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From Hypervisibility to Affirming Visibility: Navigating a Spectrum of Belonging in Public Spaces

DISSERTATION

submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements
for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

in Sociology

by

Elisabet Regina Barrios Dugenia

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Associate Professor Laura E. Enriquez, Chair
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2024

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DEDICATION

To

my grandparents and parents-
the alchemists and dreamers that made this journey possible

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Not all change happens in big bangs, sometimes, change feels minute. Change unfolds in the small crevices of the day, in ways that we might miss if we are not looking. To those who have ever gardened, raised a puppy, or a baby, you know how quickly life can blossom, and how rapidly it *does* change. But it changes incrementally, somewhere in between seconds, from one frame to the next. Looking within frames of social life, I examine the meaning folded into social interactions between strangers. I find that they carry messages of belonging.

My journey towards belonging has been made possible by so many beautiful energies. I want to especially thank the residents of Long Beach who trusted me with their life experiences. You have fueled my dreams with your own, making me believe that we can, are, and will continue to build social infrastructures that are life-giving. Your acts of resistance show me that you have not given up, but rather wised up, using your past experiences to confront violence, and your heart to cultivate spaces of belonging.

My journey of belonging started long before I was born. I come from a lineage of Purepecha and Sephardic ancestors- both peoples familiar with resistance to violence with body, mind, and spirit. To my paternal grandmother, Martha Alcaraz who died before I was born. Her cause of death was gender violence; Abuela Martha, I am told that I embody your love for life, and disdain for gender inequality. Your life gave my father the courage to become head of household at 14 years old, and the desire to have children of his own. I dedicate this project in part to my maternal grandmother Maria Margarita Nieves, who lived to be 86 years old. When I was fourteen, I interviewed you, craving to learn how you became strong. You shared that you were only allowed to go to school one day in your life, because your parents refused to provide

you with a pencil for school; they told you that you did not need to learn to read or write because as a woman, your place was at home. I think of you often, remembering that my education is a huge privilege paved by your struggles. To my cousin David Mateo and my uncle Eleazar Mateo, the little angels in our family that died as children: you are in our hearts.

A mi madre, que abandonó su pueblo natal siendo una mujer indígena que se negó a ser obligada a contraer matrimonio. Admiro su búsqueda de la libertad de elegir en su vida, luchando por mí antes de que naciera. Gracias por la osadía de querer un futuro diferente para ti y tu hija. A mi padre, que empezó a trabajar desde los 6 años, que creció en un hogar violento, gracias por ser dulce. Sobreviviste a la violencia de género, incluida la tarea de ser el proveedor de todos tus hermanos desde una edad temprana. Descubriste cómo amarte a ti mismo y cómo hacer brillar ese amor dondequiera que vayas.

My grandparents and parents' acts of resistance eventually led us here, to the United States, where I grew up undocumented from ages 4 to 30. For 26-years of my life, including my K-PhD education experiences, I practiced daily acts of resistance to systems that did not "see" me. I graduated from high school in 2010, before CA DREAM Act and Before DACA, and before there were social media pages dedicated to "undocumented" experiences. The first person I "met" who was undocumented outside of my family was Jose Antonio Vargas, the renowned journalist and author, who created a place of belonging for me in his "coming out" articles. He made me feel "seen" for the first time. His coming out allowed me to "see" undocumented communities as powerful, creative, and resilient. Learning about him gave me the courage to "come out" to college admission officers so that I could enroll in community college. Although people did not always know what form I was advocating to use, the one I did not know the name for either, I eventually filled out the form "AB 540" to become a community college student. I

still did not know anyone on my campus, my age, that identified like me until I transferred to UCLA. A college classmate, now a college bestie, introduced me to IDEAS, the organization that not only advocated for undocumented students on campus, but forged community spaces of belonging. I learned that where the system fails to "see" me, my community could step in to meet every sort of need. From a refrigerator with leftovers, a couch to sleep on, and textbooks to emotional support when legal vulnerabilities kicked in so hard that we thought about dropping out. Some of my community members left UCLA for periods of time; I came close to doing the same. I hung on by a thread, feeling fortunate to graduate in 2014. I want to acknowledge the courage of beloved Cinthya Felix Perez for founding IDEAS at UCLA, and Tam Tran, who testified before the House committee in support of the federal DREAM Act. While I did not have the privilege of meeting you in person, as a member of IDEAS, I felt the legacy of your unwavering commitment to undocumented communities. You paved the way for me, and for thousands of students. I dedicate this project to you and your families for making undocumented communities feel "seen".

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There are not enough ways to express my admiration and gratitude for my wife, Annasel Barrios Dugenia. Bumping into you and your friend, on the streets of Long Beach, changed my life's trajectory. Meeting you has made every day since feel like a fairy tale. Above all your wonderful characteristics, your deep compassion for strangers made me fall in love with you. Not only do you have eyes to see injustice, but a heart courageous enough to do something about it. And while our friends and family know we are meant to be together, you and I know that as a lesbian couple, the odds are not always in our favor. We know the danger we face for holding hands, loving each other openly. Thank you for being willing to love me boldly. It is for you, and our children to be, that I am committed to destabilizing the violence that hides in plain sight.

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bold, funny, and brilliant. I learn so much from you. You are evidence that love makes everything possible, se puede porque se quiere.

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found the love of your life, Danny Ikeda, to build an empire with. Thank you to Maria and Steve for showing me what it means to follow your dreams down the path of transformation. You keep me grounded. To Vanessa and Niki, whose partnership is filled with endless possibilities for fun and adventure, thank you for inspiring me in more ways than you know. To Nya Brooks, my housemate, colleague, and sister, thank you for always cheering me on, especially as I applied to graduate school. Thank you for bringing Bre into my life. Juan and Maria Garcia, you are family to me; thank you for sharing the warmth of your home with me during some of the most tumultuous times of my life. Dr. Meghan Condon, thank you for giving me a transformative research experience during my master's program. You coached me through the graduate application journey, motivating me to reach for the PhD. I admire your passion for building structures that create access for under-represented students in higher education to gain new opportunities. You continue to change educational trajectories, like you did my own.

To anyone, who in their own way, resists violence of any kind, I hope you feel "seen" in the pages of this manuscript.

VITA

Elisabet Regina Barrios Dugenia

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

From Hypervisibility to Affirming Visibility: Navigating a Spectrum of Belonging in Public Spaces

by

Elisabet Regina Barrios Dugenia

Doctor of Philosophy in Sociology

University of California, Irvine, 2024

Associate Professor Laura E. Enriquez, Chair

My dissertation is organized in three chapters that examine the role of identity, social context, and agency in shaping safety and belonging across micro public spaces. I draw from interviews with 44 residents of Long Beach, California, 30 of whom identify as LGBTQ. Overall, I ask, what role do social identities have in shaping experiences of safety and belonging in micro public spaces? I examine the following research questions in each chapter: 1) What role does safety play in constructing feelings of belonging? How do gender, sexuality, and race affect feelings of safety in Long Beach micro public spaces? 2) How do LGBTQ individuals, particularly those who identify as gender expansive, experience and navigate visibility and belonging in micro public spaces? 3) How do LGBTQ couples experience visibility and navigate tensions in belonging together? I develop the Spectrum of Belonging framework, that traces the relationship of safety to social exclusion and inclusion. The framework explains how insecurity diminishes belonging while a sense of safety promotes it. I theorize a spectrum of belonging with four gradients: *hypervisibility*, *invisibility*, *visibility* and *affirming visibility* that emerge to the degree that people feel safe, valued, and connected to people and landscapes in their social

environment. The framework is based on participants who experience a spectrum of belonging, and whose experiences in micro public spaces are shaped by city policies, social norms, and social interactions.

INTRODUCTION

The city of Long Beach set the stage with a red-carpet runway culminating in a balloon archway that framed the rainbow stripes of the pride lifeguard tower on Alamitos Beach. Only two weeks prior, a horrible incident occurred in which the original rainbow lifeguard tower burned to the ground. With a freshly painted promise of inclusion as a backdrop to the celebration, the community cheered as the city manager unveiled the new LGBTQ tower. "The station is a symbol of inclusiveness for every child and young person who identifies in the community," he read. "It is a symbol that they matter and that they belong in that space."(Grant 2021). As the city manager signaled with the unveiling of the new LGBTQ tower, the City of Long Beach renewed their promise to create a haven for LGBTQ people in the LGBTQ district in Long Beach. Event attendees took turns walking down the red carpet, taking photographs, and striking poses along the way. When the celebration came to an end and the crowd dispersed, I wondered how much inclusion could be felt beyond red-carpet moments of belonging.

The city of Long Beach is home to deep contradictions with a history of racial segregation, and LGBTQ resistance including the creation of the LGBTQ district along Broadway. Oral histories place LGBTQ sanctuaries in Long Beach as early as 1914, at a time where such spaces were not legal in the United States. It was home to underground LGBTQ spaces like the 606 Club and the 96 Clubs, which were often raided by police who enforced heterosexuality in public spaces. "They would come in with knives, with bats or clubs, different things — they would want to hurt people," said the owner of Club Ripples, another LGBTQ historical landmark (Rasmussen 2019). Despite the risk, speak-easy types of establishments were popular at the time because it was the best way to make friends and fall in love. Sweetwater

Saloon, a historically lesbian bar on the gay strip of Broadway has been open since 1984. Today, it holds a space that is welcoming of women and gender expansive members of the LGBTQ community, making it a fruitful city to study belonging in public spaces.

In Long Beach the legacy of LGBTQ resistance is impressed on the rainbow-colored crosswalks on Broadway Avenue. Segments of Long Beach are visibly proud to be gay, with rainbow flags and decals everywhere, mirroring Castro in San Francisco and Boystown in Chicago, but with a small-town vibe. The politics of public spaces have been central to LGBTQ belonging, and at the heart of Stonewall Riots, Harvey Milk, and current fights for LGBTQ inclusion. After all, legal rights and full participation are often launched through claims of belonging in public spaces. Gathering at the town square of Castro in San Francisco, for example, was instrumental in power demonstrations down Market Street to City Hall. The gayborhood of Long Beach, thus, represents a site of resistance within a politically and ethnically diverse American city. Long Beach with its LGBTQ district and history of reclaiming spaces, emerges as a study site with possibilities of belonging, and limitations of its own.

Living as a marginalized person is a radical act. People of color, queer people, and people with disabilities embody a political self-expression that inherently refuses White ableist heteropatriarchy. The act of "being", existence itself, can be seen as a "protest" to the status quo. Simple acts around "holding hands" or "using the bathroom" are taken as protests when expressed by people who identify as LGBTQ. I look to Long Beach's queer residents to understand the gap between the promise of inclusion and everyday forms of exclusion.

Expanding on previous studies, I examine the social consequences of expressing as LGBTQ in public. Overall, I ask, what role do social identities have in shaping experiences of safety and belonging in micro public spaces? I examine the following research questions in each

chapter: 1) What role does safety play in constructing feelings of belonging? How do gender, sexuality, and race affect feelings of safety in Long Beach micro public spaces? 2) How do LGBTQ individuals, particularly those who identify as gender expansive, experience and navigate visibility and belonging in micro public spaces? 3) How do LGBTQ couples experience visibility and navigate tensions in belonging together?

I argue that social identities interact with physical and social landscapes to create rules and consequences for who belongs where. These create social contexts that evoke a spectrum of belonging in everyday micro public spaces. The variation in spaces reflects the divisions of our society that produces a range of belonging that includes *hypervisibility, invisibility, visibility,* and *affirming visibility*. The spectrum of belonging emerges from feelings evoked by the city policies, social norms, and social interactions that shape public spaces, creating a diversity of social contexts within micro public spaces. The Spectrum of Belonging framework traces how *visibility* of historically marginalized identities shapes safety and belonging across social contexts embedded into public space. By looking at LGBTQ and gender expansive people, who encounter high levels of exclusion in everyday life, I can study the importance of context in creating a spectrum of belonging as individuals navigate and move through space and experience *visibility*.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Belonging & Marginality

Our human need for social acceptance is a mechanism of survival (Maslow 1943). We are motivated to form social bonds (Strayhorn 2018; Tartaglione and Ross 2018) within groups and collectives because these give us a sense of security, identity, and community. While essential, the study of belonging is multidimensional and complex. Belonging is associated with

feelings of safety (Antonsich 2010) and security, (Sedgwick and Yonge 2008) which supports the theory that without safety, belonging is compromised (Maslow 1957).

Belonging brings social boost across areas of life. From boosting physical and mental health outcomes to improving social life, belonging allows people to "play a special role" in a shared social environment (Hagerty et al. 1992; Levett-Jones et al. 2009; Strayhorn 2018). A sense of belonging promotes feelings of "achievement, engagement, and happiness" (Strayhorn 2018). A growing body of research demonstrates that belonging "appears necessary for psychological wellbeing" (Bailey and McLaren 2005; Hagerty et al. 1992; Kissane and McLaren 2006; Vanderhorst and McLaren 2005).

Where belonging gets dynamic, is that it involves reciprocal inclusion. For that reason, belonging is sometimes studied as social integration. It has been found to associated with acceptance, being valued (Finn 1989; Goodenow and Grady 1993; Hagerty et al. 1992; Hausmann, Schofield, and Woods 2007) respected, welcomed (Goodenow and Grady 1993) and in harmony with others (Levett-Jones et al. 2009; Walseth 2006). Having a sense of belonging promotes a feeling of connectedness (Bettez 2010; Cueto et al. 2010; Hill 2009; Hurtado and Carter 1997; Lee and Robbins 1995; Levett-Jones et al. 2009; Maestas, Vaquera, and Zehr 2007; McMillan and Chavis 1986; Museus and Maramba 2011; Sedgwick and Yonge 2008) or being part of a social group.

The absence of belonging produces a feeling of "alienation, rejection, social isolation, loneliness, and marginality" (Hagerty et al. 1992). Social exclusion (not belonging) increases "dissatisfaction, low self- esteem, depression, substance abuse, and suicide" (Hagerty et al. 1992). Social marginalization is the product of being marginalized by a matrix of domination (Collins 1990) that inflicts physical, mental, and emotional harm. It yields negative social,

physical, and mental outcomes for entire segments of society, though these reverberate differently across intersecting identities.

Belonging is a building block of security, identity, and community, used to structure spaces of integration and inclusion. When belonging is compromised, marginalization occurs, in which people no longer feel welcome, accepted, or valued. Historically the process of social marginalization is reproduced to keep groups subjugated by systems of oppression. Systems of domination yield stress, discrimination, shame, and denigration (Galtung 1969), making it difficult for people to secure their basic physical, economic, social, and emotional needs. Marginalization is fueled by unequal power relations that justify the creation of these systems, despite their blatant production of death and physical, social, and mental incapacitation (Puar 2017). Marginalized peoples fight their oppression, using agency to counteract the systematic exclusion they face. They engage in structural, cultural, community and personal acts of resistance to address inequalities or their harmful consequences (Collins 1990). People who are marginalized by a matrix of domination must resist race, gender, and social class disparities to form a sense of belonging.

Negotiating one's belonging within society involves moving through physical and social space. In other words, social boundaries set the basic parameters of who gets to "play a special role" in any given social context and who has legitimate access to spatially coded public space (Almahmood et al. 2018). Interlocking systems of oppression erect racism, heterosexism, ableism "so that one group benefits at the expense of other groups" (Adams, Bell, and Griffin 2007). To belong, marginalized people must navigate, not only structural violence, but symbolic violence as well. Symbolic violence silences people without inflicting physical coercion by legitimizing the matrix of oppression (Collins 1990). It is used to excuse, justify, and promote

exclusion through enactment of social boundaries to help people internalize dominant values (Connolly and Healy 2004) that curtail resistance or consciousness of the violence (Rhodes et al. 2007). Symbolic violence is used to establish different logics of place, that inform who belongs and under what conditions (Kwon 2022). All these structural dynamics add a layer of complexity to what it means to belong today.

Race and Class Narratives of Belonging

The American roots of racial, economic, and sexual oppression are entangled in slavery. Symbolic violence was used to justify the system of slavery, dehumanizing the enslaved. As Messerschmidt puts it, "slavery conveyed to all Black [people] that the fullness of humanity would never be available to them." (Messerschmidt 2013:33). To achieve symbolic denigration, slave owners made enslaved people appear less human. Rhetoric of otherness, the policing of sexuality and movement, became the flag posts of the American republic.

The quest to belong in America is a question of race, class, and sexuality. It is based on cultural narratives of relational social value. The "politics of belonging" are plagued with fear-inducing narratives of "nativism", "orientalism", "savagery", and "illegality" (Rumbaut 1997). Each narrative of difference alludes to entire communities being inferior to White communities (Carpio 2019; Lamont and Molnár 2002; Molina 2014; Reed-Danahay and Brettell 2008; Simonsen 2018; Telles and Ortiz 2008). White supremacist narratives of belonging frame Asian Americans as "perpetual foreigners" and "model minorities" (Lee 2008) and Latino Americans as "invaders" who are "illegally" present (Chavez 2013). These narratives of difference construct Native Americans and Black Americans as "savage" (Almaguer 2008; Oliver 1989) Based on these narratives, Americans of color must resist White supremacy to claim belonging in America.

Today, dehumanizing stereotypes against Black men and Black women have the gendered, raced, and classed entanglements of the past. American society depicts low-income Black communities as deficient oriented with men as "dangerous" and women as "welfare queens". The dehumanizing rhetoric of Black communities includes "crack babies" and "lazy". All these claims are false, yet prevalent, with former President Trump referring to "Black jobs" as "low-wage jobs" that "illegals take". These stereotypes implicitly reinforce the positive bias that associates White communities with "rich", "American", "educated", showing the power of racial stereotypes and their symbols of class.

Class Boundaries

Economic class is a major social boundary that structures the set of relations in society. Some political theories argue that it is the central organizing principle in society (Marx 1921) because it touches everything from food, music, events, leisurely activities. A sense of which class you belong to, is referred to as class consciousness, and it works to suggest who to marry and befriend. People from upper-class backgrounds are socialized to believe that certain places are "exclusive" introducing inequalities in the distribution of social space. Exclusivity is based on exclusion of people from low-income backgrounds. Debutante balls and other extravagant social and leisure activities separate themselves from "ordinary citizens, reminding everyone of the hierarchical nature of the society" (Ostrove 2003, p. 50). Such experiences, clearly a function of economic power and social privilege, foster classed notions of belonging in society. Celebrities and billionaires, too, exclude middle class people by denying access to extravagant spaces yet fostering belonging among the ultra-rich.

Organizations serve as markers of economic class. Access to private education, higher education and leisure activities set apart the middle class from the working poor. Ostrove (2003)

demonstrates that the upper class maintains their class position by establishing boarding schools. Working-class are excluded from middle- and upper-class spaces, including access to spaces and knowledge of how to navigate them. Socioeconomic status, the convergence of educational attainment, income, and occupation (Bettie 2003) merge to forge a class identity by influencing taste, behaviors, and values. For example, middle-class Black identity is distinguished by church and college, gardening, and voting (Patillo-McCoy 1999). Church, college, and voting precincts are examples of the spaces middle class communities access that low-income communities do not. There is no room for working class people in middle class spaces, elite schools, fraternities and sororities, yacht clubs, intended for the middle class to mingle.

Economic class is leveraged to obtain safety and belonging. Financial resources allow middle-class people of color to create social distance to working class people of color, thus drawing closer to high status groups. By distancing themselves from low-income co-ethnics, middle class Americans across races fuel a rhetoric of between the have and have nots. Middle class individuals strive to be recognized, not as a low-income person, but as someone of higher status. To mark the difference between them and others, they resort to strategic identity presentation. They manage to reveal their purchasing power and social networks to present themselves as middle class. The goal of strategic identity presentation is to minimize discrimination and stigma (Goffman 1959). By playing up their purchasing power to "sustain problem-free interactions" with strangers (Lacey 2007) that enables them to distance themselves from discrimination, that could lead to over policing, social exclusion, or stigma. More recent studies show that second generation Korean Americans who attempt to cross class boundaries engage in conspicuous consumption to signal that they belong with "White elites"; they use

economic purchasing power to assert belonging among the elite (Park 2022). However, those unable to cross economic boundaries are considered not to belong.

The class boundaries among working-class communities can forge solidarity. Working-class communities use their class identity to mobilize to achieve progress in education, health, and housing rights (Bolaria and Hier 2006). You can hear echoes of what it means to be working class in music from the American folk song, “I’ve Been Working on the Railroad” to country popular, “Drinking Class” by Lee Brice. These songs allow people to connect over the struggles of people who “bust their backs” for a living. Nevertheless, communities who are often low-income establish their own traditions around art, food, and music (Bourdieu 2018). They foster communities of belonging among shared economic interests such as labor unions, tenants’ rights unions, and vendor rights. They resist economic displacement by sticking together and fighting, usually, wealthy corporations.

Gender and Sexuality Boundaries

Gender orders access to public spaces. Internationally, a person's gender can expose them to different types of violence. Men are more likely to experience and perpetrate interpersonal violence (Fleming et al 2015). Women take precautions to avoid being physically and sexually assaulted by men when they leave the home (Diprose 2007; Valentine 1989). They limit their use of public space to account for times of the day in which the streets are male dominated. Using space at the wrong time is punished by men through sexual violence, blaming women for being out of place. The consequence of gender violence results in “spatial expression of patriarchy” or the “masculinization of space” (Valentine 1989, 2001) where women do not take up space like men. Instead, they self-regulate and self-policing, moving through spaces carrying things, in transition between spaces, instead of “hanging out” like men. Transitory occupation of space is a

precaution of being attacked because of their gender. The violence curfews women's activities, establishing a hierarchical order of genders within public spaces that position men at the top.

For decades, Americans have refused to have a nonbinary conversation about gender. More recently, state agencies have adopted an intersex category on official identification. In most places, however, people who express gender beyond face pushback that allows them to get clothing, body movement, and speech can become the subject of public negotiation. Movements that are coded as "gender nonconforming" or "LGBTQ" shapes the quality of social connections possible for participants who embody such identities. When gender diversity is politicized, participants can be attacked *because of* their gender or sexuality.

In a society that does not always understand what it means to be "gender expansive", fuller expressions of the self can result in tense social situations. "Gender expansive" expressions of gender, which include but are not limited to agender, nonbinary, genderqueer, gender nonconforming identities. They express gender in ways that mix, blur, or refuse "masculine" and "feminine" conceptions of the human body. In heteronormative societies, however, the simple act of walking, talking, or holding hands can be construed as a political act. It can be taken as an act of defiance to gender order that can evoke social consequences in certain contexts.

The social consequences of LGBTQ expression exclusion across sports, entertainment, and leading industries are minimal for a reason. Leading companies like Disney grapple with creating content that is palatable to societies that are hostile to LGBTQ people, including China, Russia, West Asia and the American South (Smith 2022) and while also using their corporate platform to take a stance against the homophobia that inspired the Anti-Gay Legislation in Florida, which prohibits classroom instruction or discussion of "sexual orientation and gender identity" for kindergarten through third grader in public schools (Smith 2022). In 2020, eighteen

states proposed legislation to ban trans-identified student athletes from participating in school sports (Arkles, and Strangio 2020). As a counter response, Megan Rapinoe, an acclaimed LGBTQ professional soccer player, has used her platform to advocate for trans rights by asserting that "trans people belong in sports" (Rapinoe 2021). These anti-gay bills settings infuse into public settings with physical and legal violence that makes them increasingly unwelcoming of gender diversity.

Sexuality is policed with different types of violence. On June 12, 2022, during the season of world-wide gay pride, the Patriot Front, a White supremacist paramilitary group was arrested by police officers for an attempted riot near a Pride event in Coeur d'Alene, Idaho (Halaly 2022). The consequences of holding a stigmatized identity in society include legal violence, social exclusion, and physical, and sexual violence (Herek 1993). Homophobia is one of the fastest growing motivators of hate crimes in the United States (Chibbaro 2019). It fuels hate crimes and legal violence (Menjívar and Abrego 2012) that results in the disproportionate incarceration of LGBTQ youth (Jones 2021). Intersectional identities drive these inequalities further. Women who are lesbian or bisexual are four times as likely to be arrested than straight women. Gay and bisexual men are 1.35 times as likely to be arrested than straight men (Jones 2021). Twenty-seven states in the U.S. do not have discriminatory protections for LGBTQ people in the workplace, housing, or regarding public accommodations (Freedom for All Americans 2022). The American legal system fails to protect LGBTQ people's civil rights, and the violence directed towards them is left unhinged.

Public Spaces and Belonging

City public spaces are the social arenas in which the boundaries between "us" and "them" are reified, contested, and changed. The city is a place where social boundaries uphold sameness

and difference, socially and spatially, between people sharing public space (Tonkiss 2005) George Simmel views cites as the social playground in which identity and place are negotiated. He writes "spatial boundaries are not a spatial fact with social consequences but a sociological fact that forms itself spatially" (1997:3). The park, the library, and the bar become sites in which "bodies are marked in terms of racial, sexual, and cultural difference" based on the social boundaries enacted by "familiar strangers" (Tonkiss 2005:23). The public arenas in an urban landscape site for boundary work formation, contestation, and navigation through which local societies define who belongs where. In other words, "territorialization occurs because power is understood as dividing the social into the acceptable and the unacceptable (Rose 1997) and consequently people's perceptions of "strangeness" and "danger" when interacting with an unfamiliar fellow city dweller (Tonkiss 2005:25). The urban landscape, therefore, becomes an area for politics of belonging (Carpio, Irazábal, and Pulido 2011), which are informed by broader narratives, race, class, gender, and sexuality (Yuval-Davis 2006).

The politics of belonging gives some bodies the privilege to claim space, while forcing others to protect themselves from harassment and violence. Bourdieu considers these status attribution processes as "ennobling" or "stigmatizing" an individual to the extent that they receive privilege or punishment in society (Bourdieu 1991). The micro process through which social boundaries are created invites an examination of the role that strangers play in shaping who belongs where. When it comes to public space, social routes to places are "mediated by 'organizing principles' of class, gender, race, age, and sexuality" (Azmitia and Cooper 2001). Social movements reclaim public spaces through the public demonstration of identities that are usually hidden (Saguy 2020).

Temporary re-coding of spaces shifts social dynamics. For example, Gay Pride celebrations, and political demonstrations such as the Women's March and Dyke March are few examples of the temporary re-coding of public space. More permanent forms of repossession of space take place when there is a demographic shift, and the result is a gay or ethnic enclaves (i.e., "gayborhood") (Forest 1995; Namaste 1996). Temporary and permanent re-coding of space carves out a spectrum of belonging in which racialized and sexualized bodies can experience a sense of acceptance within a community.

The politics of space have been an area of fruitful scholarship. Afterall, public space is a coveted resource that makes it worth fighting for. In her Ted Talk, *How Public Spaces Make Cities Work*, Amanda Burden, an urban planner overseeing New York City's development, says "corporate interests will almost always compete with public interests when it comes to space" urging cities to take the "long road" to protect public spaces that are enjoyable and accessible to all. Negotiations naturally occur within public spaces that are shaped by city and money politics, but people determine how the public resources are used. Just like social spaces are divided into micro interactions, so is public space. Rather than generalizing about public space, I propose looking at public spaces at the micro scale, with a lens towards micro social interactions. Doing so gives us insight into how macro politics come to be and are actively negotiated on the grassroots level. This lens gives us a window into the process through which belonging is bounded and reclaimed, and how these changes across public space at-large. Micro public spaces are critical to our understanding of the role of agency, as they allow us to see, not just the landscapes of power, but the landscapes that community tends to, and overlays. Thus, studying micro public spaces is fruitful for research on belonging, as it allows us to trace the interplay

between the hegemonic constructions of space and micro constructions of space, making room for people to reclaim physical and social belonging in real time.

Theoretical Implications of Belonging

Erving Goffman's theory of identity management, articulated through his "front stage" and "backstage" analogy, explores how individuals navigate and present their identities in social interactions (Goffman 1959). In Goffman's view, the "front stage" represents the public sphere where individuals perform and project specific identities according to social expectations and roles. In this space, individuals adhere to norms and scripts to create a specific impression on others. They engage in impression management, carefully controlling their behavior, appearance, and demeanor to align with the expectations of the audience. Presentations of the self are curated to create a desired impression by managing the presentation of self through verbal and non-verbal communication, adjusting behavior to fit different social contexts, and using props and settings to influence others' perceptions. Conversely, the "backstage" refers to the private, more authentic space where individuals retreat to relax and prepare for their public performances. Here, people can drop their social masks and behave more naturally, away from the scrutiny of the audience. This space allows for the expression of true feelings and the rehearsal of roles and strategies for future performances. Goffman's analogy illustrates that identity is a fluid and context-dependent construct, shaped by the ongoing negotiation between public presentation and private self. While Goffman sheds light on the complexities of social interactions and the ways individuals manage their identities to navigate different social settings, the front of the stage and back of the stage are theorized as separate, not overlapping.

The emergence of public and private spaces converging in public, blurs the distinction between the front and back of the stage. This study delves into the blurring of the front and back

stages. Identity management theory allows us to see how identities can be leveraged to gain belonging. People navigate their interactions with strangers and manage the presentation of the self to minimize discrimination and stigma (Goffman 1959) by playing up their purchasing power to "sustain problem-free interactions" with strangers (Lacey 2007). Working-class people use their class identity to mobilize to achieve progress in education, health, and housing rights (Bolaria and Hier 2006). Goffman's theory, however, does not address group memberships.

Social Identity Theory posits that an individual's self-concept is derived from their membership in social groups (e.g., ethnic, national, or organizational groups) (Turner 1988). Unlike Goffman's focus on performance and impression management, Social Identity Theory emphasizes the role of group memberships in shaping identity. It argues that people categorize themselves and others into social groups, which influences their self-esteem and behavior. The theory focuses on the in-group versus out-group dynamics and how group affiliations contribute to identity formation and intergroup relations. It is useful in conceptualizing concepts like belonging, which refer to group membership and degree of social inclusion by different groups, as well as the role of group membership in shaping identity. It builds on identity management theory by capturing the relational aspects of belonging, while overlooking how they resist and reclaim identities and spaces.

The literature on belonging is rich. It tends to center belonging within one context or add dimensions of belonging without examining how these are layered within the context of everyday space. This leaves us with an abstract notion of the aspects of belonging that matter, but without an operational model of how belonging emerges within and across contexts. Scholars on belonging need a framework that is contextual, dynamic, and traces the underlying forces that shape belonging. Such a model would allow scholars to reverse engineer the recipe for a strong

sense of belonging, seeking to understand the specific ingredients that foster or disrupt belonging, and how these relate to the broader recipe. Like any recipe, an integrative framework that makes room for intersecting identities, social contexts, and agency, will need to be refined through practice and with innovative approaches.

Spectrum of Belonging framework: an integrated lens for the study of belonging

Building on a rich but disjointed literature on belonging, I propose a framework that captures the underlying social dynamics that produce a variety of social experiences. By developing a Spectrum of Belonging framework, I explore how belonging is constructed through both the internal psychological processes and the external, performative aspects of social interactions, thus providing a richer understanding of how individuals experience belonging contextually across their day. The Spectrum of Belonging framework has helped me trace how belonging emerges as a function of group identity *and* from a lived social performance that includes navigating norms and resisting them. For instance, the framework highlights how individuals strategically align their behavior and self-presentation to reinforce their membership and acceptance within a group, while simultaneously navigating the expectations and norms of both front stage and backstage interactions. By bridging SIT, identity management theory and a cross-disciplinary literature on belonging, I examine how individuals balance internal feelings of group identity with the external demands of social performance, thereby gaining an integrated view of how belonging is actively constructed and maintained.

The Spectrum of Belonging framework holds that there are four gradients of belonging that emerge within specific social contexts. *Hypervisibility* is experienced as surveillance and threat that trigger feelings of vulnerability to different forms of insecurity. *Invisibility* is experienced as devalued identities that result in unmet emotional and physical needs. *Visibility*

values identities and acknowledges emotional and physical needs. *Affirming visibility* is experienced when people feel their identities are central; it is the basis of social relationships that foster deep connection at the physical and emotional level.

Throughout this study, I triangulate social identities, social contexts, and agency to show how these create a social force that shapes belonging. The convergence of these creates a spectrum of belonging in everyday micro public spaces that include *hypervisibility, invisibility, visibility,* and *affirming visibility*. *Hypervisibility* makes people feel like they are the target of violence *because* of their intersectional identities. Being too different (visible in a negative way) feels threatening. *Hypervisibility* emerges when people feel surveilled and at-risk for economic, physical, sexual, and identity-based violence. Feeling threatened activates a flight or fight response to emerging vulnerability. In these contexts, insecurity carries economic, physical, sexual, and identity-based implications, leaving them feeling disconnected from people and places within that context. In the context of public space, experiences of *hypervisibility* are navigated in future interactions through refusal. Moving towards absolute belonging, feelings of *invisibility* emerge when people feel devalued and depreciated in each context. When people are made to feel invisible, they walk away with a sense of being unequal to others which diminishes the social value of their contribution within these social contexts. Feeling inferior to others, or at times invisible, makes people feel partially disconnected from the group. It diminishes social connection and leaves those who experience *invisibility* with unmet emotional and physical needs. People use agency to contest this type of social exclusion by attempting to bring positive visibility to their identities. Moving towards inclusion, *visibility* emerges when people feel that their identities are protected and respected. Feelings of *visibility* emerge when people feel safe, and thus relaxed to be there. Feeling *visible* offers a stable basis for social connection. Often DEI

efforts fall within the category of *visibility* of diverse identities reflected on boards and brochures; while those efforts are foundational, visibility alone does not result in deep connection. Moving towards extreme belonging, *affirming visibility* is experienced as described in the seminal definition of belonging -having the opportunity to “play a special role” in a shared social environment (Hagerty et al. 1992). When people feel visible in affirming ways, they can relate to others based on shared identities or interests and make notable contributions. *Affirming visibility* is more than safety, it comes with feeling “seen” and deeply valued. For a visual representation of the Spectrum of Belonging framework see Figure 1 below.

Figure 1. Spectrum of Belonging framework

Spectrum of belonging	**Hypervisibility** Target of Violence	**Invisibility** Devalued, Depreciated	**Visibility** Valued, Appreciated	**Affirming Visibility** Community, Embraced
Experienced as	Insecurity of needs and identities	Unequal recognition of needs and identities	Recognition of needs and identities	Centers needs and identities
Navigated by	Flight, Fight, Refuse	Contest, Overlook, Refuse	Relax, Express, Choose	Relate, Co-create, Cultivate
Effect on Belonging	Disconnected	Unstable Connection	Stable Connection	Strong Connection

METHODS

Study site

On an average day, the city of Long Beach is radiantly sunny. Sixty-three degrees, with a slight breeze, on the coast of California – it is not hard to imagine why Long Beach attracts visitors and residents from all over the world. Long Beach has a reputation of being culturally and politically inclusive. It not only attracts diversity, but it promotes it as a point of pride. Long Beach is home to a vibrant Cambodian, Thai and Filipino communities, *and* a gayborhood. As a tourist destination, Long Beach boasts about its diversity to give people a taste of its many cultures. A wide majority of Long Beach residents in study agree that Long Beach is diverse in

every way thinkable. Due to the gender diversity, sexual and racial diversity in Long Beach, I examine both the forces of exclusion, as well as the strategies people use to navigate exclusion and maximize inclusion.

Data collection

I recruited participants through paper and digital strategies, across various areas of Long Beach to achieve representation across neighborhoods and economic backgrounds. I created a social media page and social media fliers to recruit participants online. I conducted outreach to Long Beach Community College classrooms, University of California classrooms, and circulated information about the study through the Chicano Latino Listserv. I visited California State Long Beach campus, adding fliers to common areas including the library and student centers. I posted fliers in Scherer Park, Sports and Rec Park, Cherry Park, Tierra Mia, Hot Java, The Library, Alamitos Beach path, outside of the Social Security Office and around the surrounding blocks of Central Long Beach. In North Long Beach I posted near the community recreation center and Lakewood's shopping center. I conducted outreach through the Human Trafficking Coalition of Long Beach who is a coalition of service-oriented organizations that work with youth, families, and survivors of trafficking. In the traffic circle area of Long Beach, I posted fliers outside of Staples, Sally's, and sports stores. I conducted outreach to the Filipino Migrant Center, the United Cambodian Community of Long Beach, the LGBTQ Center, and Centro CHA, and posted fliers in as many random posts as I could find, as I drove across the city.

I met with forty-four participants at almost every coffee shop. I encouraged LGBTQ participants, ages 18 and older, to apply while also interviewing 14 heterosexual participants to provide a comparison group. Participants usually chose to meet in a place. I noted the interview places, often asking why we chose that location to ease into a conversation of space. This usually provided a departure point for our conversation on belonging and public places. The interview

guide I used consisted of 17 questions covering a range of topics like personal history in Long Beach, their gender, sexual, and racial identities, family structure, and memories of positive and negative social interactions with strangers in public spaces. As part of the interview, I incorporated two activities related to identity and belonging. In the first I asked participants to draw a self-portrait of themselves. They described their self-portrait with me and shared the places they can be that version of themselves. Then, we discussed anything they have to do to present in other spaces, and why that was important.

At the end of the interviews, participants completed a digital mapping activity where they used emojis to represent places of belonging and disbelonging in the city of Long Beach. I use their pins to understand the social geography they carry with them, and how they use it to navigate social exclusion and maximize social inclusion.

Participants

Participants were compensated $30 for their participation in a 1-1.5-hour interview in-person or online. They were encouraged to refer friends and family, earning $10 per referrals that resulted in interviews. I interviewed thirty Long Beach residents who identified with LGBTQ sexuality and fourteen straight participants for comparison across gender, sexuality, and racial categories for a total of 44 participants. (See Table 1). Among the LGBTQ participants in the study, I found a lot of gender diversity. Of thirty LGBTQ participants, twenty-one identify as gender expansive. Additionally, ten participants identify as men and thirteen as women.

This study is uniquely suited to center LBTQ identities of the queer family, adding a new perspective to LGBTQ scholarship that often centers Gay men. By looking at marginalized groups within the LGBTQ community, I can trace the role of gender expression and gender, in creating moments of exclusion that are unique intersecting identities. Successfully recruiting nonbinary, trans, gender non-conforming participants under the general guise of "LGBTQ

residents of Long Beach" gives me access to center the experiences of gender expansive participants who face higher rates of discrimination (Medina & Mahwald 2023). Most of the participants in this sample are predominantly LGBTQ, and most identity as a person of color. In total I recruited forty-four residents of Long Beach to study the impact of embodying multiple marginalized identities with differences along gender, race, and sexuality. This study explores the hegemony of whiteness in public spaces given the literature on the politics of belonging. To that end, I recruited thirty-one participants who identify as non-white and nine as White. (See Table 2). The "nonwhite" sample consists of participants who identify as Black (n= 10), API (n = 9), Latinx (n= 12), Middle Eastern (n= 1), and Multiracial (n= 3). (See Table 3). The racial diversity of this study allows me to explore the impact of Whiteness, heterosexuality, and cisgender binaries for belonging in public places, further unpacking the differences in experience within the LGBTQ community.

The gender expressions represented in the sample include gender expansive identity that vary from agender, to transgender, to genderqueer which allows us to explore what it means to be queer for people who do not identify as men. Literature shows that gay men experience belonging at the same rate as heterosexual people but asexual, queer, and pansexual report less belonging and more exclusion (Over Zero 2024). The gender diversity in this sample gives ample range to understand how gender function across identities to shape feelings of safety and belonging in public spaces.

Coding and analysis

After each interview I recorded post-interview memos that summarized key points. I used a transcription service, OtterAI, to generate transcriptions from the audio files from interviews. All interviews were recorded and transcribed. I cleaned interview transcripts in OtterAI, and uploaded them into the coding software, HyperResearch. I used flexible coding for my

qualitative data analysis (Deterding and Waters 2021). I started by immersing myself in the data to develop an initial understanding and identify preliminary themes, which included the grounded themes of navigating between spaces, and dealing with strangers' microaggressions. I developed a codebook based on each chapter, or sub research question. These codes included the impact of gender, race, class, and sexuality on safety and belonging. I created codes for factors that made socio-physical landscapes feel affirming, disaffirming, or indifferent. I documented strategies used to navigate micro public spaces. As I progressed with coding, I used axiomatic codes—adding visibility, invisibility, and *hypervisibility* codes, that helped me assess the convergence of identity, context, and agency.

Organization of the Dissertation

Chapter one examines the foundation of safety baked into the city; I show that receiving unwanted attention from others, or feeling *hypervisible*, is linked to feeling vulnerable in social contexts that were carved by city politics. I argue that years of racial politics shape landscapes that create a backdrop with safety implications that drastically shape the possibilities for people to experience belonging in public spaces, which I then explore in Chapters 2 and 3. In chapter two, I center the experiences of LGBTQ identified residents of Long Beach, and the everyday social encounters that produce moments ranging from *hypervisibility* to *affirming visibility*. Rather than looking at belonging as a binary of inclusion and exclusion, I propose that gender expansive participants navigate a spectrum of belonging in everyday micro public spaces that includes feelings of *hypervisibility, invisibility, visibility,* and *affirming visibility*. I trace the process through which they resist social exclusion built into everyday life by refusing to be mistreated and singled out. I give examples of their power in holding space for *affirming visibility* of gender expansive identities, allowing for social interactions that produce a sense of belonging. In chapter three, I center the power

of LGBTQ couples to navigate moments from *hypervisibility* to *affirming visibility*, together. I find that the absence of LGBTQ love stories in mainstream society creates a context of *hypervisibility* for couples who express their affection for one another in public, and a push towards *invisibility* that relegates their relationship to private spaces. LGBTQ couples enter public spaces prepared to navigate politics of *hypervisibility* by choosing not to display affection in public as they work together to de-escalate social situations that are threatening. To combat *invisibility,* LGBTQ couples choose spaces that honor their romantic partnership, while protecting their safety and fostering spaces of belonging.

In each chapter I trace the process through which participants navigate social exclusion built into everyday life and the acts of resistance they use to cultivate spaces that enable communities of belonging. I give examples of their power in holding space for affirming visibility of gender expansive identities, allowing for social interactions that produce a sense of belonging. While not everyone experiences micro public spaces equally, all residents who are familiar with moments of *hypervisibility, invisibility, visibility,* and *affirming visibility* that emerge from the interaction between their social identities and their surrounding context. Consequently, residents of Long Beach learn to navigate between micro public spaces that evoke insecurity, while seeking spaces that enable safety and belonging.

CHAPTER ONE: Navigating Insecurity in Public Spaces

Like other American cities, Long Beach has a history of segregation that is reflected in high school politics. The seemingly innocent question, "What high school did you go to?" reflects race and class dynamics of Long Beach. "Poly", short for Polytech High School, stands for private, elite, and middle class in a generations of privilege kind of way. Poly High has been around since 1895 (Living New Deal 2024). In its inaugural year, Poly Tech graduated one

student, suggesting its elite nature from the start. To date, Poly has sent 60 players to the NFL and holds six Grammy awards in music, among a wall of athletic accolades (Play Football 2023). Wilken and Milliken High schools trail in the glamor of Poly High School as "good schools". These high schools stand in sharp contrast with Reid High School, across from the 405 freeway, where 95 percent of students are ethnic minorities. Reid is known for having a 56 % graduation rate, 4% reading proficiency, 0% math proficiency. Jordan High School, another high school bordered by a major highway, the 710, has 98 % minority students with 77% graduation rate, 32% reading proficiency, 6% math proficiency (US News 2024). The stark difference in student outcomes gives us a reflection of Long Beach and its history of segregation and economic exclusion.

Like most American cities, Long Beach has race and class politics that reflect a deep tension between racial integration and racial inequality. Long Beach was sought out by Black Americans seeking to live in racially integrated cities on the West Coast. In the 1920's Long Beach held promise of a better future for Black communities, while also serving as a stomping ground to Ku Klux Klan, where, in 1926, 30,000 members marched down Ocean Boulevard of which 5,000 were thought to be residents of Long Beach (Health and Human Services 2024). At the same time, Long Beach holds a deep connection with "South LA" where Black culture has strong roots, making a city that reflects deeper politics of the nation. Long Beach's Black culture includes being home to Black American jazz singer, Nat King Cole, was said to work at the Pike Amusement Park in Long Beach in the 1930's before he worked his way onto Hollywood red carpet. A local history timeline reports: "In 1919, African American residents in Long Beach protested a popular game at the Pike called 'Drowning the [N-word'] in which players would throw a ball at a target to dunk a Black man into a tank of water. Despite their efforts to remove

it, the game remained at the Pike into the 1950's." (Health and Human Services 2024). During World War II, Long Beach became a home base for Black and White American sailors who experienced Long Beach as a segregated city where Ocean Boulevard USO served White sailors, while the USO in Central Long Beach felt more welcoming to Black sailors (Fresh Coast LBC 2023). In 1966 Dorothy Height, a key figure in the Modern Civil Rights Movement, was the keynote speaker at a meeting of the Long Beach Chapter of the National Council of Negro Women held at the Art Deco building, adding another major civil rights contribution to local and American history (Downtown Scene Newsletter 2022). In efforts to address some of the lingering racial cracks in the city, in 2018, the City of Long Beach established an African American Cultural Center through the support of Council member Austin Al. The project involves the opening of a center that offers workshops and walking tours that bring visibility to Black history in city public spaces. The African American Cultural Center reclaims historical accounts that describe Long Beach as "Iowa by the Sea", a monolithic White portrait of the city, reminding us that Long Beach is rooted in Black culture much like South LA.

Given the rich yet complicated history of Long Beach- a small town-vibe connected to big city politics, what role does safety play in constructing feelings of belonging? How do gender, sexuality, and race affect feelings of safety in Long Beach micro public spaces? I look to Long Beach as an industrial port city with a history of racial segregation, which like many American cities, flaunts its racial diversity. I hover over people's social experiences in micro public spaces- the mini social contexts within publicly accessible spaces- to better understand how they navigate space as they move through the city.

In this chapter, I show that city policies segregate neighborhoods in Long Beach by race and class, which forge social contexts that create different types of insecurity as residents of Long Beach move through micro public spaces. I demonstrate that moments of insecurity are linked to *hypervisibility* which signals risk of physical, sexual, and verbal violence that is contingent on intersecting identities of race, gender, class, and sexuality. While not everyone feels unsafe in the same spaces, all residents who are familiar with feeling unsafe in social contexts feel threatened by their social identities, thus producing feelings of being *hypervisible*, or at odds with their surrounding context. Consequently, residents of Long Beach learn to navigate micro public spaces that threaten their sense of safety as they move through the city. This chapter examines the foundation of safety baked into the city; I show that receiving unwanted attention from others or, feeling *hypervisible*, is linked to feeling vulnerable in social contexts that were carved by city politics. I argue that years of racial politics shape landscapes that create a backdrop with safety implications that drastically shape the possibilities for people to experience belonging in public spaces.

Navigating Physical Insecurity: Concerns about Violence and Safety

The city of Long Beach, like most American cities, has grappled with the promise of inclusion while upholding racial divisions in the city through housing policy. Long Beach is known as a "city of neighborhoods", a label that alludes to the gradual carving of the city through economic policies. The forty-six neighborhoods of Long Beach were forged through housing policies, tax policies, and long histories of racial segregation that create a landscape with rules about who belongs where. At the turn of the 20th century, Long Beach became an integrated city with economic opportunities for Black communities, but it held onto racist practices. In fact, Long Beach data shows that "Black people, who comprise about 13% of Long

Beach's population, have more health problems — especially respiratory illnesses — a lower life expectancy and greater poverty rates than the city as a whole" (Evains and Haire 2021). Long Beach holds deep contradictions between its racially integrated stance and the racial inequality that burden every modern city in America, making the lessons from Long Beach relevant to other neighborhood cities with an inclusive political tone.

The racial and class inequalities are obvious to the participants, who argue that the city of Long Beach is not equally invested in all its neighborhoods. When asked how they feel about Long Beach, participants often answered by asking, "What part of Long Beach?" pointing to the inequalities that have created different pockets of the city. Long Beach was shaped by politics that have created middle class neighborhoods, but neglected parts of Alamitos, North and Central. These pockets of Long Beach are marked by abandoned buildings, empty lots, cracking sidewalks, and wrapped in the stench of urine pointing to the concentration of poverty. These pockets are filled with shadows of a history of racial difference that complicates life for its residents. When I met Sheila, a Black woman in her early 70s, she told me that had lived in Long Beach for 30 years. She moved out of the Deep Alabama South, where she and her sister were the first to integrate their school in her area. When Sheila moved to Long Beach, she found new opportunities. She was mesmerized by South L.A. and parts of Long Beach that felt like it, where she saw thriving Black business districts, something she did not find in her town in Alabama. On the other hand, she quickly sensed segregation in the city. Sheila lives in Central Long Beach, two blocks down from a blighted business plaza, near five abandoned storefronts standing in for old vibrant commercial districts that were gutted and never replaced. Her community of apartments is tucked behind Jordan High School, one of the predominantly minority high schools with 80% of students receiving free and reduced lunch. Sheila has lived in her apartment for over

25 years, seeing neighbors come and go. Sheila has witnessed the trickle-down effects on city disinvestment and how these produce insecurity around her block. A year prior, Sheila intervened to save a teenage boy from getting jumped by a group of other teenage boys. "I was waiting for the bus when they threatened the neighbor from upstairs, I vouched for him saying 'I know him' and they let him go." Unfortunately, Sheila knows neighbors who have lost young family members to street politics in a city that struggles with pockets of violence and economic insecurity. Her history in the city captures a broader pattern of disinvestment in neighborhoods with communities of color that has fueled pockets of gun violence and insecurity.

Physical insecurity, or the fear of physical violence, was a common safety concern among all participants. Growing up in Long Beach looks vastly different depending on "where in Long Beach" participants were from. Participants who grew up in pockets like Alamitos, North, Central Long Beach learned to confront violence and circumvent it. According to participants who were born and raised in Long Beach, the risk of being robbed, jumped, or threatened at gunpoint is part of the backdrop of everyday life - especially for communities of color whose very own neighborhoods have been disinvested in by the city. Being "from Long Beach" in these contexts means being aware of where you are, and who you are, and interaction of the two. Participants, particularly those who grew up in neglected neighborhoods, talk about how the threat of violence creeped into their early childhood memories. For example, Felipe, a Mexican American 20-year-old resident of Long Beach, shares how intertwined his sense of place is with safety. He shares that when his mom was pregnant with him, she had a close call that marked their lives:

> It's crazy how the universe works. [My parents] didn't get robbed, but only because a cop car pulled up and he [the assailant] walked away. My mom was in tears. My dad was like, wow. And it kind of sit for them 'oh, this is this is not a

> neighborhood where my kids can grow up to be outside and be walking around- they need to stay in the backyard.'

From the moment his pregnant mother and father were robbed at gunpoint, Felipe grew up with parents who were worried about his safety. His family tried to protect him by keeping him in the backyard as a child, though as a teenager, Felipe had to devise his own ways of keeping safe because as he grew, insecurity in Long Beach grew too. Neighborhoods that have been disinvested foreground for moments of *hypervisibility*, where people face feeling at-risk due to unwanted attention. Like his father, Felipe learned to cope with the risk of violence stitched into his neighborhood and across pockets of the city. Felipe compared his experience of navigating public spaces across Long Beach to "a Big Mouth episode where the Black dude turns on his White voice around White people and Black voice around Black…". Felipe uses that analogy to tell me that he has his own dial to adjust to varying social contexts in efforts to stay safe. As a young adult, he turns the dial to combat the risk of feeling *hypervisible* as an outsider to the street politics in his neighborhood. By walking tall and broad, with a facial expression that says, "I am not afraid", setting the dial to "fearless" and "not an easy target". In moments where he feels safe in Long Beach, he lays out on the grass, looking for constellations in the sky. For these experiences, Felipe leaves his neighborhood returning to his elementary school in Lakewood, a place that reminds him of happy simpler times, when his mom dropped him off at school. Like Felipe, other participants share their own version of "turning the dial" to manage the insecurity stitched into the backdrop of the city.

The history of Long Beach as a racially segregated city creates a landscape that has left parts of the city in shambles and others in glory. Long Beach neighborhoods, which create a race and class context for current residents, are the product of the Federal Housing Association and private banks implemented redlining, which restricted loans based on the racial makeup of the

neighborhood. “Central Long Beach - where many people of color lived and still live - was a redlined neighborhood, deemed too risky for investment by lenders.” (Health and Human Services 2024). This led to the demise of the core of the city - one of the only areas where people of color could buy property. During this same time, deed restrictions prohibited the purchase, lease, or occupation of property by people of color in East Long Beach, Bixby Knolls, and Lakewood, pockets of Long Beach that are still predominantly White-owned today. The carving out of the city, makes participants think of Long Beach as having pockets – areas for separate communities across the city- that create social contexts in which people experience *hypervisibility* when they leave their neighborhood. Feeling hypervisible creates vulnerability that makes residents feel out of place and targeted for it.

Participants who live in or by the disinvested neighborhoods are familiar with feeling *hypervisible*, like “all eyes on you” in a dangerous way. Feelings of insecurity are closely associated with feeling *hypervisible*, yet the risks of being *hypervisible* are not equally experienced. Men of color often report confronting risks of physical violence as a part of walking through a city with pockets controlled by street politics in middle school and high school years. Once men of color started walking home from school or riding the bus, they had incidents that taught them to be wary of certain public spaces. Marcus, a 28-year-old Filipino man, remembers almost being jumped on his way home from high school one day. He grew up in North Long Beach where many Filipino residents abide, yet he crossed through a predominantly Black neighborhood. Noting the contrast between Marcus’ identities as a Filipino, middle class young man, crossing through a landscape of Section 8 housing that had predominantly Black residents, made him feel *hypervisible*. Suddenly, a group of young boys surrounded him to ask, “Who do you rep”? Stunned by the question, Marcus did not respond. The group followed up with, “Do

you run with the Asian Boyz?", one of the gangs in Long Beach. Desperate to get away, Marcus gulped and nodded. To this day, Marcus is not sure why they let him go, but he is thankful to have made it out unscathed. Now, twelve years later, Marcus laughs at the thought of having claimed to be an Asian Boy, a gang he was never affiliated with or aware of when he was in high school. Now he understands this moment as the type of thing that happens in disinvested areas of Long Beach, the type of space that he avoids.

The backdrop of insecurity that stems from economic need, positions men on the frontline of violence. Men across racial backgrounds shared an expectation to "deal with the violence" on them. Whereas women and gender expansive participants face a risk of sexual violence, men share moments in which they were physically confronted, assaulted, or felt the need fight to protect someone they care about. The convergence of race, gender, and class identities converge to create moments of insecurity that can produce *hypervisibility*. While these moments occur as people move to and from pockets in the city, the risk of violence feels imminent. Felipe, for example, deals with violence and insecurity even in places of work. He is currently a student at Long Beach City College and a full-time employee at the Pike, the same place with the racist game described earlier. Before his current job, when he managed an after-school program for children, he told me that he was on the front lines of confronting physical violence, "One time a guy tried to storm into our kids' cooking class! I had to run towards him and shove him out the door" he shared, still remembering the adrenaline he felt. His working-class background and gender position him towards working jobs in which as a part of his work, he is responsible for curtailing violence. Similarly, Adan, a 45-year-old Mexican man, who has lived in Long Beach for almost 9 years since immigrating to Long Beach, works at a Laundromat in Central Long Beach. He works in an area where the city has disinvested and unhoused

communities are seen with nowhere to go. As a part of his work, Adan ends up on the frontline, *hypervisible* as a working-class man of color surrounded by economic need. He receives pleas from the neighborhood, including from unhoused community members who face extreme economic insecurity. "Some people ask for water, and I give them water, but other people yell at me because they want free washes". Adan shared that one time an unhoused community member tried to hit him, and yet another time, he was threatened by men with guns who were upset that they did not get free washes. Adan shared video camera footage of many of the incidents that make him feel *hypervisible* during his work hours, yet shares that even with strong evidence, he feels like there is no one to help him in those moments. When he has called the police, he says the police rarely come, and if they do, they do nothing. Felipe and Adan face violence in Long Beach as working-class men of color, who are exposed to violent attacks as a daily nature of their work. When I asked Adan if he ever felt threatened outside of working hours, he shared that mostly walking alone anywhere outside of his quiet Signal Hill neighborhood makes him feel the need to be aware, to watch his back. Adan chooses to drive most places, to buffer some of the *hypervisibility* he faces as a man of color navigating the Long Beach street politics. Men of color like him share similar moments in which they cannot escape feeling *hypervisible,* a feeling linked to feeling vulnerable to physical attack.

Long Beach through its redevelopment policies takes actions that shift environments in favor of the economically privileged. Gentrification stems from the city developing areas that have been historically disinvested in. When the city invests to attract wealthier residents, they contribute to the displacement of the families already living there. These demographic shifts in neighborhoods create moments of *hypervisibility*- making long-term residents feel like outsiders on their own block. The history of displaced communities within Long Beach includes a history

that gutted the city of its White middle-class families, leaving low-income people of color in the city. When I spoke to Jesse, a 25-year-old Puerto Rican resident of North Long Beach shares, "My neighborhood got the roads repaved and recently a lot of White residents are moving in… I can tell because I see them jogging by my house" Jesse shares. Prior to recent investment in his area, Jesse grew up feeling largely invisible to the City of Long Beach, who has disinvested in this neighborhood. Now that investment is coming in, his family and neighbors are being pushed out, a demographic shift that makes him feel *hypervisible* in his neighborhood of 15 years. His neighborhood is experiencing gentrification and resisting it. "People think you're suspicious for some reason," Jesse shares as he walks in his neighborhood, showing the effect that a changing landscape has on his daily experience. Jesse shares that at first, it was the affluent residents that "stuck out" but now, Jesse feels like their neighborhood is being reconstructed all around him, making him and his family feel *hypervisible*.

Communities of color in Long Beach fight the loss of space, and rights to space, as higher income buyers decide to flood in to enjoy the gentrifying restaurants the City approved. Like in other parts of the country, low-income people of color are re-shuffled to make space for "redevelopment". The changing landscape around families of color, makes them feel unsafe in their own neighborhoods. This is not the type of safety that refers to gentrifiers violently assaulting low-income residents, but that they would use economic force to push them out. City beautification projects in underinvested neighborhoods positions people of color, as the outsider on their block, and a target for displacement. These feelings of insecurity are closely tied to feelings of social exclusion. Rio, a Filipino nonbinary participant who also lives in North Long Beach, an area known for industrial parks, is on the front lines of fighting gentrification at City Council. While they raise the concerns at city council meetings of the displacement of

multigenerational households with redevelopment projects, they do not feel heard by the city. Their experiences show they experience *hypervisibility* in their neighborhoods, yet *invisibility* in City Hall, both which work simultaneously to exclude marginalized members of a community. As residents of these neighborhoods start to feel like outsiders on their block, they resist being displaced in favor of wealthier buyers, and yet see a pattern of social exclusion implemented under the guise of economic development before.

Men who live in wealthier areas share they also experience moments of *hypervisibility*, and the vulnerability it brings. When middle class men move through the city, there are moments where they feel at odds with their social environment. Brad, a White man in his 40s, lives along the Peninsula of Long Beach. He is a liquor shop owner and keeper in Central Long Beach. He does feel safe in the neighborhood he works in because it has been historically disinvested in. Brad's experience demonstrates that White affluent men experience *hypervisibility* as a function of how their identities are understood within a social context. In this case, the interaction of his gender, class, and race makes him feel vulnerable to attacks when he is tending his shop in Central Long Beach, where economic need runs high. Brad shares that his customers can get rowdy. One time he kicked out a customer from the store and he came back with a gun. "I am lucky to be alive," he said. Brad sought a restraining order against that customer, but it was never enforced. The customer came back a couple of times, and when Brad called the police, he could not believe their slow response. His positionality as a White affluent man made him comfortable talking to the police sergeant of the precinct, asking him why he didn't send help earlier. Brad's experience left him feeling that the police sergeant discriminated against because he is not a "little old lady".

> I have a restraining order, like what if I was some, like a poor old lady, you know, who's whatever ex-husband or somebody's trying to attack me? Like, four hours seems kind of out of line. And then the sergeant wants to argue with me like, 'no, it's only been three hours and twenty-seven minutes.'

Brad faces *hypervisibility* in low-income neighborhoods of color. As a White man, he feels like his identities can become the target of robbery and physical assault. Brad exemplifies how race, class, and gender interact with physical spaces that make him feel *hypervisible*. To combat the feeling of insecurity that comes with feeling *hypervisible* he filed a restraining order. Yet the police department makes him feel unheard. Like Rio, who appeals to City Hall with no avail, Brad appeals to the judicial system in vain. Even when Brad follows the process of filing a restraining order, he does not see it enforced. When I asked how he made sense of this, Brad shared that as a man he is expected to "tough it out". He understands his gender as being the reason why his insecurity was deprioritized.

Navigating Sexual Insecurity

Sexual insecurity, defined by fear of sexual violence, was a safety concern amongst sexually marginalized individuals including women and gender-expensive individuals and *hypervisibility* was the warning. In addition to fear of facing economically motivated crimes, queer and straight women, shared concern is facing sexual violence emerged. They shared a concern that moments of *hypervisibility* can result in sexual attacks by men in public spaces. Eva, a Filipina 23-year-old bartender shared that when she walks home, especially after work, she fears being seen alone. Eva feels a sense of *hypervisibility*, created by seeing no other women out during the times she walks home. Consequently, she adopts a strategy to make it home safely.

> I kind of hold my keys in my fist, ready to go, just in case as like, it just makes me feel better. I kind of speed walk to my apartment, because it is at night when I start seeing more men out.

When Eva walks home, she worries that on her way home, she might encounter sexual violence. Sometimes she catches a ride with co-workers, takes public transportation, or walks home with friends. Eva gave up on fixing her lemon car - which places her in the middle of street politics more often than participants who had access to private car transportation. Eva shares that she feels *hypervisible* in her surroundings as a woman by herself in public at night. She navigates sexual insecurity in addition to the fear of getting robbed. Days before the interview, Eva shared that she went out with friends after work. As she was walking home, a man approached her, demanding her bag. “The first thing I did was look at his hands to see if we had any type of weapon. Once I realized he didn’t have anything, I made a run for it.” To Eva, feeling hypervisible is linked to feeling vulnerable to attack- whether that be economically or sexually motivated. She is strategic, like keeping the keys in her fist to punch someone, or making a run to resist the violence she faces as a woman. Like Eva, queer and straight women, fear sexual violence in addition to economically driven violence.

Gender expansive participants experience feeling *hypervisible* in public spaces too. Rio identifies as transmasculine, however, is often misgendered as a “woman” by others in passing. Rio complains about having heard men make explicit sexual comments about their body when they walk by. These comments plant in them a fear that being objectified and weary of sexual violence. In addition to facing sexual insecurity like women in this study, Rio shares that they fear their trans identity makes them feel *hypervisible* in a cisgendered society. They hear about transphobic hate crimes from friends and the news. This informs the way Rio feels when they navigate micro public spaces. Rio describes her concerns:

> Knowing that there's just so much violence against women and also trans people will naturally put me on edge when I'm out. It is also why I really try not to be out by myself a lot of the time in public social spaces.

Gender violence in public spaces creates a challenge for Rio, who confronts misogyny *and* transphobia in everyday contexts. Gender expansive participants encounter identity-specific threats as they move through micro public spaces. Rio gives us a sense of another worry in the back of gender expansive participants' minds as they maneuver through cisgender societal expectations. They walk with an awareness of the risks that come with being trans in mostly hetero cisgendered society.

Feeling *hypervisibl*e has cascading consequences. When I spoke to Jay, a trans White queer advocate who works to provide health care access to at-risk LGBTQ communities, they shared that their work exposes them to, not just their lived safety concerns, but those that are widely shared among the trans community, *hypervisibility*. As a case manager serving the LGBTQ community of Long Beach, they know of clients, particularly those who rely on public transportation or walking to get around, "adjust their dress or make-up before taking the bus or going into a neighborhood that is not accepting- but here they can be fully themselves…" Jay shared. Jay notices that clients combat feelings of concern of the transphobia on the streets of Long Beach by choosing where to express their gender identity. They navigate moments of feeling *hypervisible* to protect their personal safety. "Many of them get UTIs unfortunately, because they are unwilling to use public restrooms, out of fear of attack." As we will delve into Chapter 2, on the role gender expression has on belonging, public restrooms can be one of the micro spaces in which *hypervisibility* becomes linked to feelings of LGBTQ-related insecurity.

Navigating a heteronormative world is challenging for queer women who experience a heterosexual society. Living in a world that assumes heterosexuality can create tense moments of

hypervisibility moving across micro spaces. For example, Marina, a queer woman in her mid 30s, encounters verbal harassment from men who objectify her. Her queerness is rendered invisible in a society that assumes all women are heterosexual. One time, Marina was on the Alamito Beach bike path by herself when she heard a man comment on her body, alluding to having sexual interest. She experienced *hypervisibility,* becoming the center of unwanted attention from a stranger. Marina's response reflects a mix of discomfort and familiarity with this type of incident.

> And there was a man just kind of standing there like talking to himself. But like, as I'm walking by, he says, "oh, like the supermodel of the world. It's gonna be a tough one this year!" I'm like, "Okay, I'm a little uncomfortable, but also like, at least at least you weren't like, you know, doing anything too crazy."

Marina grapples with heteronormative assumptions of her sexuality that result in men who make sexual advances, assuming that Marina would be interested in them. During these moments, Marina feels *hypervisible*. She grapples between being confronted with correcting strangers or playing into their assumptions. Her experience represents the social and physical discomfort of *hypervisibility*. LGBTQ women are commonly "cat called" as they move through public space, evoking a reminder that they are not safe. Incidents like these, that are normalized, or even glorified in movies, produce stress and discomfort. Marina sheds light on the pervasive culture of harassment and microaggressions that she and other women often endure, making her feel *hypervisible* as a woman crossing through space, yet invisible as a queer woman in society.

Navigating LGBTQ-related Insecurity

LGBTQ-related insecurity, defined by fear of violence targeting sexual diversity, was a safety concern across gender. Especially, anyone who expressed gender outside of the cis binary, felt vulnerable to attack. Trans, gender expansive, men and women who defy gender norms talked about feeling *hypervisibility* because of it. While Long Beach has areas that are LGBTQ

inclusive, inclusion is still a divisive issue. Long Beach has reported an up-tick of violence directed at LGBTQ residents (Olmos 2023). To commemorate the lives taken by LGBTQ-directed violence, the City of Los Angeles partnered with the City of Long Beach in sponsoring a new mural in the LGBTQ district of Long Beach. Proudly displayed in Cherry Park the mural "underscores a need to come together and show solidarity with the LGBTQ community" by documenting a history of resistance to queer oppression. The mural is an effort from both cities to increase awareness of the rise in hate crimes against LGBTQ communities across California by shifting the tone of space (LA vs Hate 2022). The mural is an effort to plant seeds of unity, yet the spatial reality is that Long Beach is a city with many pockets, not all of them safe to walk in, despite Long Beach investing in a reputation of being LGBTQ-friendly.

The context of Long Beach as a violent city, gives weight to the safety risks that come with encountering someone who is homophobic or transphobic. Transgender hate has been described as "overwhelmingly Black, under 35 and killed with a firearm", in America (Schoenbaum 2022). The threat of extreme physical violence is part of the backdrop of everyday spaces, but it is mostly targeting people who do not conform to the gender binaries. The threat of extreme physical violence is part of the backdrop of everyday spaces, but it is mostly trans and gender expansive people that feel *hypervisible* in micro public spaces. The heightened risk of gender violence comes with *hypervisibility* that produces feelings of insecurity as they move through pockets of spaces.

Earlier in 2024, a gay man was stabbed in front of a bar on Broadway Ave. while he was with his partner. He died that night. While the cause of the fight that took his life may never come to light, the implications of physical violence in the middle of the LGBTQ district creates a feeling of threat for the queer community. LGBTQ couples talk about feeling *hypervisible* as

they navigate micro public spaces. One time, Suze a lesbian Filipino woman, went into a bar in Long Beach, leading her wife into a bar that, unbeknown to them, had conservative patrons. As they walked in holding hands, they began to look around, they noticed a lot of eyes were on them. “We left before finishing our drink... Your worst fear is to be shot just for being together,” Suze shared, as she explained that being out for her also meant not putting up with spaces that “do not feel right”. Suze, like other queer participants in this study, have felt vulnerable to attack because of their gender and sexuality. Learning from experience, however, gives Suze and her wife future leverage- the power to stay away, to refuse to be in threatening spaces. Their safety insecurity is understood by loved ones and people with shared values and identities, who often share the pain of knowledge of LGBTQ-motivated crimes.

Visibility of queer identities comes with risk of being *hypervisible*. To mitigate that risk, participants can downplay their LGBTQ visibility to avoid incidents of violence. Jerry, a gay Mexican man, learned that men who sway their hips as they walk are vulnerable to attack. He grew up hearing hateful words used towards men who are gay, and it made him afraid to reveal his sexuality. A high school counselor connected Jerry to an LGBTQ coffee hour for high school students in Long Beach. During that queer coffee hour, Jerry experienced feeling safety as a gay man, once a week. Everywhere else, Jerry learned to “stiffen up” while walking through the streets of Long Beach. Showing too much hip sway made him afraid of becoming *hypervisible*, and consequently the target of violence. When Jerry spends time in the LGBTQ district, along Cherry between 4th and Broadway Ave, he exhales a sigh of relief to walk normally and safely. Participants who are gender expansive, or who queer gender, learn to adjust their body movement to conceal deviance in heteronormative norms. This becomes an everyday strategy of navigating micro public spaces, not just for Jerry, but for participants who blur cisgender notions

of gender. Furthermore, Jerry's experiences exemplify the jarring contrast between moving from spaces of *affirming visibility* where he felt fully community among LGBTQ youth across the city, to spaces of *hypervisibility* where he felt the need to adapt his hip sway, back to spaces of *visibility* like the LGBTQ district where he experiences relief from fear of attack. Like him, gender expansive participants, and cisgender participants who queer gender with their dress, mannerisms, and body movements, learn to carry themselves to maximize safety across different micro public spaces.

Just like getting dressed for the day depends on the day's activities, gender presentations shift with social contexts to balance social contexts and personal identities. Navigating everyday spaces meant striking a balance between *visibility*, associated with being able to express freely, and *hypervisibility* associated with feelings of vulnerability and insecurity. Participants carefully consider when and how to present their sexual orientation and/or gender identity within gendered spaces. Jerry, who navigates between micro public spaces, shares the overlap between feeling visible and hypervisible. At times the two feelings converge within the same space, revealing gendered patterns in policing *hypervisibility*. When Jerry eats his favorite Mexican *platillos*, he occasionally encounters negative reactions from co-ethnic, "young men" who comment on his sexuality. When that happens, the comments he hears, makes him feel hypervisible. Being singled out as the only gay man in the space, he is *hypervisible* and thus vulnerable to attack. At the same time, his cultural knowledge of food, dress, and values, his cultural repertoire, help him connect with "older Latina women". "Mijo", my son, co-ethnic older women call Jerry, drawing him in closer. These moments represent spaces of *partial visibility* where participants feel safe among some yet unsafe around others. Like Jerry, participants experience a mixed bag of public reactions as they move through everyday spaces. The mixed bag may include moments of

inclusion and moments of exclusion, that are patterned by gendered policing. Most importantly, we see how the intersection of participants' gender and cultural identities wedge them between *hypervisibility,* feeling insecurity, and *affirming visibility* that grants them a feeling of community.

Daily social interactions across a diversity of micro public spaces can create a composite sense of space that informs notions of *hypervisibility*. Participants learn to move strategically through pockets of Long Beach; when they find pockets that make them feel safe, it fosters a foundation for belonging. Jay, a Long Beach transplant, noticed the collective shift in LGBTQ inclusivity of Long Beach compared to upstate New York. Jay had only been living in Long Beach for a little over a year, but they were already involved with many queer groups and organizing spaces. When I asked how their New York hometown compared to Long Beach in terms of safety and belonging, Jay was quick to point out the political differences and how these translated into a general sense of openness around strangers walking by:

> I guess being trans, I was starting to feel like there wasn't enough space for me in rural, upstate New York. And I kind of wanted this combination of having a little bit of a city, but also enjoying fruits and vegetables and having produce locally, and having a local community, where we were all kind of accountable to each other. And I don't know, this sense of like, knowing folks on the street as you're walking around and stuff like that. But feeling safe, well, like walking around, I kind of felt like, if not Southern California, like where in this country would it be safe? So, it's like this idea that it was like progressive, and everyone's a little bit more on the same page of, like, where we stand and like diversity, equity, inclusion, anti-racism, stuff like that.

Jay's daily social interactions create a composite sense of safety as they move through space. The simple act of being able to walk around, with less fear of harm, makes Jay feel thousands of miles away from the *hypervisibility* they experienced on the East Coast. Jay shares how for them, moving to Long Beach meant being "on the same page" with others. While not all Long Beach

feels equally inclusive, in Long Beach they have relatively more opportunity to safely walk around. Like Jay, other gender expansive participants develop a general sense of safety, or insecurity, based on fleeting everyday social interactions, and these notions of safety shape belonging. They describe a palpable difference of feeling overall inclusion in the air when surrounded by gender-affirming people that make them feel “safe to walk around”.

Conclusion

A sense of belonging emerges to the degree that people feel safe, valued, and connected to people and landscapes in their social environment. Feelings of insecurity diminishes belonging while a sense of safety promotes it. In this chapter, I examine how *hypervisibility* emerges from moments of physical, sexual, or identity-based insecurity in public spaces. When *hypervisibility* is activated, participants become concerned with navigating safety risks. In the process, they resort to flight or fight strategies that disrupt social connections. Feelings of *hypervisibility* trigger psychological mechanisms of self-defense. It comes with a physiological stress response. Understanding who, why, and where people experience *hypervisibility* in micro public spaces is essential to building a foundation for belonging.

The forty-six neighborhoods of Long Beach were forged through housing policies, tax policies, and long histories of racial segregation that create a landscape with rules about who belongs where. Given this city landscape, and the emerging pockets of street politics that ensue, participants become aware of the social risk of being in the wrong place at the wrong time. They describe adjusting to worry of *hypervisibility,* which triggers feelings of vulnerability to varying forms of insecurity. While every participant faces unique challenges, they adjust their body movement in ways that align with their sense of safety to combat identity-based and context-specific safety concerns as they move between micro public spaces. They use their knowledge of

space and past experiences of *hypervisibility* to strategically maneuver through a patchwork of inclusion in the city.

Gendered insecurity produces different risks associated with *hypervisibility*. Men face physical and are economically motivated violence and are expected to confront it on their own. This makes them feel that their safety needs are not valued equally. Women, on the other hand, report constantly monitoring for threat of sexual violence and economic violence. They fear men that would attack them for walking by "at the wrong place at the wrong time". Women feel supported by loved ones who give them a ride or walk alongside them, as men and women understand being a woman in public spaces to be unsafe. LGBTQ participants use strategic gender presentation, to minimize *hypervisibility* that produces vulnerability to violence. Gender expansive and cis genderqueer participants associate *hypervisibility* with transphobic attacks- which include a range of physical and sexual risks. Their safety insecurity is understood by loved ones and people with shared values and identities.

Everyday fleeting interactions within micro public spaces feed overall feelings of security and insecurity. Participants have visceral reactions when they do not feel safe, alluding to not being able to walk freely, or breathe. The interaction of intersecting identities along race, class, gender, and sexuality, within a violent race and classed context fostered by racial and economic inequalities, produce a spectrum of possibilities to feel safe and to belong. The violent history of Long Beach exacerbates the consequences of social exclusion, creating life-threatening situations for men, women, and gender expansive participants of diverse race and socioeconomic backgrounds. As participants move across their daily routines, like walking around their neighborhood, or going to work, they encounter specific threats that implicate their sense of safety. While race, class, gender, and sexuality shape where and why people feel insecurity, all

participants were familiar with moments of *hypervisibility*. Their experiences suggest a strong connection between experiencing *hypervisibility* with creating vulnerability within micro public spaces that can have life-changing consequences.

Given the rich yet complicated history of Long Beach- a small town-vibe connected to big city politics, I find that city policies, whether they promote racial and economic inequalities, forge contexts of *hypervisibility*. Pockets of the city carved out to uphold "diversity, equity, inclusion" like the LGBTQ district, in turn facilitate feelings of safety and *visibility*. Long Beach, an industrial port city with a history of racial segregation, married to a present-day DEI-stance, reflects the deep tensions within progressive cities in America. Looking at a range of social experiences in micro public spaces- the mini social contexts within publicly accessible spaces- I find that all participants navigate space moving through raced, classed, and gendered aspects of the social landscapes in Long Beach.

In this chapter, I have examined the foundation of safety baked into the city; I showed that receiving unwanted attention from others or, feeling *hypervisible*, is linked to feeling vulnerable in social contexts that were carved by city politics. I argued that years of racial politics shape landscapes that create a backdrop with safety implications that drastically shape the possibilities for people to experience belonging in public spaces (Chapter 2 and 3). These possibilities spread across segregated neighborhoods of Long Beach that create patterns of race and class, and sexuality that create spatial rules about who belongs where. City policies, overtime, produce identity-specific insecurities. Hypervisibility emerged as driving participants' feelings of vulnerability to economic, sexual, and LGBTQ-related insecurity. While not everyone feels unsafe in the same spaces, all residents who are familiar with feeling unsafe in social contexts feel threatened by their social identities, that produce feelings of being *hypervisible*, or

at odds with their surrounding context. Consequently, residents of Long Beach learn to navigate micro public spaces that threaten their sense of safety as they move through the city. In chapter two, I will examine belonging for gender expansive participants, highlighting how they maneuver through the spectrum of belonging ranging from of *hypervisibility* to *affirming visibility*, where they feel a sense of community.

CHAPTER TWO: Navigating Gender Binaries in Public Spaces

To see and be seen, is a classic phrase that captures the reciprocal nature involved in a sense of belonging. Belonging emerges from feeling "seen" and cared for, carrying a notion of visibility that signals being acknowledged, respected, and valued. To be "seen" within micro public spaces, the publicly accessible pockets of social life, means enjoying synergy that allows for positive social interactions which create possibilities of belonging. The City of Long Beach repaints its rainbow sidewalks each year, as if renewing its promise to keep LGBTQ communities safe. Local elected officials sponsor queer occasions to reiterate the importance of the gayborhood of Long Beach. State Senator Lena Gonzalez and Vice Mayor Cindy Allen sponsor LGBTQ events like the Dyke March during Pride weekend. They renew their stance of inclusion, publicly denouncing hate. These are all moments through which the city aims to project an image of itself as an LGBTQ sanctuary. In practice, however, queer communities in Long Beach grapple with the limitations and possibilities of these promises of inclusion.

While Long Beach has areas that are LGBTQ inclusive, inclusion is still a divisive issue. Long Beach has reported an up-tick of violence directed at LGBTQ residents (Olmos 2023). To commemorate the lives taken by LGBTQ-directed violence, the City of Los Angeles partnered with the City of Long Beach in sponsoring a new mural in the LGBTQ district of Long Beach. Proudly displayed in Cherry Park the mural "underscores a need to come together and show

solidarity with the LGBTQ community" by documenting a history of resistance to queer oppression. The mural is an effort to increase awareness of the rise in hate crimes against LGBTQ communities across California by shifting the tone of space (LA vs Hate 2022). The mural is an effort to plant seeds of unity, yet the spatial reality is that Long Beach is a city with many pockets, not all of them safe to walk in, despite Long Beach investing in a reputation of being LGBTQ-friendly.

Decades of social research suggest that people who identify as LGBTQ can face bullying, discrimination, and violence all while also fostering an inclusive community. In this chapter, I examine the tension between the possibilities to belong, and its limitations within micro public spaces. I define micro public spaces as publicly accessible spaces dispersed across the city, excluding private residences. Given the tension between the promise of LGBTQ inclusion and lived realities, I ask, how do LGBTQ individuals, particularly those who identify as gender expansive, experience and navigate visibility and belonging in micro public spaces? I look to Long Beach as a city with a history of gay rights activism *and* residents with conservative views. I hover over their social experiences in micro public spaces to better understand their experiences maneuvering through pockets of insecurity, *invisibility*, and the possibilities to cultivate spaces of belonging in the city.

Chapter two centers the experiences of LGBTQ identified residents of Long Beach, and their experiences ranging from *hypervisibility* to *affirming visibility*. Rather than looking at belonging as a binary between inclusion and exclusion, I propose that gender expansive participants navigate a spectrum of belonging in everyday micro public spaces that includes feelings of *hypervisibility, invisibility, visibility,* and *affirming visibility*. I trace the process through which gender expansive LGBTQ participants navigate a variety of micro social spaces

in their everyday life. Throughout this chapter, I trace the process through which people manage their visibility as gender expansive residents of Long Beach. I demonstrate that participants, while going about their day, use strategies that allow them to resist insecurity and forge belonging.

Affirming Visibility: Making and Marking Friendly Spaces

It is hard to miss the symbols of pride along Broadway Avenue. Like a cluster of stars in dark skies, a strip of gay bars runs parallel to Ocean Boulevard. The area surrounding “the gay bars” of Long Beach has been officially designated as the LGBTQ district, as of 2013. North of that cluster of bars on Broadway, a mix of residential buildings and family-owned homes create a diverse physical and political landscape between Broadway and Fourth Street, home to the LGBTQ Center. Fourth Street, also known as “Retro Row,” sports gender-affirming LGBTQ flags towering over the roof of the LGBTQ Center, which has served in the city since 1980. Today the gender-inclusive LGBTQ flags envelop a strip of retail shops along Fourth, creating a scene that makes it easy to stumble into someone wearing a pronoun pin.

Every symbol of inclusion in the gayborhood represents a promise to uphold space for gender and sexual diversity. The rainbows and symbols of LGBTQ pride set the tone for inclusivity from a mile away. Modeled after Boystown in Chicago, Broadway Avenue sports rainbow sidewalks which were advocated for and won by grassroots community members in 2013 (Addison 2023). A decade later, the City of Long Beach hoists LGBTQ banners regularly during Pride season to affirm their promise of inclusion symbolically along the gayborhood. The promise is uplifted with micro spaces like homes, businesses, parks, and sidewalks that symbolize inclusion. Within micro spaces, business owners play a role in creating welcoming environments that bring *affirming visibility* to LGBTQ communities. Their spaces, filled with signs announcing, “love is love” and “everyone is welcome here” written in rainbow letters,

imply a promise to include queer communities. A promise that is intermeshed with the gender, race, and class dynamics embedded into the politics of space.

Early into our conversations, queer residents of Long Beach pointed to gender, class, and race dynamics within the gayborhood. Not everyone feels welcome in the LGBTQ district because it privileges people with enough money to shop and ignores the growing number of unhoused people sleeping on rainbow sidewalks. They mention that the gayborhood attracts tourists, who have time and money to spend at the gayborhood. Long Beach statistics show that District 2 residents are earning, on average $65,000 a year, compared to $47,000 in District 3, in Central Long Beach (Long Beach Data 2022). The price of housing and cost of services around the gayborhood quilts a thread of socioeconomic privilege into the LGBTQ promise of inclusion.

At the same time, LGBTQ friendly micro spaces exist because of queer resistance. They are important to queer communities on the Broadway scene. Long Beach has been home to queer communities since the 1970s. "Club Ripples, which spent nearly 50 years on Ocean Boulevard but has since closed after its owners retired, was, like other Long Beach gay bars, among the only safe places those who were LGBTQ could hang out," documents journalist Kristy Hutchings in the Press-Telegram (Hutchings 2022). Broadway Avenue and Retro Row have been on the frontlines of LGBTQ visibility for decades. Echoing traces of the resistance 50 years ago, Fran, a 19-year-old agender participant talks about where they belong in the city:

> Retro Row is in general somewhere where I always feel very safe. It's a welcoming space due to the LGBTQ Center… I liked the atmosphere there a lot.

The stalworth presence of the LGBTQ Center on Retro Row contributes to a social atmosphere that generally feels safe and welcoming to Fran. It gives them and participants a visceral sense of being safe that is foundational to belonging. Similarly, what is known as the LGBTQ district, is home to many mini pockets of inclusion.

Broadway Ave and Retro Row promote LGBTQ visibility, to various degrees, and in their own ways, making a palpable difference in the overall social atmosphere. Feeling safe is conducive to belonging in the city.

Smaller pockets of inclusive micro spaces are fostered by queer people and allies all over the city. Long Beach LGBTQ+ Chamber of Commerce is composed of 164 businesses and organizations that affirm LGBTQ communities with visual cues, external markers of LGBTQ friendliness. The markers include art and murals built into Cherry Park, and the rainbow sidewalks. A broad collective of queer-led businesses creates a mosaic of ways to make queer communities feel welcome. These LGBTQ-affirming micro public spaces come together to forge a social landscape of LGBTQ inclusion in Long Beach that does not feel confined to "one area" of the city. Sam, who identifies as trans and "from Houston" shared that moving to Long Beach has been great for their social calendar. It has helped them find, not just one, but many places of belonging across the city. In their first year, they joined a queer BYOB book club, queer roller-skating, and queer biking group. Now, Sam runs a queer motorcycle group too, adding it to the list of queer-friendly offerings in Long Beach. In return, Sam gets the opportunity to connect with queer people around shared interests. Meeting at the intersection of important identities and hobbies, from motorcycle to book clubs, lays the foundation of community. Long Beach, for economic, political, and historical reasons, holds spaces that loudly, and boldly affirm that "love is love".

Just like pride celebrations take over main avenues of the city, queer takeovers open possibilities for LGBTQ belonging. As if creating inclusive bubbles all over the city, every queer takeover adds an inclusive space under the rainbow dedicated to combinations of letters in the

acronym LGBTQ. For example, LBians, a social bicycle ride, was founded to meet a need for spaces that center queer-woman-bicyclists. The founder, Vanessa Cisneros, started LBians hoping there would be other queer women, like her, interested in promoting queerness and cyclist visibility. Four years after its first queer bike ride, LBians is at the forefront of creating *affirming visibility* that centers a trifecta of gender, sexuality, and cycling interests. Spaces like these foster belonging for lesbian, bi, trans, and queer women, holding inclusive spaces for them to gather safely. It rallies participants from Los Angeles, Orange County, and beyond. LBians forges a community among "queen women cyclists" who often socialize for hours after bicycle rides, networking and making friends.

LGBTQ participants forge spaces of belonging through transforming space using queer takeovers, events that create opportunities for queer people to experience a social atmosphere that feels more welcoming than "normal". Queer takeovers, create spaces that feel "the inverse of what normal society feels like " in the most affirming ways. Queer takeovers become "third spaces" that allow for impairment but are meaningful. For example, Marina, a 36-year-old queer cisgender woman, describes her weekly roller derby practice as the unique social landscape. She feels excited to transform ordinary spaces through queer takeovers:

> I roller derby and we have a lot of skaters from Long Beach and we're like, 90% 95%, queer. There's also been times where I've been one of two cis women and then everyone else is nonbinary and, and it's like an inverse of what normal society feels like…I love it!

Marina gets to experience a space that is much more inclusive, and visibly queer than most places. Like Marina, participants feel affirmed by queer takeovers creating spaces of belonging in which gender expansive identities are viewed in a positive light, and its members are esteemed become spaces of belonging sustained by affirming visibility.

Queer-friendly places in Long Beach, spread like dandelions across a field, strive to reflect LGBTQ diversity in their spaces. Participants shared their own version of the place that was welcoming, not just because of the visual cues, but because participants can see themselves reflected in the spaces. “There's something about seeing yourself in a space that makes you feel good to be there, like you’re *seen*,” shared Jordan. This idea of feeling represented applies to names of streets, media, historical landmarks, and celebrations held in public. For example, while the public library is not part of the gayborhood, it is intentional about making LGBTQ library-goers feel “seen” by featuring LGBTQ history and local drag celebrities in its curated content. Around pride months, the art exhibits feature themes of identity and sexuality. The public library creates opportunities for LGBTQ people to see themselves reflected in the curated art exhibits. Coffee shops and bookstores that hosted events in a similar pride spirit, helped participants feel “seen” and affirmed.

LGBTQ visibility includes feeling acknowledged by the people. Micro public spaces do not need to be decked out in rainbows. Spaces that feel deeply queer friendly can do so with and without pride flags, by catering to queer communities. Places of belonging include ordinary places that have gender-affirming practices. Salons and barber shops can make participants feel welcome. They hold spaces for hair salons to specialize in hair *trans*formations, with stylists that are sensitive to the process of gender transitions. When asked about any places Sage feels belonging in the city, Sage brought up their barber, wishing they could have had a gender affirming barber as a child.

> That barber shop [in Long Beach] that was my first queer Barber. Having it would have meant a lot to me as a kid… you know a place where the barber did not assume I am a boy who likes cars…

Everyday places with inclusive practices that go beneath the surface can make LGBTQ participants feel visible in an affirming way. Micro public spaces that have a queer friendly tone, can convey inclusion through the people in those spaces, who extend services with sensitivity to LGBTQ experiences. Places that offer everyday types of services, like LGBTQ-affirming thrift shops, and LGBTQ-sensitive health programs create *affirming visibility* through care.

Invisibility: Heteronormativity and Gender Binaries in Everyday Spaces

Just like rainbow strokes of *affirming visibility* creates a foundation for belonging, moments of exclusion taint those possibilities. Moments of exclusion strip away at visibility by making participants feel invisible, “unseen”, or deprioritized. Heteronormative spaces make gender expansive people feel out of place, forced to contend with a gender binary that does not resonate with them. The same person on the same day, can feel like completely different people as they move through spaces. In one context, they matter, while in others, they don’t. The difference between spaces depends on participants' identities and their agency to choose to be or not to be in certain spaces, as well as the politics they find within them.

Participants navigate uncharted waters when they leave home. They sail through gray areas in inclusion in everyday life. Not knowing whether spaces are safe creates uncertainty that compromises belonging and safety. The challenging part about navigating spaces without clear markings is that it makes social interactions feel like a gamble. Fran navigates seemingly neutral spaces, by pushing through moments of social exclusion. While fleeting, the interactions Fran has with others, and the messages of belonging, have a long-lasting impact. The gist of these interactions lingers in Fran’s mind; reminding them that gender diversity can feel invisible in a gender binary world. Fran shares “Even when I mind my business, people find a way to misgender me by saying, ‘oh excuse me *miss,*”. As someone who identifies as agender, a culture

of politeness erases Fran's gender identity. It forces gendered norms in ways that create tension for gender diverse participants. Fran shares their perspective on the tug of war between their gender identity and societal perceptions of their gender:

> As far as, like, my gender identity and sexuality…I get a lot of people assuming that I am femme. And I do present femme sometimes, like gender. So, at this point, I just sort of, like, put up with it. I mean, it doesn't bug me a lot because I understand, that's how they grew up. And that's how society is, but at the same time, should I say something?

Interacting with people who do not see gender diversity creates tension for Fran that produce feelings of *invisibility*. They, like participants, move through choppy seas of people who assume cisgender and straightness. Participants learn to navigate microaggressions that make them feel socially invisible within social contexts. Microaggressions, like well-intended gendered language for example, reproduces *invisibility* with a mask of politeness. Using language that assumes binary genders, erases gender diversity. It makes participants feel invisible to people who project a heteronormative world. That feeling of not being "seen" is the opposite of the *affirming visibility* Fran experiences on Retro Row.

LGBTQ participants learn to navigate the tensions between being openly queer and feeling invisible. They distinguish inclusive atmospheres apart from unfriendly ones, to avoid microaggressions and other harms of feeling invisible. "I look for a sticker or trans pride flag or someone who looks queer like me." Jay shares. While that is not the only thing Jay looks for, it is often the first thing they notice about a space. Jay, who identifies as trans, looks for trans-specific symbols of inclusion. But the design of the space is deeper than the sticker. "Even if you say your business supports the queer community, I want to see your bathrooms" Jay shares, pointing to the instances where they feel unthought of when they visit places with gendered bathrooms, showing gendered cracks to the promise of inclusion. When participants feel

invisible to whoever designed the bathroom signs, it makes them feel less belonging in those micro spaces. Promises of belonging come up against the stagnant gender norms conveyed through space. Participants learn to navigate the *invisibility* of gender diversity, suggesting that blanket queer inclusion has limits.

LGBTQ-spaces can make people feel partial visibility, which means being recognized for one aspect of your identity but not others. Feeling partial inclusion creates a tension between core identities. For example, Jay shares feelings accepted for being trans in their community organizing spaces, which is their gender identity, but Jay feels invisible when it comes to their cultural identity as Jewish. Jay attributes this to their race saying, "As a person with White privilege, I feel bad being like hey, let's talk about my culture" yet feeling invisible as Jewish trans, they feel less understood in places meant to be inclusive. Joking that people in Southern California have no idea how to understand their culture, Jay says:

> In New York, tons of people are Jewish. People have a general sense of what a bar mitzvah… here [in Southern California] I do not think people even know what that means *laughs*

Jay's has moments of LGBTQ belonging that come with a sense of cultural *invisibility*. Feeling like they must be gay or cultural, means withdrawing part of their intersecting identities to align with identities that are recognized within spaces. Shifting towards inclusion ends up in partial visibility. `You can't have both, it does not compute to be Jewish and trans to most people ". Feeling LGBTQ visible but culturally invisible makes participants like Jay feel partially seen in places of belonging, but never as a whole. Similarly, participants who navigate racial boundaries within queer-affirming spaces bump into the complexities of fostering welcoming spaces that are inclusive at the margins.

Race and class shape social interaction even within LGBTQ-friendly places, creating moments of *invisibility*. In a society that makes White middle-class the political, economic, and cultural norm, low-income people of color are marginalized within the norm. Jean shared that being a gay Black man meant having a tough time with employment as a film director. He navigates discrimination with advanced degrees from top film programs, but even then, it is not easy. His off-and-on payments make it harder to secure housing lately. Seeking social support, he joined a weekly group run through the LGBTQ Center. However, he found that the support group catered to the interest of White, middle class, gay men. Although Jean goes every week, he cannot help but feel different from the other gay men in his support group. Race and class as intersect to create a layer of social distance between Jean and his peers, marginalizing him in a support group space, rending his lived experience partially invisible:

> Even though we are all gay men, I am a Black gay man trying to find housing while some White gay men in my group have other problems, like what to have for lunch on their sailboat, if you know what I mean..."

Even when the space is meant to be welcoming, racial and class differences can impact the dynamics within LGBTQ-friendly spaces. As a gay Black man, Jean points to feeling partial inclusion among gay men. He feels embraced for his sexuality, but not fully understood when it comes to his gendered, racial, and classed realities. Among other gay men, Jean experiences moments of *invisibility* when he is overshadowed by the interests of those with racial and economic privilege. Like Jean, participants deal with moments in which they feel somewhat invisible to those around them.

Hypervisibility: Policing of Gender Binaries in Micro Public Spaces

People move through a range of spaces that include a variety of micro spaces. Given that participants are actively moving through gas stations, parks, stores, and other everyday spaces,

they often confront heteronormative assumptions and extreme visibility (*hypervisibility*). The heteronormative resistance is most evident in gendered spaces, which will be the focus of this section, to show extreme examples that give us a sense of the risks it creates.

Feeling hypervisible can be described as a social discomfort associated with a fear that they might be targeted, with verbal, physical or sexual violence. Participants shared that *hypervisibility* comes with signs of disapproval, shock, and surprise. It is conveyed by on-lookers who behave in ways that convey "I have my eyes on you" not, "I see you". When participants feel the whole "room" looking at them, as happens in gendered spaces, gender norms and sexual behaviors may be enforced through violence. When participants feel too visible in gendered spaces, they deploy strategies for managing the social tension and potential risk.

Heteronormative privilege is maintained through the enforcement of gender and sexual norms through violence. Glares, stares, and tracking people who are diverse in the room, conveys a tone of disapproval. When participants start to feel too visible, they begin watching their back, as a strategy of self-preservation. Suze, who self-describes as a "butch presenting lesbian", defies gender expectations by shopping for herself in the men's aisle. Suze gets pushback for refusing to hide her gender expression or sexuality as she shops for a date:

> When I shop, it is very clear that I am not shopping for another man. By the clothes I am wearing and the way I hold the shirt up to my neck, it is obvious that this is my aisle too, but some guys get in my space as I am shopping…basically elbowing me…I have to be mindful of whose around me.

Suze faces the challenge of being hypervisible in everyday life as she shops. Particularly in gendered spaces, her gender expression and gender are not always welcome. Gendered spaces make intersecting identities salient by putting participants at risk for being targeted. Participants

that navigate gendered spaces experience *hypervisibility* which they associate with vulnerability and insecurity. Feeling like the only gender expansive person in the room triggers vigilance.

Everyday cisgendered places, such as bathrooms, can be uncomfortable for people who are gender expansive participants. They learn to deal with bathroom politics in which their bodies are "out of place" in gendered bathrooms. When they blur the social norms of "masculinity" and "femininity" they receive disapproving looks from others in the bathroom. Their experiences with the social exclusion masked with politeness and gentle body language, creates a feeling of *hypervisibility*. For example, Suze shares that going to the bathroom usually results in others scanning up and down her body:

> It happens pretty often to me, that when I go into the bathroom, ladies check out my 'package', to see if I am a guy. They look me up and down a couple of times before deciding I am okay to be in there *laughs*

Access to the restroom comes with the social cost to Suze. Similarly, other gender expansive participants talk about the gendered dynamics that make them feel out of place in everyday places. They grow used to social interactions that remind them of societal gender norms. They make gender expansive participants feel hypervisible as they do ordinary life things.

Cultural spaces can be gendered and heteronormative in everyday spaces, especially in cultures that hold onto the illusion of the nuclear family. Gender and sexuality norms enforced within cultural contexts complicate spaces of belonging. Jerry grew up immersed in a Catholic Mexican culture within an immigrant family. As a Mexican son, he is expected to marry a woman and have kids. "I want neither of those things" Jerry reflects. At the same time, he feels like most LGBTQ spaces are not made with Mexican culture in mind. If he wants to eat his favorites, including flautas and menudo, Jerry deals with feeling hypervisible to Mexican men

who uphold cultural expectations of the role “Mexican men” should play in their families. Jerry bumps into heteronormative cultural norms when he hears comments from “Mexican men” that critique his body movements with derogatory terms, enforcing their beliefs of what family should be. Jerry concludes that he can only be “seen” holistically with his intimate circles of friends where people recognize that he is a gay Mexican man, and proud of his intersecting identities. Outside of intimate spaces, Jerry feels caught between intersecting identities that are not holistic, pitting him as a “gay man” or “Mexican man”. At times cultural belonging and LGBTQ visibility seem at odds, creating exclusion and acceptance, or partial visibility, within cultural micro public spaces like restaurants, grocery stores, and organizations that cater to cultural communities.

Navigating Contexts of Hypervisibility and Invisibility

Today, LGBTQ affirming places have their social and physical limits. Most activities in everyday life happen across a variety of places, including the grocery store, gym, and recreational spaces. Moving between spaces means navigating a sea of uncharted micro spaces that appear neutral. It means seeking out places with *affirming visibility*, avoiding hostility, and navigating gray areas. As it turns out, gray areas encompass most micro public spaces. Most spaces do not profess inclusion or exclusion, leaving it up to the people who frequent to set the tone. Gray areas, like murky waters, are best navigated with strategies to deal with moments of *invisibility* and *hypervisibility a*s they move across everyday spaces.

First, participants gauge micro spaces judging them by deeper measures of visibility. Beyond the commercial signs that denote of LGBTQ inclusion, participants look for signs of a commitment to be inclusive. Hiring of queer people and attracting queer customers makes spaces feel, not just look, inclusive. “I can tell a business really cares when I see openly queer staff

working there" shared Suze. She looks for social landscapes that are welcoming with actions, not just words, "because being the only queer person does not feel safe". When having to make split-second decisions about the safety of spaces, participants factor in a range of aspects of space. They gauge inclusion by looking around to see who is in the room. If a place attracts queer communities, it adds a deeper layer of visibility, not just in the posters, but in the people. LGBTQ visibility on a deeper level. Jay and Suze mention the importance of seeing like-minded people within gender expansive friendly spaces to feel safe:

> I think when folks are around who are like, visibly queer, I'm always just like it's okay it's safe to be here. I think that's honestly one of the big ones.
>
> –Jay
>
> There are often not a lot of people like me, but if there are then I know that's where I am meant to be.
>
> – Suze

Both Suze and Jay's experiences illuminate the importance of having places that reflect gender affirming visibility, not just through banners, but through practices. Hiring diverse staff, for example, adds a deeper layer of inclusion. LGBTQ regulars, also add to a social landscape that promotes queer visibility and invites community building among them. Looking beyond the surface, means looking for who runs the place, to who is represented on its walls, to who it serves, assessing its social inclusivity.

Second, participants navigate social dynamics within spaces by choosing whether to engage with others in micro public spaces. Participants have different baselines of responding to strangers. Rio for example, tries to be friendly around them, shifting the tone of spaces to make them welcome, in general. Other participants do not engage strangers or mind the stares. They let the gazes roll off. Their choices show agency and how they have learned to navigate uncharted

seas from past experiences. Rio practices friendliness, but also filters the micro spaces they frequent. They choose to abide in places they feel “somewhat safe”. On the other hand, participants like Sage, monitor the attention they get in the room without being bothered by it. As a Black belt karate master, Sage is prepared to defend themselves, if necessary, but tries not to mind the looks:

> Thankfully, I don't really get stares. I mean, not that I notice. I think what I tried to be, generally when I'm out, I try to be like a very, like, open, friendly person but also really try to stick to places that I can feel somewhat safe in and not be by myself.
>
> –Rio
>
> In public, I think stares are fine, at least for me. I've reached a point where I'm comfortable with how I look. For the most part. If its kids, [I think]"Oh, they've never seen someone like me before." I've had really old people just mad dog stare at me as I walked by, like, that's a little intense. But as long as they're not saying nothing, it’s fine.
>
> – Sage

Rio and Sage face different public reactions to their gender expression. Rio seldom encounters stares because they filter out LGBTQ unfriendly places, and because they de-escalate strangers by being friendly. Meanwhile, Sage has grown accustomed to stares, choosing not to engage, at least unless things escalate. Participants become aware of other people’s reaction to their queer visibility. They respond to moments of *hypervisibility* with de-escalating tactics, like being friendly or being cool under pressure. When they can, they avoid hostile places, but when they are caught in the sea of uncharted spaces, they tread through tension, to stay afloat.

Third, participants navigate between spaces by selecting spaces that feel affirming over hostile social landscapes. They spend time and money in spaces that do not make them feel invisible or hypervisible, excluded or too different. “I value my mental health so much that I will not go to a place that is not queer friendly” shared Rhian, who identifies as a Black queer

woman, who has no patience for inequality. She learned this lesson early on, using her purchasing power as their voice. If she thinks that she is being treated unfairly, she leaves and shops somewhere else. Even when she is in a rush, Rhian prefers to leave than to accept microaggressions. Deciding when to leave, and whether to come back, is an act of refusal to be *invisible*. Like her, participants refuse violent spaces to mitigate social exclusion.

Just like gender dynamics matter, racial and ethnic differences create moments of *hypervisibility*. A culture of Whiteness envelops the more affluent pockets of Long Beach. Given what we know about the history of racial and economic segregation, it complicates space for queer people of color who never quite blend in. This extends to the LGBTQ district of Long Beach, which caters to gay White men, and White communities overall. Even in places that hang up a pride flag, the experience of being around “White people" does not always feel safe to queer people of color. The consequences of being *hypervisible* introduce vulnerability for people of color to be policed in White spaces. Excessive attention serves to control and regulate people of color, by asserting power to exclude them. “You hear a lot about it in the media, like White people accusing people of color for ordinary things,” shared Cyn, a queer Mexican woman who feels socially reprimanded through stares, even in predominantly queer spaces when she speaks Spanish. “It’s like they see me in a whole different light, no longer like fellow gay”. While not all participants have had negative experiences being queer people of color in predominantly White spaces, most feel only partially reflected in the music and clientele on Broadway as a queer person of color.

Fostering Spaces of Affirming Visibility

Participants resist *invisibility* and *hypervisibility* within their communities by cultivating spaces that allow them to express fully and freely through *affirming visibility*. They build

community in places that make them feel “seen” for their intersecting identities. Spaces of belonging address safety concerns, allowing for stable social connections that can be forged. When people feel, not just safe but fully affirmed, they collaborate and co-create in a way that deepens connections described as a community of belonging.

Spaces of belonging require people to grapple with what it means to hold space for mutual recognition of each other. Communities in Long Beach are calling for intersectional inclusion and their spaces reflect that. They are calling for a deeper sense of belonging in everyday public spaces, that makes room not just for parts of us, but for all of us. Not being questioned, as Rio points out, gives a freedom of self-expression that gives off a sense of belonging only cultivated within welcoming spaces:

> I think my sense of belonging comes from not having to be questioned about what I choose to wear, how I choose to look, or what I choose to do… When I'm with my community they're not asking me about things like, why do I look like *that*. It's more an uplifting community...

Rio echoed a widely held viewpoint among participants—belonging in public spaces means having positive social interactions rather than *invisibility* or *hypervisibility*. Finding people and places that make space for positive visibility, connecting with people that enable belonging through affirming practices. Participants value places of intersectional inclusion, where they can be fully recognized. They seek places that acknowledge multiple identities at once, making them feel “seen”.

Intersectional inclusion requires the diversity within LGBTQ communities to be appreciated and "seen”. It calls for a deeper engagement of the core identities people hold dear. One initiative that aims to expand the conversation on intersectional inclusion is the Safety Alliance program. It sends a decal to spaces that pledge to embrace all forms of diversity,

including gender, sexual, racial, and religious diversity. It promotes visibility of overlapping identities that are core to our existence. The Safety Alliance stems from a vision of intersectional inclusion started with grassroots efforts by creating a roster of partnership that believes in promoting a tone of *affirming visibility* across intersecting identities. Safety Alliance thus has become a symbol of intersectional inclusion in Long Beach. People who see it, know that those spaces are committed to hold space for the diversity under the rainbow.

What does intersectional inclusion look like? When I asked if there are any places that enable multiple identity expressions to converge, a handful of places came up. Rio shared about the Anakbayan chapter they are a member of, in which youth from different sectors of society advance the cause of national democracy in the Philippines. While Anakbayan is a political club, Rio found it to be inclusive of their gender and sexual identities. Rio shared that through joining, they learned queer Filipino history. Joining this space, where they can be a queer Pinoy, reaffirms their history and their future. Jerry, who struggles to feel "seen" as a gay Mexican man in cultural spaces finds queer Mexican inclusion at Que Sera, a bar that features queer Latino artists. Although in most places, Jerry feels like his culture expects him to fit into a heterosexual box, finding local bands like Cielo Azul allows Jerry to enjoy queer-led cumbias. Jerry loves spaces where he can celebrate Latinx queerness openly. Jay, who often felt their culture invisible under the label of White privilege, was still searching for queer Jewish social groups. They did, however, find belonging at a trans-friendly vegan restaurant in Long Beach. This space embraced the core Jay's identity, a passion for social justice and a LGBTQ visibility.

Overall, participants seek out spaces, events, and moments of *affirming visibility* of their gender, sexuality, and culture, among interest-based identities. In the age of digital fliers, social media posts, and traditional brick and mortar shops with gender inclusive symbology, queer

communities flourish across a variety of micro public spaces. Participants show resilience in fostering opportunities to gather around shared identities and interests. They cultivate community within spaces that are fully affirming, creating micro public spaces across the city "to see and be seen".

Conclusion

Gender expansive participants seek *affirming visibility* in everyday places. They look for visual cues that send messages of LGBTQ inclusion, such as Pride flags, and gravitate to spaces that reflect queerness in multifaceted ways- in the art, events, and people, expanding on the concept of being "seen". They co-create spaces of inclusion through queer takeovers that bring visibility to LGBTQ identities, especially from a gender affirming lens. Inclusive spaces, while not always decked out with pride symbols, can use internal practices that make space for gender expansive participants to "see" themselves in the space.

Navigating *visibility* is an everyday part of life, as participants move through uncharted waters, they deal with raced, classed, and gendered dynamics that produce moments of participants being "unseen" in everyday spaces. Gender expansive participants navigate a largely straight and cisgender society, which makes queer people of color feel insignificant, and mostly out of place as they walk through a White supremacist backdrop. The weaving in and out of social landscapes is part of everyday life and forces scholars to look to the gayborhood and beyond, to learn how gender expansive participants and allies resist violence and the role of cultivating spaces of belonging for the identities they hold dear.

Invisibility within social landscapes makes participants feel unwanted or misunderstood in micro public spaces like coffee shops, parks, and grocery stores. Participants deal with other people's assumptions about their gender and sexuality. Their bathroom, shopping, and safety

needs are not always recognized. As participants move through a range of spaces, they oscillate between feeling "fully seen" to having partial visibility and invisibility, due to the overlapping effects of gender, class, and race.

At times, participants feel *hypervisible*, evoking a sense of being out of place in a threatening way. *Hypervisibility* emerges from moments of intense stares from strangers, and other forms of surveillance as participants move across micro public space. When participants feel *hypervisible* due to their sexuality, it provokes a discomfort that warns of violence, like a rattlesnake warns of a deadly bite. The social consequence of *hypervisibility* is disconnection from their greater social environment.

Participants cultivate spaces of belonging among people with shared identities and interests. Long Beach is thought to have many LGBTQ friendly spaces that carry the promise of belonging for gender expansive participants. They foster spaces of belonging in which they can congregate openly, and experience affirming visibility. They create temporary and permanent pockets of belonging, holding spaces that feel judgment-free and accepting. Within these spaces, community connections emerge based on shared identities and interests. More and more spaces are advocating for intersectional belonging, enabling gender expansive participants to express their core identities and interests, without compromising safety or inclusion.

Given the tension between the promise of LGBTQ inclusion and lived realities, I find that gender and sexuality converge in micro spaces, creating unique dynamics for LGBTQ participants who are gender expansive. The gender boundaries upheld across different micro spaces alter the possibilities to feel belonging. Furthermore, I demonstrate that race and class shape feelings of belonging for LGBTQ participants by creating contexts of *hypervisibility* and *invisibility*. I look to Long Beach as a city with a history of gay rights activism *and* residents

with conservative views. I hover over their social experiences in micro public spaces to better understand how they refuse insecurity, *invisibility,* and the possibilities they cultivate to bond over intersecting shared identities.

In chapter two, I centered the experiences of LGBTQ identified residents of Long Beach, and the everyday social encounters that produce moments ranging from *hypervisibility* to *affirming visibility*. Rather than looking at belonging as a binary of inclusion and exclusion, I propose that gender expansive participants navigate a spectrum of belonging in everyday micro public spaces that includes feelings of *hypervisibility, invisibility, visibility,* and *affirming visibility*. I trace the process through which they resist social exclusion built into everyday life by refusing to be mistreated and singled out. I give examples of their power in holding space for *affirming visibility* of gender expansive identities, allowing for social interactions that produce a sense of belonging. In chapter three, I trace how they move away from contexts of *hypervisibility* to foster those of *affirming visibility*, where they feel a sense of community. I examine how LGBTQ couples use their collective power to maneuver through moments of social exclusion and how they work in tandem to create *affirming visibility* for their romantic expressions in micro public spaces.

CHAPTER THREE: LGBTQ Couples Navigate Being Together in Public Spaces

Acts like holding hands, kissing, or hugging have been historically repressed for LGBTQ couples. While heterosexual couples can show intimacy freely, the same expressions of affection have been policed for LGBTQ couples. Underground LGBTQ spaces like the 606 Club and the 96 Clubs, were often raided by police who enforced heterosexuality in public spaces. This creates a general tension for LGBTQ couples who wish to enjoy normalcy in their relationship but face punishment by those who enforce a hegemonic heterosexual norm. Even in the present

day, often LGBTQ couples are forced to tone down their affection, or hide it, in the name of safety. This leaves LGBTQ couples calibrating their affection to match the overall tone of inclusivity within micro public spaces, something heterosexual couples do not have to think about. The hegemonic portrayal of "true love" are almost always heterosexual expressions. The few mainstream representations of queer love are tragedies, horror stories, or sexual fantasies, rather than depicting healthy relationships among LGBTQ couples (for a contemporary review see Mclnroy & Craig 2017). This absence of positive images creates a context of *hypervisibility* when real queer couples take up physical space.

Chapter three centers LGBTQ couples' power in choosing how to navigate *invisibility* and *hypervisibility* together. As we will see, LGBTQ couples learn to navigate the good moments, the frustrating moments, and the threatening ones as they move through a spectrum of belonging in micro public spaces. I desire to understand the insecurity in their lives, *and* their power in reclaiming belonging. I ask, how do LGBTQ couples experience *visibility* and navigate tensions in belonging together? Throughout chapter three, I examine the possibilities that LGBTQ couples share for belonging in public, and how LGBTQ couples determine when to express sexuality, affection, and romantic partnership.

I find that the hegemonic views of romance in society creates a context of *hypervisibility* for LGBTQ couples who express their affection for one another in public, and a push towards *invisibility* that relegates their relationship to private spaces. Their strategies reveal that they cultivate *affirming visibility* by choosing to be in spaces that honor their partnership, while developing couple-level strategies for navigating *invisibility* and *hypervisibility* in micro public spaces. To combat *invisibility,* they choose spaces that honor their romantic partnership, while working together to de-escalate social situations to minimize *hypervisibility*. Overall, LGBTQ

couples are intimately familiar with the need to protect their safety and foster spaces of belonging.

Locating LGBTQ Visibility

It's a typical day in the gayborhood. The sun is shining at 68 degrees with a nice ocean breeze that trickles over Cherry Park, onto Broadway Avenue. The gayborhood invites open displays of queer love, carved out from the city by a row of LGBTQ and trans flags and murals standing as a promise to embrace queer couples. "That's where all the fireworks went off," Sam, a Mexican-White trans participant shares, describing their first date, with Liam. As they reminisce with a smile, we talk about the role the gayborhood has, its park, bars, coffee shops, and restaurants. The LGBTQ district, which includes historical landmarks worthy of a Netflix docu-series, with a chapter on each space including Sweetwater, Mineshaft, and Executive Suites, creates a broader micro public space in which Sam and Liam enjoy the evening with less fear of violence.

The gayborhood of Long Beach plays an important role in nourishing inclusive everyday spaces for queer couples. I refer to these places as "queer-mostly" as they are also frequented by families who are drawn to the farmers market, the community center, the skate park, and tourists, who find plenty of recreational options near the gayborhood. The cross stitching of rainbow sidewalks creates a platform of queer couples to enjoy *visibility*. Executive Suites, for example, is a LGBTQ club that holds space for LGBTQ couples to spread out across two-stories of dance floors, creating public micro spaces that rotate identity-specific *visibility* through themed nights for "gay men" and "queer ladies". Micro public spaces that promote *visibility* become earmarked as disrupting the hegemonic heterosexual constructions of romance.

Spaces with overt LGBTQ symbols of inclusion set the stage for LGBTQ couples' *visibility* to find recognition and acceptance. Cyn met Alex in college six years ago. After college, and a few jobs in between, they moved to Long Beach together. In Long Beach they have found several spaces in which they feel like they belong and go to often. Cyn and Alex are an affectionate and silly couple, Cyn tells me. Around Broadway, "we don't worry about being together". In other places across the city, however, their interactions make them feel *hypervisible* or *invisible*, alienating them within social spaces. As we will discover, LGBTQ couples seek out places where they feel safe to be together, as this allows them to experience couple-level *visibility* while also protecting their safety. Visibility in the context of LGBTQ couples is linked to feelings of being able to relax and express. Naturally, choosing to be in LGBTQ-mostly spaces, creates a pocket where you see many queer expressions of love. However, when they leave safe spaces, they use couple-level strategies to protect their partnership.

Hypervisible Love in Heteronormative Spaces

LGBTQ couples understand the risk of displaying affection, love, and care in public spaces. Even in societies as open as the United States, being LGBTQ communities face discrimination and hate crimes. In everyday terms, something as simple as grabbing a burger can get complicated. Spaces that are not clearly marked, the seemingly ordinary shops, can feel hostile to queer couples. As if taking twists and turns across everyday spaces, queer couples manage their visibility to avoid moments of *hypervisibility* that triggers shared vulnerability.

In contexts of *hypervisibility* LGBTQ couples face social consequences for ordinary behaviors. Simple actions like hugging and such as holding hands can evoke disapproval from onlookers. Sometimes LGBTQ couples try not to mind looks. "It's kind of funny to me sometimes to see people so worked up by it… until it turns into name-calling of course" Sam

shares. Their comment suggests a tension between being comfortable with provoking discomfort yet trying to stay below a threshold of social exclusion. Name calling is no longer something Sam and Liam ignore. When faced with social exclusion, they develop couple-level strategies to determine how to respond next.

LGBTQ couples get pushback from society for doing normal couple things. The act of being together, against a heteronormative backdrop, creates moments of *hypervisibility* for LGBTQ couples. Their *hypervisibility* creates vulnerability for couples trying to avoid violent interactions with strangers. One time, Jean was holding hands with his boyfriend along the Alamitos Beach path when they were verbally harassed by a construction worker. How did you respond? I asked:

> Well by giving him the bird and telling him to [fuck off]. It did not happen often, but I am from New York City— I am not afraid to talk back!

Jean and his partner continued to hold hands, despite the social disapproval from onlookers. Their experience reveals the complexity of doing ordinary things together. Against a heteronormative background, LGBTQ couples feel hypervisible. The consequence is pushback from society for being together. Moments like this are rare but poignant in the memory of those who confront homophobia as they hold onto ordinary pleasures. Simple acts such as hugging and holding hands can become a source of tension when expressed by LGBTQ couples, thus introducing vulnerability in their lives as they cross through micro public spaces.

Navigating reactions, together, is part of everyday life for LGBTQ couples who express affection like heterosexual couples. Partners must decide how to navigate the boundary together. Joey, a White woman in her early 30s, loves playing pool in bars. “Growing up, me and my dad would go to the bar. He had a beer, and I had a soda.” Joey took her girlfriend to the same bar, as

a way of sharing a bit of her childhood with her. To her shock, this bar did not feel welcoming of Joey and her partner. At first their discomfort came from the occasional prolonged stare, which made them feel *hypervisible* in the room. The homophobia flared up when Joey and her partner took up more space, choosing to play pool together. Even though no one was playing, a group of men approached them to kick them off the pool table. Joey could not understand why, if no one was playing. At first, she contested, arguing that it was their turn to play. Unfortunately, the group of men threatened to resort to violence. Joey turned to her girlfriend and locked eyes. They grabbed their things and left, choosing never to return. Feeling *hypervisible*, as the only lesbian couple in the room, Joey perceived this as a homophobic attack. Reflecting on the incident, Joey expressed feeling sad to have such a special place tainted by strangers at a bar who enforce heterosexuality. Joey's experience is unfortunately all too common for LGBTQ couples who need to decide how to confront strangers in real time. Moments like these require LGBTQ couples to move swiftly, and move together, when necessary.

Being together in public involves sharing micro public spaces with people of mixed views regarding LGBTQ love. "Sometimes we get the gawkers," Sam said, sharing how they hate feeling like a spectacle. "The gawkers" represent people who convey disapproval or confusion when they see LGBTQ couples act normal. As LGBTQ couples go to the grocery store, or on a date, they stay aware of their surroundings. Some LGBTQ couples learn to manage *hypervisibility* by de-escalating tension through behavior modifications. This couple-level strategy requires both partners to do their part in minimizing *visibility*. One time, for example, Sam was grabbing lunch with their partner after a hike. As they walked into a burger joint, they started to feel all eyes on them. The stares lingered long enough for Sam and their partner to "tone down" their expressions of affection for fear of escalating violence. In Sam's words:

> There were a lot of eyes coming towards us. And I, personally, felt uncomfortable. And I'm like, okay, I'm gonna draw back a little bit. There's always that fear of like, at least for me that we were going to get shot.

Sam and their partner decided to consciously tone down their LGBTQ sexuality to protect their safety. Feeling *hypervisible* in a heteronormative context, makes little things like sharing meals, public spectacles. When LGBTQ couples express anything that suggests they are together, romantically speaking, they brace for potential backlash. Although LGBTQ couples have different ways of navigating moments of *hypervisibility* they adopt couple-level strategies to maneuver through micro public spaces.

When the illusion of a straight society is disrupted, it results in moments of *hypervisibility* for the LGBTQ lovers. Feeling the piercing gaze, like pins and needles, as LGBTQ couples enter and move through spaces, makes participants feel like a moving target. Receiving a gaze that turns into prolonged stare makes participants feel *hypervisible* and thus vulnerable to attack. LGBTQ couples have different ways of navigating moments of *hypervisibility* in tandem. They learn to modify their behaviors, or leave a space, which are in line with a psychological literature that shows that, when threatened, people enter flight or fight mode. Feeling *hypervisibility* sounds LGBTQ couple's internal alarm signaling that violence may be around the corner.

Navigating spaces as not just LGBTQ couples, but also racialized couples, further complicates social dynamics in public space. “Sometimes I am not sure if it’s the gay or the Black thing, or the gay Black thing,” Jean pokes at the different assumptions he confronts in everyday spaces. “And because my boyfriend is Latino, we really make people mad when we are together”. Jean refers to the moments in which gendered notions of Black and Latino “manhood” can create social friction. “People stare and roll their eyes at us,” or say, “what a shame”. Jean

knows that these comments underlie a tension with societal expectations imposed on men in a hegemonic heteronormative society. This tension of Black and Brown gay men confronting their communities for being together, has been documented extensively. Seeing the everyday consequence of moving through micro public spaces, reminds LGBTQ couples that they are not viewed as "normal" means facing social exclusion for not fitting neatly into the gendered, racial, and heterosexual repertoire of romance.

Invisible Love in Heteronormative Spaces

At a simple glance, it becomes apparent that society clings onto a heterosexual backdrop across micro public spaces. Joey finds a tension between a "progressive culture" in Long Beach and finding misalignment in the visual cues around her. "We live in an age that professes inclusion, but the spaces created do not reflect that." The absence of meaningful representation of LGBTQ couples, renders LGBTQ love invisible. LGBTQ *invisibility* is reproduced in society by erasing LGBTQ couples from the front pages of covers and advertisements. "Engagement industry for example, shy away from images of queer proposals to sell diamond rings," Joey critiques. "We do not see our queer love stories being told." This culture of erasure contributes to LGBTQ couples being seen as "friends" when they are together in public. Often LGBTQ couples report social exclusion that makes them feel, not in fear of imminent threat, but devalued, deprioritized, and *invisible*.

Moments of *invisibility* emerge when LGBTQ couples feel sidelined to the friend and family zone by heterosexual strangers. The experiences of being assumed *not* to be together emerge as a double-edged sword. Some LGBTQ couples find micro public spaces easier to navigate when they dovetail off heteronormative assumptions to glide through spaces. Other LGBTQ couples take offense to being relegated to the "friend zone". Regardless of LGBTQ

couples' preference, they agree that their love stories are not always recognized within a heteronormative society. "We also get people constantly asking if we are sisters," Suze vents that. She and her wife get overlooked as a lesbian couple. "My wife" says Suze as she confronts strangers with their assumptions of heterosexuality when it feels safe to do so. The hegemonic portrayal of love as a cis and binary practice, creates *invisibility* that places LGBTQ couples in a default "friend/family zone". This gives LGBTQ couples room to determine who they want to move forward. The lack of representation of queer couples perpetuates a hegemonic heterosexual assumption that when people seem close, but not straight, they must be related in non-romantic ways. This systematic erasure of LGBTQ couples in plain sight contributes to a culture of *invisibility*, that places the onus on LGBTQ couples to negotiate their *visibility*.

LGBTQ couples deal with heteronormative social expectations that produce invisibility. At times hetero social expectations hide under "just curious" types of questions. For example, men in heteronormative bars think that Cyn and Alex are two friends, looking for a man. While those situations could end as mildly embarrassing moments, sometimes the tone shifts into "really awkward" and possibly dangerous. Cyn explains that some men begin to question their relationship, implying that perhaps if Cyn and Alex dated men, things could be different. One of the pervasive assumptions in a heteronormative society is that LGBTQ couples do not "know better" or have not had a chance to experience heterosexual romance. These heteronormative assumptions are not only disrespectful to LGBTQ partnerships but have often been used to justify "corrective rape". These moments of *invisibility* result in situations that compromise their emotional belonging by triggering feelings of sexual insecurity. Cyn's frustration and Alex's discomfort with heterosexual advances are echoed below:

> I get it. My girlfriend is hot, but then they try to size me up and I'm like, dude, I don't know what you're expecting out of this conversation…

Cyn's and Alex face unpleasant reminders that others can impose heteronormative expectations on them. "Free drinks are the silver-lining", Cyn jokes, showing her grit in confronting heteronormative assumptions. Their experience shows the consequences of being placed in the "friend/family zone" and the extent that strangers are willing to go to enforce their ideas that diminish LGBTQ partnerships in micro public spaces.

Racial and gender dynamics converge to create specific types of *invisibility* for LGBTQ couples of colors. Even in LGBTQ-friendly spaces, some couples are more visible than others. LGBTQ spaces tend to privilege White gay men. This creates inequalities that fracture structures of belonging in the LGBTQ community. LGBTQ queer couples of color, especially trans and gender expansive identified couples face social exclusion within LGBTQ establishments that cater to the gay couples above others. "Every time I want to buy a drink the gay male bartender serves guys who came after me, before me," Rio shares. If you recall, Rio identifies as nonbinary Filipino participants, navigating the world using a "transmasculine" expression. This means they wear polos, fashionable socks under rolled up loose fitting dress pants, and adopt a wider stance. When Rio wants to buy their date a drink, they experience moments of feeling depreciated in "gay-friendly" spaces that bump trans and nonbinary couples to second tier service. Even when Rio approaches the bar with their partner, which should make it more obvious that they want service, neither feels fully "seen". "Maybe if we were White, it would be slightly better, but I think guys in general have way more privilege," Rio elaborates when I ask how they explain these moments. Their experience alludes to the gendered and racial hierarchies that place White men, and in this case, gay White men, at the top of the pyramid. Despite inclusive symbols on the walls, LGBTQ can replicate *invisibility* of women and genderqueer participants. This time

the *invisibility* that produces feelings of not being valued equally is not about being LGBTQ, but about being gendered and raced within "gay-friendly" spaces.

Couple Strategies for Navigating Contexts of (Hyper/In) visibility

Acts like holding hands, kissing, or hugging are repressed for LGBTQ couples. While heterosexual couples can show intimacy freely, the same expressions of affection can be punished through social exclusion and violence. This creates a general tension for LGBTQ couples who wish to enjoy normalcy in their relationship. Often LGBTQ couples are forced to town down their affection, or hide it, or fight back in the name of safety. This leaves LGBTQ couples calibrating their affection to match the tone of the overall tone of inclusivity within micro public spaces, something heterosexual couples do not have to think about. The hegemonic nature of societal portrayals of "true love" are almost always heterosexual expressions. The few mainstream representations of queer love are subtle, overly sexual, and rarely include them being in healthy relationships, and thriving together as "power couples". The absence of LGBTQ love stories in mainstream society creates a context of *hypervisibility* for couples who express their affection for one another in public, and a push towards *invisibility* that relegates their relationship to private spaces.

LGBTQ couples maneuver through gendered sexualities to find public belonging in a variety of ways. Couples learn to confront moments of *hypervisibility* and *invisibility* in tandem. In the beginning of their relationship, LGBTQ couples may have diverging opinions about whether to leave a space, confront a stranger, or de-escalate tension. Yet because they need couple-level strategies to navigate micro public spaces together, they find agreement. Gendered dynamics create different comfort levels within a LGBTQ couple, and these must be negotiated to deploy a joint strategy. "At first, I wanted to leave, and she wanted to say…but we talked

openly about it afterward, debriefing." Couples must juggle intersectional experiences within their relationships. Suze explains that as a masculine-presenting lesbian woman, she feels like she gets the brunt of the heat when tensions rise. Suze's gender-presentation makes her worried about overstaying her welcome in contexts of *hypervisibility*. "As the more masculine one, I would be the one pulled into a fight with men, needing to protect myself and my wife." Her experiences are in line with research that finds that gender presentation mediates the effect of social exclusion- positioning masculine-presenting lesbians of color feel closer to the social experiences of men of color. After Suze explained this identity-based concern to her wife, they reached an agreement to honor each other's comfort level in tense situations. They decided to protect the person who feels most at-risk, acknowledging that although both identify as lesbian women, their social experiences are quite different. LGBTQ couples, thus, learn to balance individual needs to adopt couple-level navigation strategies they can deploy in tandem.

LGBTQ couples navigate the joys and worries of being visibly together, sometimes choosing not to be out in public. Past experiences instill worry of facing insecurity as they navigate micro public spaces. "You want to believe everything is safe, but you never know who is watching you," Rhian shares. As a Black lesbian woman who presents their gender fluidly, often violating beauty standards held over Black women, Rhian feels that her gender expression denotes that she is LGBTQ. Rhian alludes to her fear of being the target of a homophobic violent attack because of the interaction between her sexuality and gender expression in contexts of *hypervisibility*. Consequently, Rhian is reserved about who she dates and prefers to meet her in a "private place" where they can relax. Rhian talks about constantly "watching around her" feeling *hypervisible* as a Black lesbian woman. Her experiences dating behind closed doors, allude to the pressure to combat *hypervisibility* in public settings. This becomes a couple-level

strategy for her, and other LGBTQ couples, who tread with caution in efforts to minimize their exposure to violence.

LGBTQ couples practice resistance in everyday spaces by developing strategies to de-escalate social situations to minimize the risk of violence. As an LGBTQ couple who organizes Trans Day of Remembrance in Long Beach, Jay and their partner are intimately aware that hate is the leading cause of death for people in their community every year. Planning for things to change is often the best plan. "We have to be attentive to any situation that can turn transphobic," Jay shares. To facilitate their ability to be attentive and respond to evolving situations, they have developed a color scale to communicate their social comfort level with one another. They adapted their social comfort scale from a sex-positive consent scale that designates colors to represent feelings:

> Red is like, we need to go now. And oranges is like, if this is still going at the rate it's going we're gonna have to leave real soon. Like, we should probably, start preparing for that. And then yellow is like, I just don't like the way this is going…So then we check in and usually, it's the person with their red, yellow, orange, we kind of cater to them first.

As a couple, Jay, and their partner use code language to openly discuss their comfort level in a social environment. Checking-in allows LGBTQ couples to calibrate their actions to avoid tense situations. They work together to protect each other from potentially escalating social dynamics. Even when one partner does not feel at risk, feelings of unsafety, intuition, and discomfort are taken seriously. While every couple has their own way of communicating, LGBTQ couples share that they take it upon themselves to be prepared to respond to risks of violence. They employ couple-strategies for smooth sailing of everyday public spaces.

When LGBTQ couples navigate everyday life together, they learn to adjust to evolving social needs by adopting precautionary behaviors. LGBTQ participants share that anything can happen. Even pleasant plans can turn sour if others in the space are not inclusive of LGBTQ couples. “My girlfriend and I learned to bring our own car,” shared Cyn, describing the precautionary behaviors she and Alex take to avoid being stuck in a bad social situation. They decided that driving their car gives them the option to leave whenever they want. Driving there serves another purpose. It carves out space for them to check-in and decide how long to stay. “We learned that sometimes we need to talk privately, so we ask each other for lipstick, using that as a code phrase that suggests that we need to walk to the car together”. Cyn shared that this practice emerged from dealing with “bullshit situations” where anyone undermines their partnership by making heterosexual assumptions. Now anytime they feel uncomfortable, they do a regular “lipstick check”. They have learned to keep an eye on people who do not see them as a couple, and at times leave them behind in the rear-view mirror.

Even when participants did not feel the need to be in the gayborhood, they often shared that they know of queer friendly spaces. This made a “night-and-day” difference in Sam’s social life when they moved from Houston “The hard part is choosing which events to go to” Sam chuckles, delighted with the options of events they learn about on social media and through friends. Living in Long Beach, surrounded by so many LGBTQ hang outs, gives them lots of local options to explore their queer identities, and how those might intersect with other ones. Likewise, Rhian describes her spaces of belonging as private queer parties. She loves meeting new people through dancing, and as a queer Black woman, often finds more queer people of color at her friend’s underground parties than the “bars on Broadway ". As someone who doesn't drink alcohol, but loves to dance, finding queer friendly dance parties gives her a space to

express more freely. "Actually, I met Lina at one of those parties…which is amazing because we were not on the apps" shared Rhian, sharing that underground queer dance parties brought her and her partner together, and continue to be a space where they can go together regularly.

LGBTQ couples work in tandem across a spectrum of belonging. They are not always sure what to expect. This results in LGBTQ couples monitoring the tone of micro public spaces, working to understand who is in the room and adjusting as needed. They mitigate social exclusion, at times, by toning down their affection. Sam talks about how reading the space informs what they do. Coming from Austin, Texas they perceive Long Beach to be relatively more inclusive of LGBTQ public displays of affection:

> Speaking for my partner and I, we've noticed that when we are in Long Beach, we sort of relax and don't worry about it, but I feel like as soon as we go back to Texas or anywhere where we are not sure about it, then we consciously have to make the decision to not draw any attention, you know?

Sam and their partner decide how much affection to show depending on where they go. Likewise, LGBTQ couples manage their *visibility* in public, assessing the extent to which it is safe to be "seen" together. Holding each other's hand in public, for example, can provoke social friction that may or may not be within the capacity or interest to address directly. LGBTQ couples must decide when to resist by continuing to display affection. They tone down affection if they feel like that might make it easier to move through micro public spaces.

Refusing spaces that are threatening or uncomfortable, is an exercise of power. Regardless of whether a space is supposed to feel affirming, couples feel out the dynamics. They decide when it is time to leave, changing to a more supportive environment, or stay to make the most of one. Being able to spend time in the company of people who make LGBTQ couples feel "seen" matters. Everyday spaces that are not explicitly LGBTQ-centric can still make space for

queer couples to be "seen". These spaces for couples are safe and embraced by the community. Jerry echoes the value of having gay-friendly spaces. He shares, "surprisingly we feel like we belong at a straight sports bar because we can just chill and watch sports" enjoys having a place where he can be openly gay but a sports fanatic, nonetheless. Jerry and his partner feel like regulars, and that feels safe. In a similar vein, Andrew shares "my husband and I pretty much hang out with our swimming team, where everyone embraces us. It is not a gay team per se, but we all love swimming." Andrew raises that queer-mostly is not what matters to him, being part of the team is what counts. They often attend team birthday celebrations and other important occasions in public spaces. Their experiences shed light on the role that allyship plays in fostering spaces that feel inclusive. Some couples seek out LGBTQ-friendly spaces, while others do not; what the spaces of *affirming visibility* hold in common is the way they make couples feel acknowledged and embraced by others in that space.

LGBTQ couples work in tandem to protect their safety and take pride in their love. While every LGBTQ couple chooses which strategies to use to navigate a society that expects heterosexuality, they decide together. They work to stay on the same page, they are strategic about how and when and where they display affection. What is most important to LGBTQ couples is life, and thus their resistance together takes many forms. Participants always think of their loved ones when confronted with the choice to stay and fight physically. They adopt a range of couple-level navigating strategies that help them resist the heteronormative violence in micro public spaces. Their specific strategies depend on context, opportunities, and agency. In other words, depending on where they are (context), who they are (opportunities) and how they choose to use their energy (agency). Their approaches range from choosing not to display affection in public, to working together to de-escalate social situations to minimize

hypervisibility, and combat *invisibility* by refusing spaces that diminish their romantic partnership. LGBTQ couples join forces to navigate contexts of *invisibility* and *hypervisibility*.

Conclusion

When queer couples are seen "*together"* in public, they share the joys and worries of being visible in public spaces. Couples mutually understand the risk of displaying affection, love, care, and (inter)connection in public spaces where transphobic and homophobic strangers might see. Spaces with overt LGBTQ symbols of inclusion set the stage for LGBTQ couples' visibility to find recognition and acceptance. At the same time, LGBTQ couples understand the value of affirming places and building community in those spaces. I argue that LGBTQ couples foster spaces of belonging, returning to them often, and navigating a wide range of public reactions in spaces outside of them.

LGBTQ participants use romantic partnerships to maneuver through social exclusion in tandem. They maneuver through gendered sexualities to find public belonging in a variety of ways. LGBTQ participants have unique experiences with confronting moments of *hypervisibility* and *invisibility*. The specific strategy deployed depends on context, opportunities, and agency. In other words, depending on where they are (context), who they are (opportunities) and how they spend time, money, and energy (agency). LGBTQ couples enter public space prepared to navigate politics of *invisibility*, *hypervisibility* by choosing not to display affection in public, working together to de-escalate social situations to minimize *hypervisibility*. To combat *invisibility,* they choose spaces that honor their romantic partnership. Often, they learn to deal with unfolding social dynamics that emerge from their public displays of affection or absence of them. Their movements through every day public spaces demonstrate there are shifts and turns that carry implications for social inclusion. LGBTQ couples work together to navigate

hypervisibility and *invisibility* across everyday spaces, seeking out micro spaces that enable safety in *visibility* that sets a foundation for cultivating spaces that feel welcoming and affirming.

LGBTQ couples' queer space by doing everyday life together. LGBTQ couples maneuver across everyday spaces, leveraging their power as a couple over that of an individual. By planning to deal with evolving social dynamics, they move between *affirming visibility*, *invisibility*, and *hypervisibility* in their everyday life. Holding hands in a queer affirming place can yield smiles, while in other places, evoke unfriendly stares. Regardless of the specific circumstance, LGBTQ couples practice resistance by spending time in affirming spaces, with accepting people, and managing the rest together.

CONCLUSION

Our fundamental human need to belong is founded on notions of security. When belonging is compromised, vulnerability emerges and people no longer feel welcome, accepted, or safe. While a wide body of literature suggests that social connection is essential to physical health and emotional wellbeing, the process through which belonging is negotiated is poorly understood. In this study, I focus on understanding how three social identities, social contexts, and agency interact to shape belonging.

A recent study of belonging in the United States, belonging is affected by sexuality, class, race, and gender, and while this is no surprise to sociologists, who argue that our social positionalities matter, most Americans report falling somewhere in between absolute exclusion and inclusion (ambivalent belonging) (Over Zero 2024). Yet what exactly contributes to mixed feelings of belonging is unknown. Theorizing the ambivalence, I propose a Spectrum of Belonging framework that can be used to understand how identities, contexts, and agency relationally interact to create experiences of *hypervisibility, invisibility, visibility,* and *affirming*

visibility. This theoretical framework supports future research that can triangulate social identities, social contexts, and agency allowing us to understand who, where, and why people experience a certain degree of belonging. The Spectrum of Belonging framework allows us to trace how people negotiate social exclusion and how they reclaim spaces along with their sense of belonging across multiple social contexts. It helps us understand the dynamic nature of belonging, both what individuals can protect their physical and emotional wellbeing, and what social contexts can do to inhibit or support those efforts. Furthermore, while this study centers the role micro public spaces play in facilitating or inhibiting belonging, the Spectrum of Belonging framework can be applied to belonging at school, work, or with family.

One of the contributions of this project is explaining *how* safety and belonging, are related. Feelings of belonging emerges to the degree that people feel safe, valued, and connected to people and landscapes in their social environment. Feeling of insecurity diminishes belonging while a sense of safety promotes it. In this chapter, I examine how *hypervisibility emerges* from moments of physical, sexual, or identity-based insecurity in public spaces. When *hypervisibility* is activated, participants become concerned with navigating safety risks. In the process, they resort to flight or fight strategies that disrupt social connections. Feelings of *hypervisibility* trigger psychological mechanisms of self-defense. It comes with a physiological stress response. Understanding who, why, and where people experience *hypervisibility* in micro public spaces is essential to building a foundation for belonging.

Throughout this study, I triangulate social identities, social contexts, and agency to show how these create a social force that shapes belonging. The convergence of these creates a spectrum of belonging in everyday micro public spaces that includes *hypervisibility, invisibility, visibility,* and *affirming visibility*. *Hypervisibility* makes people feel like they are the target of

violence *because* of their intersectional identities. Being too different (visible in a negative way) feels threatening. *Hypervisibility* emerges when people feel surveilled and at-risk for economic, physical, sexual, and identity-based violence. Feeling threatened activates a flight or fight response to emerging vulnerability. In these moments insecurity carries economic, physical, sexual, and identity-based implications, leaving them feeling disconnected from people and places within that context. In the context of public space, experiences of *hypervisibility* shape whether a person will use a space in the future. This means that even if the City of Long Beach invested ten years and 2.8 million dollars building Gumbiner Park, if people feel hypervisible in that space, they will not use it (Ruiz 2017). Moving towards absolute belonging, feelings of *invisibility* emerge when people feel devalued and depreciated in each context. When people are made to feel invisible, they walk away with a sense of being unequal to others which diminishes the social value of their contribution within these social contexts. Feeling inferior to others, or at times invisible, makes people feel partially disconnected from the group. It diminishes social connection and leaves those who experience *invisibility* with unmet emotional and physical needs. People use agency to contest this type of social exclusion by attempts to bring positive visibility to their identities. Moving towards inclusion, *visibility* emerges when people feel that their identities are protected and respected. It is described as feeling valued and protected. Feelings of *visibility* emerge when people feel safe, and thus relaxed, to be there. Feeling *visible* offers a stable basis for social connection. Often DEI efforts fall within the category of promoting *visibility* of diverse identities reflected on boards and brochures; while those efforts are foundational, visibility alone does not result in deep connection. Moving towards extreme belonging, *affirming visibility* is experienced as described in the seminal definition of belonging - having the opportunity to "play a special role" in a shared social environment (Hagerty et al.

1992). When people feel visible in affirming ways, they can relate to others based on shared identities or interest and make notable contributions. *Affirming visibility* is more than safety, it comes with feeling "seen" and deeply valued. These feelings promote physical and emotional wellbeing and facilitate strong social connections, often described as community. For a visual representation of the Spectrum of Belonging framework see Figure 1 below.

Figure 1. Spectrum of Belonging framework

Spectrum of belonging	**Hypervisibility** Target of Violence	**Invisibility** Devalued, Depreciated	**Visibility** Valued, Appreciated	**Affirming Visibility** Community, Embraced
Experienced as	Insecurity of needs and identities	Unequal recognition of needs and identities	Recognition of needs and identities	Centers needs and identities
Navigated by	Flight, Fight, Refuse	Contest, Overlook, Refuse	Relax, Express, Choose	Relate, Co-create, Cultivate
Effect on Belonging	Disconnected	Unstable Connection	Stable Connection	Strong Connection

Safety and belonging are informed by city policies, social norms, and social interactions but these are not unilateral dynamics. As we have seen, there is a relational dynamic in people, individual, and collective agency to subvert or perpetuate these dynamics. These findings contribute to urban sociology by engaging with a micro space scale of the processes that inform rights claiming, and the use of public space in the matter. It gives us the glimpse of the types of insecurity that people overcome when they take up social and physical space to reclaim space, and the latent social dynamics that facilitate and stifle those movements. This study contributes to LGBTQ and gender literatures, by shedding light on the micro dynamics that inform the intersections of gender and sexuality. It adds a framework that is agentic, while considerate of social forces that shape social identities, social contexts, and the politics of social and physical space.

While much of the literature on belonging conceptualizes belonging as a binary outcome, I offer the Spectrum of Belonging framework to theorize a range of social exclusion and social inclusion from a relational standpoint. I find that every person, with their intersecting identities, is familiar with a spectrum of belonging ranging from *hypervisibility* to *affirming visibility*; however, their intersecting identities produce diverging experiences across the city. Furthermore, I argue that micro public spaces are critical to belonging. Lessons learned about the social interactions in public spaces apply to workplace, school, and family contexts. Scholars and grassroots movements have theorized public spaces as resistance sites. This study begins to suggest how hegemonic forces can facilitate or disrupt belonging across social contexts. I argue that practices that forge social and physical spaces are deeply embedded in everyday life and are set to replicate systematically and repeatedly unless changed, hence the politics of belonging to literature. This insight reinforces the idea that social spaces are constructed through a reciprocal process of negotiating contextual belonging, where the presence or absence of affirming symbols and their diverse representations can profoundly shape a contextual sense of belonging. Learning from spaces that create opportunities for social connection supports community-building, which promotes a strong sense of belonging. Lastly, this study engages in a conversation of power, at the couple-level, shedding light on how people can join their agency to protect their sense of safety and reclaim a sense of belonging by taking up physical space.

Implications

We have the power to move the needle on physical and emotional health by designing social environments that support people holistically. Cultivating public spaces that feel welcoming to people at the intersections of gender, race, sexuality, class, and ability is essential for our collective wellbeing.

The research findings presented in these chapters come with policy implications. First, cities shape the possibilities for its residents to belong by the way they structure spaces. From street names, landmarks, murals, and rainbow sidewalks, they layout of spaces convey a message of belonging. If cities are interested in making certain public spaces more inclusive, they should gather data on residents' experiences using that space, asking users and non-users questions about *hypervisibility*, *invisibility*, *visibility,* and *affirming visibility*. While cities might believe that they are only responsible for shaping physical landscapes, everything the city builds has a social impact. Assessing that impact and designing with social needs in mind can serve as a preventative strategy to curtail insecurity. The city of Long Beach has room to study its Safety Alliance program, as well as many cultural, LGBTQ, and interest-based spaces in the city. Studying these spaces of *visibility* and *affirming visibility*, as well as those that raised concerns for residents, can inform contextual interventions that address the *invisibility* and *hypervisibility* directly. Second, investing in the creation of public spaces that give off an affirming and welcoming atmosphere can buffer some of the harm experienced by marginalized communities. While there is no quick solution to addressing poverty, homophobia, or transphobia in Long Beach, there is room to offer funding for the development of public spaces for community use. Adopting this strategy can facilitate protective relationship building among neighborhood residents. Increasing funding for local initiatives like neighborhood gardens, adding amenities to shared spaces (i.e. adding comfortable chairs, street lighting, or bike stations) and facilitating knowledge on how to apply for block grant funding for neighborhood projects, are small ways in which Long Beach can re-invest in micro public spaces. Third, Long Beach can hold educational spaces that use art, theater, and music to engage Long Beach residents in conversations about safety, *visibility*, and belonging. In this way, Long Beach can create awareness of the behaviors

that make others feel unsafe and help them develop personal strategies to navigate insecurity. By fostering feelings of *visibility* and *affirming visibility* that celebrate diversity, Long Beach can take steps towards restoring the social fabric that keeps its residents physically and emotionally healthy. Policymakers, organizations, and strangers contribute to the social forces that drive our public spaces towards *affirming visibility*, or away from it. Cities and communities should leverage the power of micro public spaces to facilitate community-building. Investing in welcoming micro public spaces is crucial to facilitating the types of social connection that can boost residents' health, diminish insecurity, and nourish their sense of pride in Long Beach.

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APPENDIX A

TABLE 1. PARTICIPANTS GENDER AND SEXUALITY

GENDER IDENTITY	**LGBTQ SEXUALITY**	**HETERO SEXUALITY**	**NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS**
GENDER-EXPANSIVE	21	0	21
(CIS)MEN	3	7	10
(CIS)WOMEN	6	7	13
	30	**14**	**44**

TABLE 2. PARTICIPANTS GENDER AND BINARY RACIAL IDENTIFICATION

GENDER IDENTITY	**WHITE RACIAL IDENTITY**	**NON-WHITE RACIAL IDENTITY**	**NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS**
GENDER-EXPANSIVE	4	17	21
(CIS)MEN	2	8	10
(CIS)WOMEN	3	10	13
	9	**35**	**44**

TABLE 3. PARTICIPANTS GENDER AND RACIAL IDENTIFICATION

GENDER IDENTITY	**Black**	**White**	**API**	**Latinx**	**Middle Eastern**	**Mixed race**	**NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS**
GENDER-EXPANSIVE	4	4	5	5	0	3	21
(CIS)MEN	2	2	2	3	1	0	10
(CIS)WOMEN	4	3	2	4	0	0	13
	10	**9**	**9**	**12**	**1**	**3**	**44**

Black = 10, White = 9, API = 9, Latinx = 12, Middle Eastern = 1, Mixed race = 3