made clear as a kind of productive power, the power to produce – demarcate, circulate, differentiate – the bodies it controls."[26]

The concept of regulatory ideal is important here. It suggests that there are codes and authoritative structures in place that are responsible for defining someone or something by their relation to these structures; moreover, these codes can be active within otherwise minority, disenfranchised groups, whence homonormativity. While Butler uses the idea here to talk about how the category of "sex" comes about, the larger concept is equally applicable to more refined structures within a greater category like sex. The notion of gender as the "social significance that sex assumes within a given culture" becomes invalid, as sex is already a constructed discourse.[27] Gender becomes another level of discursive construction. A category such as the music tastes of a particular group, one circumscribed by its gender presentation (e.g. gay men), can be described as yet another level of discourse.

The way subjects relate to these various discourses is equally important. On this, Butler says the following: "Indeed, it is unclear that there can be an 'I' or a 'we' who has not been submitted, subjected to gender… subjected to gender, but subjectivated by gender, the 'I' neither precedes nor follows the process of this gendering, but emerges

[26] Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 2.

[27] Butler, *Bodies That Matter*, 5.

only within and as the matrix of gender relations themselves."[28] No matter their level of agency, subjects are first constructed in relation to the codes of discourses and can only be defined in relation to them. They may move freely within them, but there is no *a priori* way of constructing the subject without these regulatory discourses of power. Indeed, the constructive matrix itself is the prior condition of the existence of subjects.[29] While Butler argues that this is true even on the most basic levels of sex and gender, these constructive, discursive matrices can seemingly incorporate a very wide range of guidelines. The notion of a normative music taste (alongside other normative ideals of race, class, body type, and sexual object choice) for a given group, then, becomes one of many precepts for the construction of subjects within a given category. To name someone "gay" is to impute certain affinities within a wide range of categories, and one of these is the kind of music that person likes.[30] That which is "mainstream" becomes in this formulation a discursive category that exerts pressure in the formation of subjects – the mainstream is that which is assumed in the interpellative formation of a subject.

However, these categories are not fixed, and are subject to both gradual changes and attacks by subjects within the discourse. In Butler/Foucault's system, the idea of performativity becomes a mechanism for reinscribing or affecting the discourse. Any performative gesture necessarily cites the prior codes and structures, even if trying to

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[28] Butler, *Bodies That Matter*, 7.

[29] Butler, *Bodies That Matter*, 7.

[30] Althusser's idea of interpellation and naming is important here, as it is within Butler. See Judith Peraino, *Listening to the Sirens*, 112. Peraino's book also mentions Gregory Bredbeck's article on disco and identity, "Troping the Light Fantastic," *GLQ: A Journal of Gay and Lesbian Studies* 3 no. 1 (1996): 71-107, which is an excellent exploration of Althusser's idea of interpellation and the construction of gay identity from a more sociological perspective.

work against them – again, one cannot escape the constructive discourses.[31] Butler takes this idea up once more in the final chapter of *Bodies That Matter*, where she discusses the performative nature of the word queer. By performing a certain gesture over and over, the gesture becomes inscribed into the discourse through reference to the previous state of the discourse: "action echoes prior actions, and *accumulates the force of authority through the repetition or citation of a prior, authoritative set of practices*… In a sense, no term or statement can function performatively without the accumulating and dissimulating historicity of force."[32] However, this process can work subversively. By constantly performing a set of actions that lie within the discourse yet which are opposed in some way to it, the discourse itself may be changed.

The discourse of gay identity (or perhaps gay identification, with its connotation of agency) may also be construed in this way. If, for example, a dance party aimed at gay men were to select a certain kind of music, it is already working within a generalized discourse of gay nightlife – that dance music forms a part of normative gay identity. However, the music selection acts as a performative – by choosing music that works against the accepted, authoritative codes of mainstream taste, a party may display a kind of inverted, subversive citationality. In displaying its otherness against the backdrop of normative, dominant tastes, it can be said to be queering that taste, reinscribing the discourse as a broader, though not necessarily more inclusive one. It is here that "alternative" as a discursive category enters the equation. Alternative ideas are performed in reaction to the discursive mainstream as a way of asserting some other kind of identity and in the process modifying the discourse; in doing so these ideas pick up a multitude of

[31] Butler, *Bodies That Matter*, 15.

[32] Butler, *Bodies That Matter*, 227.

other implications from surrounding and simultaneous discourses. To apply it to Mixtape and "Let's Have a Kiki," alternativeness is performed as a reaction to the perception of what constitutes the mainstream discourse of music and/or gay identity, leading to specific musical and textual choices that then eventually push the mainstream discourse in various directions, some new and some not.

I do not propose to position alternative and mainstream as purely antagonistic binary formations. They relate to and inform one another, are constituted gradually and processually, and move along continuums of perception with subtlety and speed, as I hope my investigation will show. It is with this idea of the discursive construction of the alternative and mainstream in mind that I now turn to Mixtape.

CHAPTER 2

MIXTAPE

A dance party is far more than just a place to go and move your body to music. It is a social space in which discourses about identity, embodiment, and interpersonal relationships are both formulated and constituted. As such, dance parties raise many interesting questions, such as who is there and why? Why choose this song over that? Were I to visit, what should I have to drink? The answers to these questions, taken together, can create a snapshot of the web of relationships and meanings that surround a particular party and perhaps reveal something about the people involved. Even something as superficially prosaic as drink choice can reveal the complexity of the discursive formations that operate within these kinds of spaces; at a gay club, to choose a craft beer over a gin and tonic can provide many layers of information about self-identification and the ways in which an individual operates within a larger gay subculture.

I originally began investigating Mixtape asking these kinds of questions, hoping to explore the nature of the party and how it fit into the larger scene of Washington, DC. I aimed to do this by speaking with the two men who DJ the party, Shea van Horn and Matt Bailer, who graciously agreed to meet with a nervous graduate student back in November of 2011 and talk about the party they had started and continued to shepherd. This chapter grew out of that first interview, but as I continued to work on it and subsequently interviewed the DJs again in June of 2012, my focus has changed somewhat. I no longer believe that I can fully explore or describe what Mixtape is and its

relationship to the larger scene of DC, or even partially do so, especially without much more ethnographic research typical of a dissertation in ethnomusicology, let alone a chapter in a master's thesis.

Thus, here I focus on the DJs and their extremely fascinating statements regarding how they think about their party, its place in Washington DC's larger gay scene, and music's relation to gayness and gay identity more generally. Specifically, I explore how Mixtape is constructed as an alternative party primarily through the statements and discursive practices of the DJs, though I examine its sonic character as well. Mixtape is a complication within the discourse of a monolithic, mainstream conception of gay men and their nightlife, and as with any disruption within a discourse of power, it has political ramifications.

It's Just the Music: The DJs of Mixtape

Mixtape has been in existence since September 2008, and it has consciously marketed itself as an alternative musical space. Indeed, the DJs are fairly adamant about this; in the words of Matt Bailer, "From the beginning… all we've ever branded ourselves as is music."[33]

The two ways I wish to talk about the alternative aesthetic of Mixtape and the resultant processes of identification and self-understanding are through the consideration of the physical space and the sound world evoked by the music selection. One central aspect of the party is that it venue hops – one month it will be at a particular club and the next month at another. As Bailer indicated to me, the venue hopping started "out of

[33] Matt Bailer and Shea van Horn, interviewed by author, Washington, D.C., November 19, 2011.

necessity" because they outgrew their first venue, an Ethiopian restaurant called Dahlak. The alternative feeling of Mixtape is relatively independent of the venue, however, and this is partially due to a conscious effort on the part of the DJs:

> **CB:** Well, then it [Mixtape] started venue hopping around, so how does that affect the vibe of it, does it affect the music selection?
> **MB:** Definitely, well, it, mmm, we try not to necessarily make it affect the music, but kind of it, well certain venues automatically do sometimes, I'll put it this way, we have to be more conscious about sticking to our sort of alternative leaning [music selection], like when we had our anniversary party at Town –
> **CB:** Yeah, I wanted to ask about that.
> **MB:** That was an adjustment but at the same time trying not to make it too much of an adjustment because it's easier to sort of fall into the trap of playing what people there [like], not that we would play what people there would expect, but like leaning towards that, and we have to sort of push ourselves to like not necessarily avoid that altogether, um, but to sort of protect our style or our – I mean, I like a guilty pleasure as much as the next person, and I like, and Shea does to, and he, and I'm probably more willing to give in to that, so I have to fight more against that, and he is more probably (he'd probably agree with this) he's probably more I wouldn't say willing to do that but he's probably more susceptible to wanting to play what, yeah, what in that kind of environment [is expected (?)] and uh but he gets, whereas I'm ok if I sort of let that happen a little bit, he's not, he gets very uh very protective about that.[34]

The anniversary party Matt is referring to was the third anniversary of Mixtape in September 2011, which took place at one of DC's biggest gay clubs, called Town. Figure 1 imparts an idea of the size of this venue, with van Horn and Bailer in the foreground:

[34] Bailer and van Horn, interview, November 19, 2011. Sections in brackets are added for clarification.



Figure 1. Shea van Horn and Matt Bailer in the DJ booth at Town.[35]

Town draws an extremely large crowd every weekend, especially when there are celebrity drag queens or special parties like the "WTF" theme parties that take place on the Sunday night before Monday federal holidays. This is based mainly on personal observations conducted while I was living in Washington DC. It is important to note that while there is some variety in the various genders, ethnicities, and classes of people that go to Town, it is primarily a white male venue. Furthermore, the cover ranges from five to twelve dollars depending on the day and time of night, which excludes a certain portion of the population based on socioeconomic factors. The venue's website declares it is the largest gay danceclub in Washington DC, and among a large subset of the gay

[35] Town actually has two dance floors, one upstairs and one downstairs, and each has a slightly different standard for music selection. This picture is of the upstairs dance floor, which is the bigger of the two. Keli, "Photos: Mixtape's 3 Year Anniversary," Brightest Young Things, http://brightestyoungthings.com/articles/photos-mixtapes-3-year-anniversary.htm (accessed October 18, 2011).

population in DC, it is probably the most visible club in the city.[36] For this reason, it is frequently construed as the site of "mainstream" gay culture and dance music, not least by Mixtape's DJs. It is certainly keyed into larger aspects of mainstream commercial gay culture; for example, on April 20, 2013, there is slated to be a visit by a drag queen named Detox, a competitor on the fifth season of the RuPaul's Drag Race, a very popular reality television show among gay audiences about drag queens.[37] This show airs on the channel Logo, which caters primarily to gay and lesbian audiences, as do the majority of its advertisers.

Moreover, not only van Horn and Bailer are conscious of Town's "mainstream" place within the larger gay scene of DC, but the management of the club is too:

> **SvH:** So we've been at Town now twice, once upstairs and once downstairs […] And the first time we were upstairs, for me it caused sort of like a crisis of like, how to like manage the crowd, like my expectations were ok, we're at Town, we're at a mainstream dance club, so, how to make sure that the crowd has a good time and I was very self-conscious about which songs [I was] playing –
> **MB:** That was our [Mixtape's] anniversary, too, right? [conversation deliberating this]
> **SvH:** So the first time we were upstairs, I didn't like it. I was, I felt like, I felt like, like, like I was almost kind of forced to play things like, just, like smack in the middle of the bell curve, and I hate that feeling.
> **CB:** Yeah.
> **SvH:** Um, and I remember even like the owner of the club, I won't say names… [laughter] you know, said, ok the drag show is ending so make sure you play pop songs right now.
> **CB:** Ahaa.
> **SvH:** And I remember that was like sort of the only like direction and then like they all came up and then, you know, I like pop songs, I played some, and then I was afraid to like, not play pop songs and so it just kinda drove me bananas.
> **MB:** It's a weird, it's different, it's different to do it [Mixtape] there, because it's, there's the timing, cause normally we're sitting there for like, an hour and a half at Black Cat, waiting for people to show up kinda playing whatever we want, like,

[36] "Town," http://www.towndc.com, accessed March 7, 2013.

[37] Think America's Next Top Model meets Project Runway with drag queens and a hefty serving of camp.

> it's cool, cause, I mean, it's stressful cause we're always like "no one's gonna show up," but it's also, you know, we don't have to, we can play anything.[38]

The DJs go on to note that the second time they consciously decided to not play into the perceived mainstream aesthetic of Town, instead playing what "represents Mixtape for me"[39] and the evening still went fine. Clearly, Town's usual musical selection is geared heavily towards pop music, which, though it is a part of Mixtape's larger soundscape, is not central to the construction of their alternative aesthetic. Shea's statement that he felt very constrained to not play songs other than pop songs is very telling in this regard.

To return to the music, there is a conscious effort on the part of the DJs to not play "guilty pleasures;" these are songs that they like but that conform too much to the kind of aesthetic Town represents, a somewhat recent example of which is Carly Rae Jepsen's "Call Me Maybe." This term also seems to encapsulate one of the central aesthetic oppositions of this thesis. In my interpretation of the term, one feels guilty about liking a particular song because of a feeling that they "shouldn't," which reveals a normative ideology of what is and is not acceptable music for a given cohort. This conscious stance is indicative of a choice, an agency on the part of the DJs in which they place themselves in opposition to the more mainstream music selection represented not only by the club's usual choices, but also by the tastes of those that go to Town regularly to dance. In this way they are entering the discourse of gay identity in DC as a partially oppositional force. Mixtape is alternative, and in a sense those music choices that make one feel guilty do so because of a perception they are not alternative enough. Their incorporation of these "guilty pleasures" into their setlists, however, perpetuates the

[38] Bailer and van Horn, interview, June 28, 2012.

[39] van Horn, interview, June 28, 2012.

discursive construction of what is alternative and mainstream even as the DJs work to popularize music that has been neglected by mainstream gay culture; examples of this include music by bands like Metric or The Naked & Famous. Moreover, using music coded as mainstream has helped along with the increased popularity of the party to draw Mixtape into a more mainstream position in the DC scene in the time that I have been doing fieldwork.

While the discourses of what constitutes the musical mainstream are reinscribed through the idea of the "guilty pleasure," the DJs actively challenge the discursive idea of a mainstream or homogenous population at their parties. Though the core audience of the party has always been gay men that follow the party around as it venue hops, there are other people who come to the parties as well:

> **SvH:** But just to go back to the idea of who's there, like, I think it's basically the same kind of core is still there there and I can think of some of my friends who liked it more when it was still small bar feel and maybe they don't come as often but they'll make their way there, and then it's also grown, for example, a friend, uh, he and his boyfriend were going to go on a date and end up at H Street, and not come to Mixtape the last time, but that guy's boyfriend's brother, a straight guy, was like I wanna go dancing at Mixtape tonight, so it's definitely crossed over a bit… maybe two or three times now I've seen… bachelorette parties, they'll come wandering through, usually it's at the Black Cat or the Rock 'n' Roll Hotel[40] – **MB:** Usually early – and you've got like, those are places that are so varied in their programming that anybody could come through and then also on the same night as our party there may be something going on in the back bar or upstairs at Rock 'n' Roll.[41]

Thus the party's popularity, which is in part predicated on its alternative musical aesthetic, has become so strong that it is attracting not just gay men, at whom it was originally aimed, but also straight men and women. Mixtape draws in people of all

[40] Both of these venues are dance clubs that host a variety of different live music acts and dance parties, and neither is explicitly a gay space in the way that Town is a gay dance club.

[41] Bailer and van Horn, interview, November 19, 2011.

different backgrounds, not just gay or queer men, though those remain the largest group in attendance. This alternative aesthetic can be read in part within the conscious choice of the DJs to keep the tradition of venue hopping alive. The practice of venue hopping means not only that the party keeps from becoming too associated with one particular space and taking on connotations associated with that space, but also that it can bring in new attendees simply by being in different spaces.

Since my initial interviews and fieldwork, the party has anchored itself at the Black Cat, which complicates this slightly. The DJs noted in my second interview that this anchoring has had the effect of stabilizing the party somewhat and has not negatively affected the popularity of the party; indeed, more people keep coming.[42] While the party does draw in a variety of different kinds of people, I do not wish to give the impression that the party is some kind of utopian oasis of gay possibility. Real-world concerns are at play within the party environment. The Black Cat charges a ten dollar cover, which limits the possible kinds of attendees on a socioeconomic basis. My own ethnographic observations of the party suggest that there is a definite (though not complete) shift in dress and presentation away from the stereotypical "gay clone" idea of white muscular normative masculinity towards a different aesthetic, which nonetheless has its own codes. In short, there are more beards, flannel, and piercings than usual, but there is still a lack of genderqueer individuals or butch lesbians at Mixtape.[43]

[42] Bailer and van Horn, interview, June 28, 2012.

[43] Based on my own observations, the ratio of ethnicity/race at the three Mixtape parties I attended in an ethnographic capacity was somewhere around 70/30 whites/non-whites.

The question of the physical space of the party and its expansion to venues not necessarily coded as gay is mirrored in and connected to the atmosphere the DJs are adamant about creating for the party. The following discussion illustrates this point:

> **CB:** Thinking more broadly, how do you think Mixtape fits into not only the gay scene in DC but also the wider party scene, because you guys get [a wide variety of people]? [pause] Do you think there's a need that's fulfilled by these parties, that that has something to do with it?
> **SvH:** I think so… [not really sure of the straight scene in DC] I think that just having places to go where it's not a club, um, pretentious?
> **MB:** Yeah, yeah.
> **SvH:** I think that's one of the things that's really important about our party, is like there's no VIP section, we'll have a short list of people on the guest list that usually has more to do with they've done something to help us along or whatever. But yeah, it's like, I don't wanna go dancing at some, whether gay or straight, someplace where it's just full of attitude –
> **MB:** Douchey.
> **SvH:** Dress codes, yeah, all that douchey stuff, it's like yuck. It's just like, come, have a good time. I've got this, you know, this woman that I work with who heard about me DJing they finally have come to parties at Black Cat and they're like "Oh, this is so much fun" and you just want to go and have a good time.
> **MB:** It goes back to just being about the music, that's really – it's not about a scene or about a dress code or about an attitude or about a, some fancy drink – it's just, if you wanna dance and come hear good music wherever we happen to be that month, that's the constant, that's what you're coming for, that's what you're paying for.
> **SvH:** I do think we definitely cater to a queer audience and I think it's important for us to stay with that, because you know, there's something interesting that happens I think, you know, I get it, if you go out, you want to feel like "I'm going to be able to hook up" [playfully sarcastic comments ensue] – I feel like it's really important to make sure that, you know – I think it's kind of sexist, or heterosexist? Or heterophobic whatever, you know, sometimes we'll hear some gay guys being like "ugh, there are too many women here" and things like that. It's like, I get it, I want them to not have that reaction, I want them to sort of like, you know, not care about that but also see that there are enough men here for them and not find that as a sort of deterrent because I think that's kinda douchey in its own way. But it also is really important that we sort of present – we've never really – I'm sort of all over the place here, but we've never really gotten the inroads with the queer women and the lesbian crowd, I feel like it's never really quite – it's been more of a gay man's party, and there's been other, peripheral pieces… I can't force people to come, so I feel like we sort of need to stay with that, keep the audience there, keep guys coming so they know they can make out with someone that night if they want to.[44]

[44] Bailer and van Horn, interview, November 19, 2011.

As a way to unpack the language used here and what constitutes a "clubby" or pretentious atmosphere, I focus on two central ideas. One is that, whatever its particular inner meaning, the DJs are eschewing a sense of clique or "club" crowd not only in the way they describe the party but also in their central motivation for its creation. They continually state that Mixtape is about the music and about having a place to dance. This is a point of identification, an agency that helps create the identity of the party itself. People that go to this party are then tacitly endorsing and entering into this anti-scene, anti-pretentious, and anti-mainstream discourse in the sense of self-understanding, if not explicit self-identification. They reinscribe its power (not to mention the particular aesthetic stance of the DJs) through their attendance and, as Bailer points out, their capital. Of course, it should be noted that this takes place within the category of gay nightlife in general – there is no escaping the larger levels of the discourses of identity, and while the party is constructed as an alternative space for gay men to dance, it does not function in this way for women, as the DJs point out. They do appear to be somewhat critical of the insular attitudes adopted by gay men in clubs when they note that some of their dancers suggest there are too many women at the party. Interestingly, while the DJs are central to the existence of the party, they try to remove themselves as much as possible from that fact in their continual insistence on the music. This seems to indicate a conscious political and identificatory stance opposed to the notion of the celebrity or all-powerful DJ.[45]

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[45] There are historical resonances here with the emergence of the disco DJ in the 70s, where different approaches to spinning led to different aesthetics between venues. See Tim Lawrence, *Love Saves the Day* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), particularly chapter 2.

The second point to be drawn out from the above passage represents a complication in the idea of the anti-club discourse. Despite the focus on a more inclusive audience that works against a monolithic idea of the "scene," the DJs acknowledge that gay men remain the central part of their following and a demographic that they have to cater to. The party bills itself as a "monthly alt-dance party for queer guys and gals and their pals,"[46] which, while it acknowledges other demographics, has queer men listed first.[47] The DJs appeal to the gay men in their audience within the alternative aesthetic that follows from their personal tastes. This leads to the second part of the broad consideration of the alternative nature of Mixtape: the sounds of the party.

The DJs' method of selecting music is primarily through personal preferences, but there is a definite emphasis on selecting music that, whatever its popularity or obscurity, is good for dancing:

> **SvH**: [discussing different tempos of the kinds of music they play]… every song is sort of meant to make you want to dance. But it's not, I don't think of our party as like a party where you sort of have this, like, DJ ride, like you're sort of peaking at this moment, that's sort of more Town and [more generally] club[s] to me, I almost like staying away from that feeling.[48]

And again:

> **CB:** How do you select the music…?
> **SvH**: I mean, for me, um it's just kind of like personal interest, like I mean, it's the music that I like, first and foremost I think it's like that kind of stuff, and you know, early on, I think it was artists that I was following that weren't being played elsewhere like an example would be like Ladyhawke someone who I thought she was really sort of like had a really cool sound, or um, Little Boots,

[46] Mixtape DC, "mixtapeDC Music Blog," 8tracks.com, http://8tracks.com/mixtapedc (accessed 18 October 2011).

[47] The issue of the lack of attendance by queer women Shea alludes to is definitely worthy of further investigation, but would require ethnographic work more in line with a dissertation rather than a master's thesis.

[48] Bailer and van Horn, interview, November 19, 2011.

> had a really cool sound, Ting Tings, those are all kind of artists that came out like right around that time [of the first party], and they weren't really sort breaking big enough to like have more mainstream remixers creating sort of club mixes or whatever and for me, it's like, I'm 41 so all the stuff I loved in the early 80s when I first kind of got into music… I wanna hear like a B side off Depeche Mode as opposed to… Mickey, but I like Mickey too, so it's like all the things –
> **MB:** Like, there's so much other stuff that doesn't get played that it's like, why not? It's great to dance to that stuff.[49]

Thus the music selection of the party, and through it the alternative aesthetic, is directly related to the personal choice of the DJs. The popularity of the party, which has grown substantially over time – as of November 2011, on a typical night at the Black Cat, they will have around 850 people in attendance[50] – suggests that their conception of enjoyable dance music is resonating with the larger DC gay community. This conception includes not only songs that fit the construction of alternative but also those that fall into the category of "guilty pleasures," which suggests that in terms of its positionality vis-à-vis mainstream and alternative the discursive status of the party is in fact at neither extreme but somewhere in the middle.

To return to the idea of catering to a primarily gay audience yet trying to reach beyond standard gay tastes, the DJs had the following to say regarding the way they conceive of a "gay sound" and how that influences their music selection:

> **CB:** So is there… a gay sound that you find gets people dancing more in terms of the crowd… do you find any difference in the way you're putting music out there in your setlist depending on the crowd that's there?
> **SvH:** I think that like Kelis, Kylie, Robin – **MB**: Dragonette – **SvH:** Madonna, you know… [the Kylie Minogue song "Get Outta My Way" is mentioned]…

[49] Bailer and van Horn, interview, November 19, 2011.

[50] Bailer and van Horn, interview 2011. It might be possible to get the specific numbers for the Town third anniversary party, but based on a consideration of online reviews and articles, it probably had over 1200 people in attendance over the course of the night. See, for example, http://brightestyoungthings.com/articles/photos-mixtapes-3-year-anniversary.htm. As the DJs note, though, not everyone that went to Town that night was necessarily there for Mixtape. The 1000-person attendance record mentioned in the introduction took place at the Black Cat on a night when the central event going on was just Mixtape, nine months later.

there was that moment last summer or fall… where I felt like that works, for sure… I feel like the rest of the stuff is more kind of anything…
MB: I think kind of the fun, or part of the thrill at least for me is mixing the stuff that you know they're going to dance to, like the Kelis and the Robin with something that's new, that is like, "I don't think you've heard this yet, [but] I think you're gonna like it" and see how it goes over. And we've been fortunate that we seem to have good ears for that kinda thing, that for me is the fun. It's not fun to play everything that everybody knows all the time, that's too easy and it's not, I don't get anything out of it – **SvH:** Rewarding – yeah, it's not rewarding. But like finding stuff that's new, that's like, then people are coming up and asking you "What was that song you played?" that's the –
SvH: But I think it's that sort 120 BPM [beats per minute], 122-126, like Stuart Price is sort of a perfect producer, Calvin Harris, Martin Solveig for sure, just that kind of electronic, keyboard-y, bass –
MB: But then, not David Guetta, although I like "Titanium" –
SvH: But I think "Titanium" and David Guetta, that sound actually… that's the sound that really gets the sort of, the gay man dancing.
MB: Well, and it gets the straight man dancing too.
SvH: For sure, but I think that's a more gay sound… there's a certain sound, that you know the wider spectrum of sort of, you know, the gay dancer is going to go crazy for that. And I think that Kylie, Kelis, Robin those kind of things –
MB: They're left of that.
SvH: Right, they're just bumping up against that sound, so it appeals to me without feeling like I'm playing you know –
CB: Super clubby?
SvH: Exactly.
MB: And also for me it's like, at least, it all goes back to I want it to be a good song. I want it to have good lyrics, and good vocals, and a good hook, and too often either the song doesn't have that or it's all that same synth/stabby sound or a remix takes out a lot of that [good] element, and it's like I want a song that has a hook, that has lyrics, that has a good voice, that I can just remember and listen to again and again and again and enjoy and get into rather than you know, I dunno… Scissor Sisters, too.
SvH: That's true. Actually, the Yeah Yeah Yeahs and Scissor Sisters are two; those are like – sure –
CB: People are going to dance to that.[51]

Again, there is a great deal here to unpack. First, the DJs have a very specific conception of a sound that gets everyone dancing, but one that they read as a specifically gay kind of sound – music by producers and DJs like David Guetta and Martin Solveig. However, they choose music that is "to the left of that," music that does not communicate

[51] Bailer and van Horn, interview, November 19, 2011.

the same level of "[gay] clubbiness."[52] Bailer and van Horn seem to have an idea in mind of what constitutes a normative soundworld that one might find at a popular gay club, and their own construction of what constitutes alternative responds to that. In this alternative soundworld there seems to be more of a focus on the melodic and vocal rather than on driving rhythms or music with conscious emphasis on audible electronic manipulation. That said, their playlists do certainly feature music by the DJs they name as indicative of a normative or club aesthetic, but these are offset by the inclusion of other artists they consider outside this musical realm. They seem to be very much aware of the level of "clubbiness" their setslists reach:

> **MB:** And tempo-wise, too, it's like keeping that, sometimes we'll realize we've been at like 128 [BPM] or whatever for half an hour and we're like "Oh, let's throw in some random Missy Eliot or Little Kim" or something just to keep it from falling into that – cause we have gotten feedback a couple times where people have been like "I don't know, it sounded really clubby this time." Usually it's just a handful of people, but that's something [we want to avoid (?)]– we don't wanna be Town.[53]

Because the anti-club music tastes of the DJ are directly related to the alternative aesthetic of the party, Mixtape itself can be read as queering the music tastes of the typical gay dance music or party vibe, making its distinctions less sharp and less polarizing. The discursive construction of the party's alternative status, by incorporating the mainstream at the same time that it works against it, performs a kind of dialectic work that shows the constructedness of the categories of alterative and mainstream. The specific self-identification that comes with deciding to attend the party springs in part from this queered taste, as does the larger identity of the party as an alternative event. While the placement on dancing in opposition to the idea of the "scene" aids the broad

[52] I don't believe the phrase "to the left of that" has any overt political reference.

[53] Bailer and van Horn, interview, November 19, 2011.

appeal of the party, it also reveals the idea of the "scene" as containing normative qualities above and beyond dancing, as that practice happens at both Mixtape and Town. This same idea works within the music selection of the DJs. Focus on just dancing and music reveals an ideological position that rejects the perceived normative "clubbiness" in favor of an eclecticism performed as alternative. Indeed, each party is a new material, musical instantiation of the idea of alternative on the part of the DJs.

This eclecticism has its limits, though, as certain kinds of music, again based on the personal tastes of the DJs, are not included in their selection of music for the parties. The setlists of the party show a definite preference for music with female vocalists:

> **SvH:** [Speaking about music taste in general]… Sort of female vocals or sort of that, kind of that whiny man vocal –
> **CB:** I definitely noticed that, especially for the September [third anniversary party] playlist, for Town, was almost entirely like female, or heavily female vocalists.
> **SvH:** Yeah, there's a lot of female vocalists I think that, um…
> **MB:** I've always liked female vocalists better.
> **SvH:** Male vocalists, for me, those that I like I love, those that I don't like it's like, uhhh, I just don't like that sound.[54]

The preference for female vocalists and "whiny" men points to larger issues of gender and normative tastes. This is not new historically, either: disco in the 1970s had a heavily female vocalist influenced sound, and this was related to gay men's influence on disco. They were the trendsetters, and the male vs. female dynamic of the times became inscribed into other, matching binaries, such as straight vs. gay and rock vs. disco.[55] Suffice it to say that the selection of female vocals by gay men illustrates another

[54] Bailer and van Horn, interview, November 19, 2011.

[55] Lawrence, *Love Saves the Day*, 184, 220.

instance of queering, a salvo against the gender binary through complication, though questions of appropriation may also loom here.

The DJs are also clear on which music they do not like, and they were again explicit that this is an aspect of personal choice:

> **SvH:** To go back to the question, of, like, you know, what I feel like right now there's, I don't know what producers other than, I mean, I'm sort of like bad with other sort of like club producers like Skrillex? – **MB:** [unintelligible], David Guetta – **SvH:** Deadmaus, so I feel like, that's all there, and has again, and has that really, it has a really intense sound that, personally, I don't like to play – **MB:** And personally I don't either – **SvH:** at Mixtape. You know, sometimes we'll sort of –
> **MB:** There's a sound that's… that it's, it's like very synthy and it's very stabby, and it's not like vocal or melodic or something, it's just very aggressive – **SvH:** Yeah –
> **MB:** And they, and it just builds and builds and builds, I can't, like, that to me, I can see how that's insanely danceable, but it's not what I…
> **SvH:** Right, right. […] Like, I would work out to that, and I do work out to those songs sometimes because it really, it has that sort of high energy, frenetic build, crescendo, climax kinda stuff.
> **MB:** But I love like vocals and hooks and melodies and – **SvH:** Exactly, and I feel like the way that we mix at Mixtape, it's less for me about, I mean, there's still, you can sort of like see, you can still sort of, um, uh, sort of, what's the word I want, like you can see kind of moods that are kind of achieved throughout the night, you know, and there's sort of a peaker, more peak type of hour, but it's not like that type of peak, like crazy peak like dance like not like we're taking you on this kind of ride –
> **MB:** It's not like an aggressive peak, it's like a fun peak. […]
> **SvH**: I would imagine that's the other kind of sound that people might want to hear [the aggressive sound], and so, we both agree to stay away from that, because it's also very difficult to get back out of that, it's so far away, that how do you sort of bring it back to something else?
> **MB:** And also I just don't like it. Like, I don't wanna play something that I… don't… like, I don't bring music with me that I won't play, so I don't have anything with me that I don't like, and if I have it with me, then sure I'll play it 'cause that means I like it… that's not fun to me, that kind of….[56]

Not only does this passage show the extent to which the DJs consider their personal tastes to be central to the soundworld of the party, but it also reveals another important aspect of the construction of mainstream and alternative within Mixtape. The DJs constitute

[56] Bailer and van Horn, interview, June 28, 2012.

their discourse of alternative sound and setting through their statements and perceptions of what is mainstream, both musically and culturally (as in "clubbiness"). However, within their own party, new norms are created that signal the discursive circumscription of musical and cultural parameters. This plays out musically in the choice to not play the kind of aggressive, sonically overproduced, non-vocal music by producers like Skrillex, though sometimes dubstep-influenced songs do get played. Almost every single song played at the party, whatever its genre influences, has some kind of vocal line associated with it. The DJs almost never play purely instrumental electronic dance music tracks. The new "cultural" norm created by the party is harder to pinpoint, but as the DJs have said, it is definitely changing and contingent on the still-expanding popularity of the party. Nevertheless, the alternative character of the party remains a discourse through which different kinds of gay identities, themselves discursive constructions, can be constituted.

Gay Sounds and Their Subversions

I now turn to explore three musical examples to investigate further the idea of what constitutes a "gay sound" in the dance music played at Mixtape – in other words, what might aurally constitute a normative soundworld against which the DJs work. In doing so I hope to further enrich the picture of the alternative aesthetic the DJs are intent on creating for their party. Within the transcripts of the interview quoted above, Matt Bailer and Shea van Horn talk about the kind of music that gets gay men dancing and that falls within a "club" aesthetic, which they consciously try to avoid in the setlists they play at the party. While of course there is no way to firmly say what is or is not a gay sound, I think it is helpful to look at these DJs' conception for two reasons. One, their own

definition of an alternative aesthetic is created in response to this conception, and the alternative construction of Mixtape clearly finds resonances with dancers. Two, Bailer and van Horn have been doing Mixtape for over four years and DJing other venues and parties for a long time, as well as spending a lot of time on music blogs. Their ideas of what does or does not constitute a gay sound carry some weight based on their experiences as club music DJs. They mention tempos as key – music between 120-126 beats per minute (BPM) seems to be a range that "bumps up against" the solidly gay sound that gets everyone dancing. However, this tempo is fairly standard for many kinds of dance music and not the only consideration in defining this sound, as timbre, instrumentation, and vocals play a part in its constitution as well. Shea mentions a kind of "electronic, keyboard-y, bass [heavy]" sound world indicative of those "perfect" producers like Stuart Price and Martin Solveig.

It is important to note the DJs' statement that "everything that we play is made to make you want to dance."[57] This suggests there will be overlap between characteristics of the songs; a pop ballad typically will not have the kind of tempo or timbral constitution that suffices for dancing in the style that is typical of Mixtape or dance music today more generally. van Horn also notes that they have a tendency to play the most experimental or alternative music in the first half hour, while the most "sugary-sweet" music comes at the end of their setlists. Looking at the November 2011 setlist, which they played at Mixtape one week before I interviewed them for the first time, there are several examples that can be used to explore their idea of a "gay sound" and the music that does not fit within that concept.

[57] Bailer and van Horn, interview, November 19, 2011.

The first song to look at is a remix of Kylie Minogue's "Get Outta My Way," created by Stuart Price, which came out in the summer of 2010.[58] In one of the transcripts above, Shea describes not only Kylie Minogue's music but also this particular song as centrally indicative of the gay sound, and the producer Stuart Price, who made the remix, as a perfect producer that works in this sound world. Matt reiterated that this is the kind of music that gets people dancing. Thus, this seems an extremely good case to consider as the primary example. Its tempo is approximately 128 beats per minute, and the meter is a very standard 4/4. The song has a four bar hypermeter, where a new element is added to the mix or the music otherwise changed every four bars. The first four bars introduce the primary feel of the song, with emphasis on a sweet-sounding keyboard melody, grounded around A major, that repeats in two bar phrases and has constant bass drum kicks on every beat. This latter characteristic is termed "four on the floor" and is extremely typical of dance music in general. It is important to note that in this song the bass has a light feel that foregrounds the melodic element.

There is a long introduction section during which the voice part is limited to simple exclamations like "Wooo." This section builds the sound world of the song by adding progressive layers of melody and electronics according to the four bar hypermetrical pattern. Kylie's vocals have a light, airy quality to their timbre, but not a particularly high tessitura. There is a definite melodic line to go along with the lyrics, though it is simple enough to project a kind of sustained feeling throughout the song. A list of characteristics emerge that may be used to define the "gay sound" that, for the DJs of Mixtape, gets people dancing but limits the rise of a sense of "clubbiness": emphasis

[58] http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6rn8iafZsIc. See Appendix A for lyrics for each of the songs.

on melody, foregrounding of vocal line, electronic melodic elements like keyboards, electronic manipulation, constant (though light) bass, and a clear major key.

This provides a very interesting contrast to another song from that November playlist which, while it has resonances with the idea of a gay sound, is very different from "Get Outta My Way." The next song is a collaboration between openly gay rapper Cazwell and the singer Peaches, titled "Unzip Me," which came out in November of 2011.[59] It comes in at around 126 BPM, has a 4/4 meter, and four bar hypermeter, but the timbral world is very, very different than "Get Outta My Way." The bass is much more insistent and present, and the electronic manipulation of the vocal part is equally foregrounded. While Kylie's song also involved electronic sounds in the creation of the overall sound world, those were much less imbued with a distorted quality. There is very little in the way of melody or line, partially because of the rap background of Cazwell, but also because of the emphasis on bass. What pitch there is in the background is mainly limited to a guitar/synthesizer sound that alternates only between the pitches F and E-flat. The de-emphasis of melody and vocal line with the simultaneous emphasizing of bass and electronic distortion suggests this song falls more into the "clubby" aesthetic alluded to by Bailer and van Horn. I would also argue this song falls into the "guilty pleasure" category also mentioned by the DJs, partially by virtue of its clubby sound but also because of its explicitly sexual lyrics. These lyrics, through their extreme raunchiness, suggest an almost tongue-in-cheek or parodistic stance, which, when allied with the excessively clubby musical character of the mix, seems to represent a caricature of gay men and their imputed aggressive, predatory sexuality ("I'll guess your favorite

[59] http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=je8cEDHzvtE

position/Just give me free admission" and "You're legal – right?"). Thus, while it may have many elements of the clubby aesthetic avoided by the DJs, its presence in the setlist almost seems to confirm the alternative stance through a sense of having fun, self-deprecation, camp, or "over-the-top-ness."

The final example takes the idea of an alternative aesthetic to the typical "gay sound" at face value. This song is Interpol's "C'mere," a heavily rock-influenced song that nevertheless fits within the tempo range discussed by the DJs, coming in at 126 BPM.[60] The song is slightly older than the other two discussed, having first appeared on Interpol's album *Antics* from September of 2004. The sound world of the song is immediately different from the other two examples discussed here, though there are a few similarities. The lyrics reference standard love/romance tropes as in "Get Outta My Way," the song is again in 4/4 meter, and the hypermeter, though less immediate than in the other two songs, is still organized in four bar patterns. These latter two characteristics, along with the tempo, suggest that despite its major aesthetic differences, it remains a good song for dancing. It is these major aesthetic differences that lead to the song's characterization as alternative when compared to the "gay sound" evident in the examples above. The "four-on-the-floor" feel is very much reduced, as the bass drum kicks only occur on beats 2 and 4 throughout the majority of the song. However, the bass guitar frequently plays straight eighth notes, which aids the rhythmic drive of the song. Electronic sounds of the kind used in "Get Outta My Way" and "Unzip Me" are nonexistent; the primary instrumental timbre is instead distorted electric guitar and drums that lends the song a much more indie/punk rock feel. It is this complete negation of certain characteristics of the "gay sound," like keyboards (and electronics more

[60] http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vaDw4CAcXVE

generally), "four-on-the-floor" bass, and "sweet" major sound that leads to the definite characterization of this song as alternative, especially in the context of some of the other songs on the November setlist. It should be noted, too, that none of the songs here dominated the pop song scene in the same way as Lady Gaga's "Bad Romance" or Carly Rae Jepsen's "Call Me Maybe" did.

Discourses and Conclusions

The broad goal of this chapter has been to explore the idea of the alternative aesthetic of Mixtape and how this plays into the idea of identification and the discursive creation of identity. As is readily evident through the interview, Bailer and van Horn are adamant about creating a very specific feel for their party. This feel centers around two central yet connected characteristics: that Mixtape is about the music, and that Mixtape is not just another club night. This represents a process of identification; Mixtape's identity as an alternative space is created in opposition to a conception of mainstream gay nightlife that it itself created through a combination of broad and specific music tastes and cultural behaviors. This creation is accomplished through both selection of spaces and very specific ideas of musical sound worlds. While the DJs are not being consciously political—they make statements to the effect of "we're just trying to give people a place to go and dance to music they normally wouldn't be able to dance to"—Mixtape becomes a political entity nevertheless.

The DJ's focus on the music, insistence on an alternative aesthetic that nevertheless incorporates aspects of mainstream music, and concern with the larger cultural ramifications and perceptions of their party all represent an acknowledgment of

and challenge to their idea of mainstream gay culture and music within Washington, DC. Yet, this challenge very much exists within the discourse of gay identity as created through nightlife. In this sense Mixtape is constantly reinscribing the discourse, its music choice a kind of performative act, making the idea of gay identity broader merely through its existence while it simultaneously perpetuates certain discursive constructions about what mainstream gay identity and music choice comprise. As long as it remains popular and resonating with the community it will give people another option for going dancing and social interaction; the options for self-understanding as not only a gay man but for individuals of any sexual orientation, gender presentation, or gender identity are broadened through the existence of Mixtape in Washington, DC.

Lest I sound too utopian, however, the power structures in play regarding race/ethnicity, class, and gender are always active in the larger scene of DC's nightlife. Mixtape's DJs do not seek to instigate some kind of revolution that tears down these structures, but through their statements and party they push against certain aspects of these normative structures. In so doing, however, they unavoidably create new ones. Ultimately, their efforts allow this investigator to see a snapshot of the broad outlines of what mainstream and alternative musical discourses are active within the Washington, DC scene and how they operate. These discourses are intimately bound up with those of queer identity, and it is in this sense that I believe this thesis and chapter present meaningful contributions to the literature surrounding this complex idea. The ideas of what queer identity is and can be as well as what it draws on are infinitely mutable, and Mixtape provides one example. The song "Let's Have a Kiki" by the Scissor Sisters provides another, and while the party and the song are very different media, they engage

in similar ways with the concept of alternative and mainstream soundworlds. Additionally, “Let’s Have a Kiki” provides another example of how regulative norms arise and proliferate within nominally alternative discourses.

CHAPTER 3

"LET'S HAVE A KIKI"

The multifarious nature of queer and gay identity gives rise to limitless unique expressions of its possibilities. These need not be restricted to individuals; groups, songs, and ideas can all take part in the discourses of the identity, using and adapting its constituent parts to various ends. Some songs, like "Let's Have a Kiki" draw on queer history as well as the long association of gays and queers with dance music. In this chapter, I explore how "Let's Have A Kiki" plays with a multitude of references to queer cultures, especially in regard to how the song's uses of technology and technologically mediated musical gestures refine and color its queer sensibility. Specifically, I argue that "Kiki" enacts a historicized, communalized queer identity through the use of musical and vocal technologies, including vocal manipulation and electronic dance music tropes; furthermore, these references play into the historical importance of dance music and disco in gay cultures. My exploration posits "Let's Have A Kiki" as an example of how music, technology, and queerness can interact in a twenty-first century pop song. I also argue that use of technology in "Let's Have A Kiki" is not only limited to the production of vocal effects and musical gestures. Through its technologically mediated existence as a piece of electronic dance music, the song creates the liminal space of the kiki (defined in the song as "a party for calming all your nerves"), through which a communal though partially normalizing gay identity can be constituted.

Technology is at work in "Kiki" in a wide variety of guises. This includes not only obvious examples of computers or telephones—both of which figure prominently in the song, though in very different ways—but may also encompass an object of public consumption, such as a pop song. As a piece of electronic dance music, the song becomes a kind of technology or tool to help create queer community, and in this it has a long history. As Brian Currid argues of house music (to which "Let's Have a Kiki" is related), it "embod[ies] the power of these contradictions [of familial stability on the one hand, and queer disruptiveness on the other] both arguing for the continuity of community in sound, and reveling in a celebration of the provisional, in the performativity of family and community as wider categories."[61] While "Let's Have A Kiki" is not strictly speaking an exemplar of the house music style, it falls within the broader category of dance music for club play, and in this way the same statement can apply.[62] The song invites those in the club to participate in their own kiki through their dancing and presence together in the same space. The markers of queer reference carefully selected and used in the song make it function even better as a tool of community building.

The song is finely crafted to make gay men scream, clap their hands, sing along, and generally go crazy on the dance floor. I have seen this firsthand while doing ethnographic research at Mixtape, at the June Pride party mentioned in the introduction to this thesis. In the interests of full disclosure, I was one of the ones singing along. This excitement is possible not only through linguistic references to queer communities and

[61] Brian Currid, " 'We Are Family': House Music and Queer Performativity," in *Cruising the Performative: Interventions into the Representation of Ethnicity, Nationality, and Sexuality*, edited by Sue-Ellen Case, Phillip Brett, and Susan Leigh Foster (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995), 165-166.

[62] To be sure, the Scissor Sisters are a band and not DJs, albeit a band that plays primarily dance pop. They trade heavily in the markers of house, techno, and EDM more generally. The band also announced it was going on indefinite hiatus at a concert in London on October 24, 2012.

cultures, but also through the fact that the genre of electronic dance music is itself strongly marked by a relationship to those cultures, especially through disco. Most of all, the song invites those in the club to participate in their own kiki through their dancing and presence together in the same space. The markers of queer reference carefully selected and used in the song make it function even better as a tool of community building.

Technology functions on several distinct levels in the song. However, the most central technology in "Let's Have a Kiki" is, as the risk of stating obvious, the computer. It and its accompanying knowledge—how to accomplish electronic manipulation of the voice and how to create artificial electronic sounds—are absolutely critical to the existence of "Let's Have A Kiki." The song's creation of a sense of space and location is in large part dependent on the manipulation of the human voice. Computers are involved in the creation of the music itself as the production of electronic beats and manipulation of vocals. The song itself functions as a tool of queer community building. Finally, technology is involved in creating the fictional world evoked by the song's lyrics.

The prime example of this is the introduction, where Ana Matronic leaves a message for someone named Pickles.[63] It is unclear whether this is an answering machine or a voice mail message, however. Given the low-fidelity filter that obscures the voices during the introduction, I suspect it is intended to sound like an analog answering machine; the age and obsolescence of this technology functions along with musical references to disco to recall an idealized gay past.

[63] See Appendix B for a transcription of the song's lyrics.

Pickles is the first to speak; we are not sure who he is, but through his gruff and gravelly vocal production as well as his rather curt message he is marked with a specific kind of masculine gender presentation.[64] This fact will become important in the course of the introduction's lyrics. The beep that follows his message clearly marks the rest of the introduction as occurring within the space of the answering machine. The low-fidelity filter that muffles Matronic's words clashes with the clearer aural quality of the electronic pitches and percussion. This filtering is two-fold: not only is Matronic leaving a message for Pickles, a private gesture letting him know she's coming over, but we the listeners are also privy to this communication between the two figures.[65] In a way, she is leaving a message for *us*, inviting us into the private yet communal space of the song. The kiki becomes a liminal space removed from the public world of the club as well as the larger environment outside the song.

This entry into the song, drawing on both the analog and the digital, also serves a queering function: in the course of inviting us into the song's kiki, this personalized entreaty also initiates us into a queer world through the language and slang used in the lyrics. The answering machine defines the modes of linguistic interaction – our friends are coming over, and we speak with our friends in certain ways. There are plenty of linguistic gestures, even in the introduction, that signal the queer affect of this song. The phrase "I hope you're up girl" brings to the fore and destabilizes the listener's heteronormative assumptions about gender structures. In a rather interpellative gesture,

[64] This gender presentation has a very specific intention: as a (male) friend of mine remarked, "Pickles sounds *hot*."

[65] The filtering also conveys the idea of introduction through the disjunction of the tinny vocal quality with the less mediated one of the music; something doesn't match up, which allows the clarification of the vocal texture marks the beginning of the song proper. I will return to this sonic disjunction below.

this "girl" is directed at Pickles, the very clearly male voice from the beginning of the song. Referring to this gruff figure as a girl creates an immediate frission of queerness. This is only reinforced by the directive that he "put on [his] heels" near the end of the introduction. One example of a kind of referentially queer slang from the introduction is the phrase "the tea." This does not refer to a hot or iced beverage. Tea actually refers to the letter "t," the first letter of the word "truth." Thus, the phrase "I don't even know what's the tea" might be translated as "I'm not sure what's going on."

The phrase, like kiki, comes from urban minority queer communities in New York of the 1970s and 1980s. These communities were especially active in putting on drag balls, the practice of which was the subject of the 1990 documentary *Paris is Burning*.[66] The reception of this documentary and the dissemination and mainstreaming of its queer slang is complex, but suffice it to say that the language and practices of the drag balls have become much more widely known outside of the circles where they first originated.[67] Such slang could certainly be used in a straight-ahead song that did not refer to its audience directly. However, through the technologically mediated trope of the answering machine, the use of slang and queer linguistic gestures attempts to make the listener an insider in the world of the song, as if to say "you and I talk in this special way,

[66] The figure associated with bringing the word kiki into wider consciousness is Dorian Corey, who mentions the term in *Paris is Burning*. A drag performer since the 1960s, she (the female pronoun is polite in this case, though she was biologically male) died of AIDS-related complications in August of 1993. See "Dorian Corey is Dead; A Drag Film Star, 56" *New York Times*, August 31, 1993, accessed December 4, 2012, http://www.nytimes.com/1993/08/31/obituaries/dorian-corey-is-dead-a-drag-film-star-56.html. For an engaging if somewhat macabre profile of Corey after her death, see Edward Conlon, "The Drag Queen and the Mummy," *Transition* 65 (1995): 4-24.

[67] One force responsible for the wider dissemination of language from the documentary is the reality television show "RuPaul's Drag Race," which has attracted a large gay following since its premiere in 2009. RuPaul, the drag queen who created the show and serves as its main judge, as well as some of the drag queen contestants, frequently use examples of this kind of slang, including the word kiki. Slang like this is even occasionally defined for the benefit of the audience.

so we can have a kiki together." The degree to which the song accomplishes this varies depending on the listener.

The effect of this kind of language can be triangulated through the addition of a third point of reference: that of the concept of camp. This slippery concept and its relation to technology and music was tackled adroitly by Kay Dickinson in her article "'Believe'? Vocoders, Digitalised Female Identity and Camp." Her working definition of camp is somewhat vague, as most definitions of the concept tend to be. However, there are certain qualities, in her view, that camp objects and practices exemplify. One of these is a "delight in the inauthentic, in things which are obviously pretending to be what they are not."[68] Matronic's delivery of the introductory answering machine message is campy in its extravagant language and excessive slang. The cryptic nature of this slang also helps make it campy; one of camp's other valences, according to Dickinson, is that it "has always been about making do within the mainstream, twisting it, adoring aspects of it regardless, wobbling its more restrictive given meanings."[69] Language is appropriated and made to mean new and potentially destabilizing things: to kiki is to gossip and party, and gruff men wear heels and own smoke machines. Thus there are multiple levels of camp reference in this introduction, and Matronic's camp delivery of language associated with drag queens (themselves emblematic of high camp), when combined with the scratchiness of the answering machine technology, brings out a disruptive queer potential in the lines. The line where she says she puts on a wig makes us question even further our

[68] Kay Dickinson, "'Believe'? Vocoders, Digitalised Female Identity and Camp," *Popular Music* 20, no. 3 (2001): 344.

[69] Dickinson, "Vocoders," 345.

notions of femininity – a woman might not necessarily have to put on a wig to look the part, whereas a drag queen would.

This answering machine message, embedded in a technological conceit as it is, functions similarly to the vocoder when Dickinson says that "By pushing current (largely straight male) standards of pop, perfection, fakery and behind-the-scenes mechanization in unusual directions, a vocoder, like other camp objects, might complicate staid notions of reality, the body, femininity, and female capability."[70] In short, the answering machine blurs the lines between genders and allows for a certain amount of uncertainty. The voice is obscured, as is the identity of the speakers. Through its containment of Matronic's queer language the answering-machine introduction, with its digital reference to antiquated analog technology, becomes a technological queer, camp object. The flamboyant and coded language here also contributes to this queerness. Matronic's delivery and words destabilize the ability to distinguish gender based on vocal performance: is this singer a woman, a man pretending to be a woman, or a woman pretending to be a man pretending to be a woman? Thanks to the multiple levels of queer reference already in play, it seems to be the rather overextended woman pretending to be a man pretending to be a woman. To take the queering potential of the song even further, anyone who listens to it now understands what a kiki is, and by extension becomes just a little bit queerer themselves.

The introduction of this song is not the only site of technological manipulation pushed towards communal queer ends, however. Each line of the refrain of the song itself is sung by different voices, sometimes layered on top of one another. It is not always

[70] Dickinson, "Vocoders," 345. This is rather more literally exemplified by Matronic's delivery of the lines where she defines what a kiki is – her voice is reinforced by overdubbing that sounds like a lowered, pitch-modulated version of her own voice.

clear whether or not these are the voices of either Jake Shears or Ana Matronic in a heavily modified form or other voices that have been sampled. At times the voices allow for identification as belonging to distinct people, but thanks to their layering and juxtaposition, their imagined subjectivity is itself layered, creating the community of the kiki within the space of the song itself. This sense of communality is created through the technological manipulation of the various voices. There are approximately eleven different voices or combinations of voices in the refrains of the song alone, which I have marked by numbers in parentheses in the appendix. Joseph Auner, in exploring the idea of posthuman ventriloquism, presents a model of analysis that parallels this multi-voiced refrain: "By distributing subjectivity between various subroutines [or perhaps voices], listeners can be seamlessly grafted into the system at many points (in contrast to the more conventional popular-music strategies of staging a single persona for listeners to observe or identify with)."[71] The technological suturing together of multiple voices and their sublimated subjectivities allows for both the creation of a kiki within the song and the space for the listener to identify with and among the singing voices, incorporating themselves into the kiki.

These new voices further increase the level of camp/queer reference in the song. Not only do some of the lines continue to reference the queer slang in the vein of *Paris is Burning*, [72] but these lines are delivered in an over-the-top, affected style. The members of this technologically created kiki community (a kikommunity?) perform their queerness

[71] Joseph Auner, "'Sing it for Me': Posthuman Ventriloquism in Recent Popular Music," *Journal of the Royal Musical Association*, 128 (2003), 119.

[72] "Dive turn work" and "We're gonna serve and work and turn honey" – though these lines specifically are not present in the documentary, words and phrases like "work" and "serving realness" are very much part of the language.

in their delivery and in their language. This sense is only enhanced further by the moment in the bridge of the song, after Ana Matronic's delivery of the lines "Oh what a wonderful kiki! This kiki is marvelous!," where multiple voices deliver campy lines over what sounds like the background hubbub at a party. The audio manipulation and layering used to create this section, only possible through technological means, imparts a sense of spatiality and presence. The space created by this mediation, however, is populated entirely by queers.

This spatiality gives rise to an interesting question, mentioned above in a footnote: why is there such a foregrounded disjunction, a difference in degree of mediation, between the tinny vocal quality of Ana Matronic's introduction voiceover and the music backing her up? To borrow some terms from film theory, it seems that the answering machine is diegetic and the music is non-diegetic – the characters in the fictional space of the song hear the message but not the music. However, I believe the distinction is not so simple as that, and the extra voices that come in the break of the song help to clarify this. These voices are clearly diegetic and heard by the other characters in the song, who are all present at the kiki; Matronic's "This kiki is marvelous!" statement indicates that they are all in the process of having a kiki. The complete lack of sound during this statement creates a sense of suspension as we wait to see what this sudden cessation in the music will lead to. Her demonstrative pronoun "*This* kiki" suggests that the resumption of the underlying track of the song is commensurate with the kiki now taking place, indicated by the hubbub of voices. In short, the song is the soundtrack of the kiki. This makes sense, given how the song is attempting to popularize the slang it trades in – put another way, the song seems to say, "Use this song to achieve an instant kiki."

Given its reception ("The gays are really, really freaking out about it"[73]), it would appear that it succeeds at this.

Linguistic behavior and slang is not the only way "Let's Have a Kiki" invokes queer cultures. There are a number of musical references the Scissor Sisters use to relate the song to the long history of gay dance music. The song certainly reaches back to disco, which is in many ways the start of the association between queers and dance music. Kai Finketscher recounts the history of the genre and its evolution into the dance music styles of the 1980s and 1990s in his book *"You Better Work": Underground Dance Music in New York City*. He states that disco arose as an African American genre in the late 1960s in clubs for black gay men which crossed over to white gay clubs in the early 1970s and finally into the mainstream in the mid to late 1970s.[74] Attaining mainstream status was tantamount to its death knell; disco went underground and gradually morphed into the genres of house, techno, hi-NRG, and other dance music styles, shepherded by those communities that had given rise to disco in the first place, namely "marginalized urban, young, gay, black and Latino men"[75] – a community that helped create the linguistic markers of queerness that the Scissor Sisters use in the song.

The song falls into the tempo range typical of dance music in general and house music more specifically, which equates to roughly 120 to 128 beats per minute. It also has the standard "four on the floor" bass drum kicks that sonically signal dance music. The clave rhythm present from the beginning presents a syncopated challenge to the

[73] Rule, "Shears Force," 38.

[74] Finketscher, *"You Better Work!"*, 26.

[75] Finketscher, *"You Better Work!"*, 11-12. For an in-depth history of disco, see also Lawrence, *Love Saves the Day*.

standard 4/4 beat of the song. It not only references house music's rhythmic profile, but the synthesized timbral quality of the pattern alludes to the computerized origins of electronic dance music in general.[76]

The distinct prominence of drum-machine bongos and the clave rhythm, especially marked during the drum breaks of the song, seems to refer to disco's early roots. The timbales-like sample just prior to the line "A kiki is a party for calming all your nerves" also reflects the Latin influences in disco. The section of the bridge which repeats a sequence of monosyllabic pairs like "oui oui" and "non non" is a likely reference to Donna Summers' disco-era classic "Bad Girls." Taken together, the musical profile of the song is clearly intended to make club audiences want to dance while it engages in several layers of reference to queerness and its connection to dance music.

Though in the genre of a recorded song the voice is detached from its bodily origin, it can still embody through its power as voice. In this embodiment voice enacts cultural characteristics like sex, gender, ethnicity, race, and history.[77] This is not to be confused with the cultural subject matter the voice is singing about, for that can be an entirely separate set of topics. What resonances or tensions emerge, however, when the embodied voice and its enacted cultural references interact with the references the voice actively sings about? "Let's Have a Kiki" provides interesting examples of this resonance and tension. The lyrics allow for the idea of a kiki to be broadly accessible as something any group can create – a party where you get together with your friends and gossip. It can

[76] For a discussion of generic tropes of house music, see Currid, "House Music and Queer Performativity," 169-171.

[77] Norie Neumark, "Doing Things With Voices," in *Voice: Vocal Aesthetics in Digital Arts and Media*, Cambridge, edited by Norie Neumark, Ross Gibson, and Theo van Leeuwen (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2010), 97.

be more than that as a site of queer disruptiveness. It can be a community unit eschewing heternormative kinship structures, and in this, it falls in a long line of dance music and gay identity. Currid argues again of house music that it "serves as a site where queers create historical narratives of continuity across time and space, centered around the continuous production and consumption of meaning in these musical signifiers."[78] The statement rings as true for "Let's Have a Kiki" as it does for house music more generally. The song posits the queer slang and linguistic playfulness central to it as a signifier of queer identity, and its status as a piece of dance music allows for its connection to the "narrative of continuity." Taken together, the song is a potent technology for bringing queer people (especially gay men) together – it trades on their languages, both spoken and musical.

"Let's Have a Kiki"'s use of all these queer references is not without its issues. Questions of appropriation and ownership arise in this example just as they do in the wider discussions of the history of disco, race, and class. It was likely some of those same marginalized urban gay youth of color that helped to create the textual references that "Let's Have a Kiki" trades on as well as the musical references. However, Ana Matronic and Jake Shears's vocal performance style enacts a certain kind of mainstream white dance pop, à la Lady Gaga, which is frequently marked with a normative gay identity that privileges whiteness, affluence, and a specific kind of gender presentation. Currid, while he espouses the community-building power of house music, also fiercely critiques the potential erasures present in the use of dance music as a marker of gay identity, especially

[78] Currid, "House Music and Queer Performativity," 173.

as they relate to the subsumption of minority queer communities in a hegemonic, white gay mainstream:

> Those configurations of gay identity which insist that gay identity is outside the realm of racial difference(s), where gay whiteness masquerades as racially unmarked,… can be partially contested by a music that re-narrates the history of gay "liberation" as sited in the sounds of a black gay underground, rather than in the growing political and economic clout of an assimilationist guppie clique, and further, by the consumption of a music that insists on the importance of racial difference in the understanding of black queer history.[79]

The music of contestation that Currid refers to is house, but his statement points to a larger concept which "Let's Have a Kiki" has, unwittingly or not, become a part of – the idea of *homo*normativity, where there is a specific and normalizing way of being gay. So what kind of community is formed within and posited by the song? Whose kiki is this?

Judith Halberstam posits the idea of subcultures as necessary for critiquing the idea of community. As she states in her article "What's That Smell? Queer Temporalities and Subcultural Lives,"

> At a time when "gay and lesbian community" is used as a rallying cry for fairly conservative social projects aimed at assimilating gays and lesbians into the mainstream of the life of the nation and family, queer subcultures preserve the critique of heteronormativity that was always implicit in queer life… Given, then, that quests for community are always nostalgic attempts to return to some fantasized moment of union and unity, the conservative embrace of "community" in all kinds of political projects is unmasked; this makes the reconsideration of subcultures all the more urgent.[80]

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[79] Currid, "House Music and Queer Performativity," 176. "Guppie" is a slang term drawn from the portmanteau "yuppie," which translates to young urban professional. Thus a guppie is a gay (young) urban professional.

[80] Judith Halberstam, "What's That Smell? Queer Temporalities and Subcultural Lives," in *Queering the Popular Pitch* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 4-5. Though now six years old, Halberstam's reference to "conservative social projects" is still very much apt; witness the Human Rights Campaign's aggressive lobbying of the US government for inclusion into the military and marriage (the former of which was successful), two of the most central pillars of state power.

Thus, when it is described as a "gay anthem," does the song then become part of the normalizing discourses of the "gay community"? In part, yes. On the other hand, many of the references in the lyrics of the song evoke queer cultures that were certainly subcultural. The question is then twofold: is there a kind of subcultural referential structure at work in "Kiki," and if so, is it still relevant as a critique of heteronormativity? In short, is it also a tool of subversion?

The slang used in the song, popularized in part by *Paris is Burning*, might have once been considered subversive, but in the course of being turned into a technology of community building has taken on the normative power of the community. Currid goes so far as to dismiss the practices of those in the ball scene as having been turned into "the stuff of consumption for white queer ethnographic fantasy"[81] by the documentary. "Let's Have a Kiki" to some extent takes part in this fantasy, for as it uses the once subversive language of the New York queens, it becomes "a mechanism to allow the white authorial production of queer identity to imprison the black queer within that fantasy spectacular body."[82]

The voices within the song's break, while they perform a multi-racial queerness through the hubbub of their kiki, are nonetheless trapped in that space, bounded by the refrains of the song. Perhaps, though, technology prevents the song from being completely marked by homonormativity. After all, it is not just Shears and Matronic that sing in the choruses of the song; their voices are technologically manipulated, layered and juxtaposed with other voices that sing the various lines of the chorus. These other voices

[81] Currid, "House Music and Queer Performativity," 186.

[82] Currid, "House Music and Queer Performativity," 186.

do not necessarily belong to white gay men. Some are women and a few sound a bit like Sylvester, the disco-era queer, African-American (male) diva. Whether or not this multi-voiced kiki saves the song from the facts of its production, status as a something to be consumed, and something that helps constitute a homonormative gay identity remains to be seen.[83]

While critiques of the application of source material in "Let's Have a Kiki" are quite possible and necessary, it is extremely doubtful that the band was consciously playing to the erasures of minority communities and their influences in the song. On the other hand, it is probably not enough to say "they didn't know what they were doing." There nonetheless remains a distinctly celebratory and fun feeling to the song, and the utopian idea of the kiki, where anyone can gather with their friends and have a good time, must in the end live in constant tension with the normalizing erasures that are a part of the song. It shares the same problems as the utopian ideal of the dance club, of which critiques are legion. In the final analysis, the referential gestures of gay community building and the technologies evoked within and through the song are all bent towards a singular end: creating a song that celebrates, evokes, and is queerness – but a queerness that is selective. The time has not yet come for a kiki—perhaps it is a rather quixotic idea, in the end—where *everyone* can take part.

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[83] An interesting article posted online back in July of 2012 responded to the cultural appropriations of the Scissor Sisters, but did so primarily on the evidence of the "instructional video" posted to Youtube by the band after the song's runaway success. The author, Madison Moore, states, "I knew "Kiki" was by the Scissor Sisters, a band I really like, and I was excited they turned to black gay culture for creative inspiration. Watch the music video, though, and you don't see a *single* person of color. *Anywhere*. I mean, how can you do a music video about serving, working and letting them have it and not show some fierce bitch from the blatino gay scene!… For the Scissor Sisters to use and capitalize on black gay slang without paying due credit to the people who invented it isn't appropriation—it's straight up cultural larceny." In the article, he states that he would have much less of a problem with the appropriation of the African-American/Latin slang of *Paris is Burning* by the Scissor Sisters if they cited or acknowledged their sources in some way. Madison Moore, "Appropriation Without Credit," SpliceToday, July 30, 2012, accessed December 4, 2012, http://www.splicetoday.com/music/appropriation-without-credit.

CHAPTER 4

CONCLUSION: NORMS, QUEERS, AND MUSIC

The preceding chapters, though they deal with rather different subject matter, have had a central theme: the production and performance of queer identity. Music is intimately bound to this performance and discursive perpetuation. Use of subcultural language, products, and behaviors is not enough to resist the creation of norms, hetero- or homo-. This resonates with my larger point about alternative vs. mainstream discourses – while the two are not commensurate, they inform each other. Mainstreams almost always seem to have regulative power and influence the ways in which people talk about and act upon the content these discourses involve. However, as we have seen from the example of Mixtape and "Let's Have a Kiki," sites construed as alternative can have regulative power as well. Perhaps a way to merge these two streams of thought would be to posit the following: discourses that are "alternative" have less visibility on the one hand and less regulative authority on the other, whereas "mainstream" ones have more of these factors. This also allows for a continuum of these qualities where alternative and mainstream are not binary states. Of course, visibility and regulatory power go hand in hand, as can be extrapolated from Butler's reading of Foucault and the concept of citationality. [84] The mainstream and alternative are constructed only because they are performed as such, and in that sense what the DJs of Mixtape and "Let's Have a Kiki" do musically is complicate,

[84] See again Butler, *Bodies That Matter*, 227.

challenge, and push against the discursive boundaries of alternative and mainstream, altering their shapes and limits.

This thesis, by discussing the discourse of alternative and mainstream as well as the issue of queer appropriation, has hopefully illuminated a larger issue: the issue of power dynamics within the gay community as expressed and constituted through music and the performance of identity. I use the word community here in the sense of Halberstam's usage in my "Kiki" chapter, where community subsumes a kind of totalizing pressure and is bent towards politically conservative social projects.[85] This thesis demonstrates that it is not that simple: communities are never as homogenous as those in power would have us believe. However, based on my evidence here, I would also say that there is no perfect antidote, no radical outside group that with their alternative (musical?) stance will bring down the hierarchies of power already in place. The reality is more complicated than that.

Events like Mixtape musically challenge the power dynamic of the Washington, DC gay community, and this challenge is materialized in the discourse of alternative and mainstream. The challenge is tacitly articulated, as the DJs state they have no overt political project in the content or production of their party. However, it is only a partial salvo against the homogeneity they see in the musical sounds of the larger gay community, as they themselves incorporate music into their setlists that would not be out of place in any dance club, is drawn from the top-40s charts, and is, in a word, mainstream. The musical discourse of queer identity here is not radically altered or dismantled; rather, it is moved and widened gradually. The larger normative standards of

[85] Halberstam, "What's That Smell? Queer Temporalities and Subcultural Lives," 4-5.

the gay community are similarly modified. Mixtape's attendees are perhaps on the whole not as white, muscular, clean-shaven, and masculinist as the average Town-goer[86], but neither is Mixtape a perfectly heterogeneous queer haven. In the end, it does not have to be: the DJs have said they just wanted it to be a place where people could go to dance, and it most certainly is that. If the party simultaneously manages to complicate the homonormative ideal of gay and queer identity in some small way, so much the better.

Both Mixtape and "Let's Have a Kiki" show the cracks in the façade of the larger gay community. As this group has gained political power, it has necessarily attempted to portray itself as a homogeneous unit, stripped of its subversive elements, in order to gain acceptance into the wider mainstream discourse of politics and identity. "Let's Have a Kiki" appears to be a musical analogue to this process. The Scissor Sisters incorporated the slang and linguistic behavior of the once-subversive New York drag ball minority groups, but in so doing they lessened the subversive power of these references. The alterity of these subjects remains embedded in the song, but with its wider acceptance throughout the gay community and in dance clubs of every kind the knowledge of these groups, what their slang and the community it helped define meant to them, and their struggles as queer people become lost.

Ideally, the popularity and danceability of the song would inspire people to search out the knowledge and history that the song trades on, but the central tension in "Kiki," between the commodification and homogenization of queer history and the subversiveness of its material, will always remain. This same tension—the need for packaging, marketability, and uniformity versus the uniqueness and mutability of queer

[86] I should also say that Town is probably not as homogeneous as I have made it out to be throughout this thesis, but between my own personal experiences of the club and its reputation as DC's most visible and typical gay dance venue I do not think I am far off.

subjectivity—exists and will probably always exist within the so-called gay community. Mixtape displays this tension as well; Matt and Shea state that they want to play all kinds of music to dance to while they simultaneously must keep people coming in. The tension manifests itself in the fact that they play more of the songs they would term alternative towards the beginning of the party, when fewer people are there and the risk is lessened, than in the later part of the evening, when the crowd has filled the venue and the DJs play more "mainstream" music. Mixtape and "Let's Have a Kiki" remind us to be mindful of the tensions within the gay community and to work against normative exclusions, but perhaps also to do it all with a light touch – in the end, as the DJs say, "it's just about the music."

Appendix A:

Lyrics for Chapter 1

Kylie Minogue, "Get Outta My Way"
What's the worst thing that could happen to you?
Take a chance tonight and try something new.
You're getting boring.
You're all so boring, and I don't recognize the zombie you're turning 'to.
Don't worry cause tonight I got you.
You can take a seat, do what you normally do.
I'm about to let you see.
This is what'll happen if you ain't giving your girl what she needs.

Leave you, move on
To a perfect stranger
You talk I walk
Wanna feel the danger
See me with him and it's turnin' you on
Got me saying getting me back it'd be another song

Get outta my way
Got no more to say
He's takin' your place
Get outta my way
Way outta my way
Got no more to say
He's takin' your place
Get outta my way

Now I got a taste I wanna explore.
Ain't going to waste, no not anymore.
You're going hard now, to win my heart but.
So many times now, you've been comin' up short.
Don't worry cause tonight I got you.
You can take a seat do what you normally do.
I'm about to let you see.
This is what'll happen if you ain't giving your girl what she needs.

[Chorus]
Leave you, move on
To a perfect stranger
You talk I walk
Wanna feel the danger
See me with him and it's turnin' you on
Got me saying getting me back it'd be another song

Get outta my way
Got no more to say
He's takin' your place
Get outta my way
Way outta my way
Got no more to say
He's takin' your place
Get outta my way

No I ain't going home cause I wanna stay, but I won't be alone no how no way.
Now I've showed you what I'm made of.
This is what'll happen if you ain't giving your girl what she needs.

[Chorus]
Leave you, move on
To a perfect stranger
You talk I walk
Wanna feel the danger
See me with him and it's turnin' you on
Got me saying getting me back it'd be another song

Get outta my way
Got no more to say
He's takin' your place
Get outta my way
Way outta my way
Got no more to say
He's takin' your place
Get outta my way[87]

Cazwell and Peaches, "Unzip Me"
drop it. grab it. jerk it.
unzip me.
drop it. grab it. jerk it.
unzip me.
drop it. drop it. lift it lift it.
bring it back home again.
drop it. drop it. lift it lift it.
bring it back home again.
drop it. drop it. lift it lift it.
bring it back home again.
drop it. drop it. drop it. drop it. drop it. drop it.

[87] Kylie Minogue, "Get Outta My Way,"
http://www.azlyrics.com/lyrics/kylieminogue/getouttamyway.html (accessed 7 December 2011).

don't you wanna unzip those pants,
let's get naked and dance,
i'm in the mood for something i haven't seen before,
don't you wanna pull up that shirt,
you get me ready to work,
i'm not rude,
just haven't been in those jeans before,
and i don't wanna talk,
cause i don't wanna listen,
i checked you out like a physician,
can i get permission,
and i don't wanna talk,
cause i don't wanna listen,
i'll guess your favorite position,
just give me free admission.

freeze...

drop it. grab it. jerk it.
unzip me.
drop it. grab it. jerk it.
unzip me.
drop it. grab it. jerk it.
unzip me.
drop it. grab it. jerk it.
unzip me. unzip me. unzip me. unzip me. unzip me.

i got them laser eyes,
that stare into your thighs,
and rip through seams,
makin' steam where there used to jeans,
and now you're nude, eww!,
i burnt some skin too,
put tracks on your choo choo,
i didn't even touch you,
better cream up to heal the cut,
better dream up your kind of smut,
better stream some dirtier stuff,
better green that we wanna puff,
with my glare so supersonic,
imagine my hands upon it,
get you pouncing up all on it,
injecting gin, no tonic

drop it. grab it. jerk it.
unzip me.

drop it. grab it. jerk it.
unzip me.
drop it. grab it. jerk it.
unzip me.
drop it. grab it. jerk it.
unzip me. unzip me. unzip me. unzip me. unzip me.

ok - how did you even get in this club?
you're legal - right? you got id?
nah - i believe you... kind of...
so, you wanna come over tonight cuz i can change my plans!

don't you wanna come to my room,
come back and check out the view,
i got a king size bed and you can test it out for me,
don't you wanna come in my shower,
get super-soaked for an hour,
i got some moisturizer you can rub it on for me,
and i don't wanna talk,
cause i don't wanna listen,
i checked you out like a physician,
can i get permission,

i still don't wanna talk, i still don't wanna listen,
i checked you out like a physician,
can i get permission,
i'll guess your favorite position,
just give me free admission.

drop it. drop it. lift it lift it.
bring it back home again.
drop it. drop it. lift it lift it.
bring it back home again.
drop it. drop it. drop it. drop it. drop it. drop it.

drop it. grab it. jerk it.
unzip me.
drop it. grab it. jerk it.
unzip me.
drop it. grab it. jerk it.
unzip me.
drop it. grab it. jerk it.
unzip me. unzip me. unzip me. unzip me. unzip me.[88]

[88] Cazwell and Peaches, "Unzip Me," http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=je8cEDHzvtE (accessed 7 December 2011).

Interpol "C'mere"
It's way too late to be this locked inside ourselves
The trouble is that you're in love with someone else
It should be me. Oh, it should be me
Sacred parts, your get aways
You come along on summer days
Tenderly, tastefully

And so may, we make time
Try to find somebody else
This place is mine

You said today, you know exactly how I feel
I had my doubts little girl
I'm in love with something real
It could be me, that's changing!

And so may, we make time
To try and find somebody else
Who has a line

Now season with health
Two lovers walk a lakeside mile
Try pleasing with stealth, rodeo
See what stands long ending fast

Oh, how I love you
And in the evening, when we are sleeping
We are sleeping. Oh, we are sleeping

And so may, we make time
We try to find somebody else
Who has a line

Now season with health
Two lovers walk a lakeside mile
Try pleasing with stealth, rodeo
See what stands long ending fast[89]

[89] Interpol, "C'mere," http://www.azlyrics.com/lyrics/interpol/cmere.html (accessed 7 December 2011).

Appendix B:

Lyrics for "Let's Have A Kiki"

Intro
What's up, it's Pickles, leave a message. [beep]

Hey, I'm callin' you back, ooh, she's been a bitch tonight

And by bitch I mean this rain. No cabs, nowhere.

So I had to put on the wig and heels and the lashes and the eairh and take the train to the club.

And you know the MTA should stand for muthafuckers touchin' my ass.

So then I get to the club, lookin' like a drowned, harassed rat and am greeted, not by Miss Rose at the door, but our friend, Johnny 5-0. Yes honey the NYPD shut down the party.

So no fee for me! And I don't even know what's the tea.

So I hope you're up girl, cuz we are all comin' over.

Lock the doors, lower the blinds, fire up the smoke machine, and put on your heels, cuz I know exactly what we need.

Chorus
Let's have a kiki (1)
I wanna have a kiki (2)
Lock the doors tight! (3)
Let's have a kiki (1), motherfucker (4)
I'm gonna let you have it (5 – Ana Matronic)
Let's have a kiki (1)
I wanna have a kiki (6)
Dive (7) turn (8) work (5?)
Let's have a kiki (1)
We're gonna serve (9) and work (10) and turn (11) honey (5)

Verse
A kiki is a party for calming all your nerves
We're spilling tea and dishing just desserts one may deserve
And though the sun is rising, few may choose to leave
So shade that lid and we'll all bid adieu to your ennui

Chorus

Bridge
Oh what a wonderful kiki!
This kiki is marvelous!
[semi-unintelligible hubbub]

Kiki
Soso
Oui oui
Non non
(bom bom)
Kiki
Soso
Oui oui
Non non
(chom chom)
Kiki
Soso
Oui oui
Non non
(bom bom)
Kiki
Soso
Oui oui
Non non

Chorus

Chorus variant
Let's have a kiki
I wanna have a kiki
Lock the doors tight!
Let's have a kiki
Hunty dropper
I'm gonna let you have it
Let's have a kiki
I wanna have a kiki
Boots ten queen
Let's have a kiki
We're gonna serve and work and turn honey

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