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Just Be(ing) Yourself:

Transgender Women of Color in Los Angeles’ Everyday Public Spaces

A thesis submitted in partial satisfaction
of the requirements for the degree Master of Science
in Urban and Regional Planning

By

John August Wendel

2017
ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

Just Be(ing) Yourself:
Transgender Women of Color in Los Angeles’ Everyday Public Spaces

By

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Master of Science in Urban and Regional Planning
University of California, Los Angeles, 2017
Professor Anastasia Loukaitou-Sideris, Chair

The ability to express one’s self, or simply ‘be yourself’ in public space remains a predominant concern among historically marginalized groups, and should be an important consideration in public space planning. Among those groups whose right to self-expression has failed to materialize in the public realm, the LGBTQ community is conspicuously absent from planning literature and discourse. Verbal harassment, bullying, service refusal, and physical violence are only a few of the ways LGBTQ people, particularly homeless youth and transgender women of color (TWOC), continue to experience public discrimination. By examining how TWOC perceive and interact with ‘everyday’ public spaces in Los Angeles, this thesis attempts to better understand the physical and social characteristics of everyday, public places that contribute to TWOC feeling more or less comfortable being themselves. The research uses qualitative methods, that include 1) a preliminary set of semi-structured interviews; 2) visual documentation, and 3) a second set of semi-structured interviews. Participants were invited to photograph the public spaces they use on an
everyday basis, and were asked to consider how their feelings of comfort vary across these spaces. The research shows that everyday public spaces reflect social norms around gender identity, sexual orientation, and race, leading to compounded experiences of discomfort among TWOC individuals. At the same time, the degree of comfort varies depending on the social and physical conditions of public spaces.
The thesis of John August Wendel is approved.

Ian Holloway
Kian Goh
Anastasia Loukaitou-Sideris, Committee Chair

University of California, Los Angeles
2017
Dedication

For all twenty-two participants in this study. This project is yours.
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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

The Problem

Despite some legal gains at the national level, anti-LGBTQ discrimination persists\(^1\). Anti-LGBTQ campaigns advocating for “religious freedom” laws and “bathroom bills” have led to decreased protections against discrimination\(^2\). Verbal harassment, bullying, service refusal, and physical violence are only a few of the ways LGBTQ people continue to experience discrimination. A 2015 report by the National Coalition of Anti-Violence Programs (NCAVP) found that 24 hate related homicides of LGBTQ and HIV-affected people occurred in 2015, which was a 20% increase in the number of reports compared to the previous year. More than half of these homicides (54%) were transgender women of color. Continuing an alarming multi-year trend, people of color, and transgender and gender nonconforming people made up the majority of victims of LGBTQ and HIV-affected hate crimes (NCAVP, 2016).

The overwhelming representation of homeless youth, who identify as LGBT (40%) (Durso and Gates, 2012), and the sharp socioeconomic disparities among women, people of color, the young and the old, and transgender people within the LGBT community (Badgett et al. 2013; Sears & Badgett 2012) speaks to institutional discrimination that is compounded among those living at the intersections of multiple, overlapping identities and oppressions that are more often carried out in urban areas. (Goh, 2015).

Yet statistics and policies alone do not fully explain how fear arises and is felt across urban space and time. How is it that queer people might still feel insecure being themselves in public? Given that the city itself consists of varying socio-spatial configurations, how might feelings vary depending on physical and social characteristics of different spaces within the city? How do feelings of comfort also depend on other intersecting identities and oppressions, such as those experienced by LGBTQ homeless youth or transgender women of color?

To begin to answer these questions, I have chosen a broad-brush approach to understanding the spatial experiences of TWOC in Los Angeles, with the aim of rethinking the role of planners in

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\(^1\)The recent slate of anti-LGBTQ ballot measures and policies in the U.S., occurring mostly at the state and local level, and the uptick in hate crimes since the 2016 U.S. election, speaks to the precarious state of existence for many queers. Statistics on anti-LGBTQ hate crime statistics at the national level found at (Levin and Grisham 2017): https://csbs.csusb.edu/sites/default/files/Special%20Status%20Report%20Metro%20Areas%202017%20Final%20Draft%2032417.pdf.

\(^2\)North Carolina’s recent law blocking measure to protect LGBTQ people reflects a national trend at the state level (Domonoske 2016): http://www.npr.org/sections/thetwo-way/2016/03/24/471700323/north-carolina-passes-law-blocking-measures-to-protect-lgbt-people
creating inclusive public spaces. Are there specific social and spatial public contexts where TWOC feel fully comfortable simply being themselves? How do they operate? And how might planners enable them? If the work of planners is to improve the spaces and places we inhabit, then understanding patterns of everyday life in an area is a critical part of planning analysis. Inclusion starts with recognizing the unique experiences of people, and categories of people, within these spaces.

This thesis is structured as follows. The introduction is followed by a review of literature at the intersection of urban planning and LGBTQ studies. Chapter 3 outlines my hypotheses and research methods. Chapter 4 discusses some of the overarching issues facing TWOC, and makes an argument for why Los Angeles is a beneficial site to study TWOC’s experiences in space. Chapter 5 analyzes the interview and visual documentation data at both the street scale and district scale. In Chapter 6, I review my hypotheses and discuss conclusions and suggestions for future research.

A Note on Terminology

For the purposes of this thesis, I will often use queer and LGBTQ interchangeably, acknowledging that both terms are contested. Queer on the one hand subverts the gay|straight, man|woman, binary categories, which are too often transposed with the equally essentialist binary of “right” and “wrong”. In this way, the “taking back” of queer from its prior derogatory use is a political act of subverting the marginalization process of categorization (Reyes, 1993). But while queer as an inclusive umbrella term subverts binaries and re-appropriates a homophobic slur, it may also render invisible certain subjectivities within the L, G, B, T, Q and beyond, as well as homogenize the entire population into one fixed ‘queer’ category, thereby defeating the term’s subversive potential (Knopp, 2007). LGBTQ retains the potential to highlight specific subjectivities that create unique experiences, and brings attention to the need for an intersectional approach to understanding how multiple identities overlap, including but not limited to gender, race/ethnicity, class, age, disability, and homeless status (Frisch, 2016).

When conducting my field work, I asked interview participants about the terms they felt most comfortable using when talking about identity and space. In a discussion of queer space, a couple participants were uncomfortable with the term queer, as they understood the term as a homophobic slur. This may reflect a generational preference; most of participants were in their 50s, and may not have reclaimed the term in the same way that younger LGBTQ have done. It may also reflect the intellectualized interpretation of a term whose use and meaning does not resonate as well outside the academy.
Doan defines the term transgender as a “collective term” that refers to people assigned to one gender who do not identify or perform as that gender, and have taken steps, either permanent or temporary, to present in another gender (2010). It is important to note that the boundaries of transgender are not necessarily fixed; not all intersexed people identify as transgender (Chase 1998; Kessler 1998; Turner 1999), and some individuals who identify with their birth sex may present in such a way that their gender is often mistaken (Doan 2010; Browne 2004; Lucal 1999).

I asked how participants self-identified and used that term throughout this study. For instance, when discussing their gender identities, each participant identified as “trans/transgender female/woman” with the pronouns “she”, “her”, “hers”. For this reason, I used the acronym TWOC (transgender women of color) as the identity marker throughout the research. While none of the participants identified as gender non-conforming per say, several participants did describe their experiences transitioning as performing a “third gender”, and discussed how various stages of their transitions affected their experiences in public spaces.
CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature that has examined or has relevance to the intersection of urban planning and LGBTQ issues has generally come from scholars of urban planning, geography, feminism, gender, and queer studies. While the field of geography has produced numerous academic articles on sexuality and urban spaces, the planning literature has remained relatively silent on the question of queer issues (Doan 2015). Several scholars have laid bare both the explicit and implicit assumptions made by planners with regards to their LGBTQ constituents, both historically and in the present, however more interrogative studies are needed to better understand how spatial injustices are experienced within the LGBTQ community (Goh 2015). The following literature review is organized along the following themes: 1) planning and LGBTQ communities, 2) the issue of public space, and 3) the critical notion of queer space.

Planning and LGBTQ Communities

Several scholars have begun to uncover urban planning’s historic pattern of exclusion along the lines of sexual orientation and gender identity. Sandercock’s (1997) seminal work argues that inclusion would start with a true commitment to multiculturalism, and by naming and recognizing that planning has a responsibility to address systematic inequities, including those around issues of sexual orientation and gender identity. Frisch goes further, arguing that true inclusion happens with explicit engagement (Frisch, 2016). Planning for multiple interests would have to start by engaging the “situational accomplishment” of individuals negotiating categorical boundaries within urban space (Valentine, 2007).

Frisch makes the case that planning was always a “heterosexist project” (Frisch, 2002, p. 1), where all public space is ‘heteronormative space’, and where the assumption is that everyone is straight. He quotes early planners like Patrick Geddes and Lewis Mumford, who explicitly linked the goals of planning to the creation of a social order governed by the dualisms of order/disorder, household/family, and public/private. Zoning, housing rights, and the public realm are organized around and reinforce these heterosexual social constructs. “Queer space challenges the public realm by making private use of public space. Planners work to destroy these queer spaces and render them safe for heterosexuals” (Frisch 2002, p. 255). In a similar historical vein, H Clay Howard (2009) reveals the implicit side of discrimination against homosexuals by examining post-World War II housing policies that limited housing opportunities for non-heterosexuals. These policies explicitly created benefits for (White) heterosexual families at the expense of other, nonconformist household formation (Howard 2009).
Moira Kenney (1995) focuses less on processes of institutionalized discrimination and more on how gays and lesbians have experienced and responded to systematic discrimination, most notably in the form of harassment in public places and discrimination in housing and public accommodations. The collective, grassroots responses of queer people to discrimination has pushed planning to recognize “the city as activator of social and political empowerment” (Kenney 1995, p. 121). Indeed, gay and lesbian efforts to create space in order to escape violence, foster a sense of community, and build economic and political power has been the subject of key scholars, though most of this early scholarship has focused on residential concentrations of gay men (Castells, 1983; Knopp, 1990), and later, lesbian spatial concentration (Adler and Brenner 1992). Central to these discussions is the question of whether LGBT enclaves have contributed to urban revitalization, as well as gentrification and displacement of other marginalized groups.

Samuel R. Delany’s Times Square Red, Times Square Blue (1999) describes the way in which planning served the capitalist state in its corporate redevelopment of Times Square in New York City during the 1980s. Redevelopment was a response to the perceived unsafety associated with the district’s sex industries, specifically, Delany argues, the sexual encounters between men of different classes and races in Times Square’s porn shops and triple-X theaters. He suggests the need to find and preserve these sites of “interclass contact and communication” (p. 111) and implicates planning and urban design in the violent construction of ‘safe’ urban spaces specifically so that suburban visitors can spend money (Delany 1999). Delany’s insights reveal the potential of sexual communities as sites of inter-class and race contact, but only focuses on gay men, thereby reflecting the historical absence of gender as a category of analysis in much of the work concerned with sexuality and space (Halberstam 205).

These scholars have laid a foundation for understanding the relationship between planning and sexuality, particularly the way in which heterosexuality is maintained in space, and the attendant spatial concentration of gay and lesbian enclaves. The literature is less concerned with how heteronormative space is felt by LGBTQ individuals and among different members within the LGBTQ community with different subjectivities.

The Issue of Public Space

The literature on LGBT populations and public space has primarily focused on three main issues: harassment, protest, and places of public affection or public eroticism (Forsyth, 2011).³ “The

³Phill Hubbard questions the idealization of public space as a site where new notions of sexual citizenship can be forged, arguing that sexual dissidents have transgressed public and civic spaces, thereby undermining dominant “heteronormative” notions of
issue of public space is perhaps the most difficult area for planning and raises questions that have divided the LGBT community” (Forsyth 2011, p. 48). One of the dilemmas is that, while many are critical of increasing regulations around public space to make them safer, others favor protection of the marginalized from harassment, through some form of regulation (Goh, 2015). Forsyth adds that forms of expression, like public displays of affection, have received much less attention [by academics] (Forsyth 2011, p. 49).

In an effort to better understand how the LGBT community experiences heteronormative public spaces, Nusser and Anacker (2015 and 2013) performed two qualitative studies examining queer identified individuals’ perceptions of everyday space in the Kansas City, MO and Cambridge, MA, respectively. In each city, they evaluated queer perceptions of public space along a spectrum of sexed spaces with “queer space” on one end and “anti-queer space” on the other (Figure 1). “Queering” denotes the in-between spaces that are not quite “queer”, but also not explicitly “anti-queer” (Nusser & Anacker, 2015 and 2013).

Figure 1. Spectrum of queer spaces (Nusser & Anacker 2013)

In both studies, queer people in Cambridge and Kansas City reflected on instances in which their identities were regulated, either explicitly by peers or implicitly by formal or private codes, in public space. Queer people also form networks where they feel comfortable outside of traditionally gay neighborhoods. Theoretically, Nusser and Anacker demonstrate how civil institutions alone do not create urban spaces that consider the experiences of queer people, and that there is a strong connection between the regulation and form of public space and the extent to which these spaces are perceived as inclusive.

Nusser and Anacker suggest that planners consider how to create public spaces that reflect citizenship (Hubbard 2001). While Hubbard’s assertion might be true, the ability to exercise one’s right to the city through public space remains a predominant concern among planners and historically marginalized groups.
the diversity of ways they are experienced. In Kansas City, planners should recognize that queer and queering spaces exist in older commercial and industrial spaces, and, rather than simply inviting redevelopment, should consider how to facilitate reuse of older buildings and design elements that facilitate indoor and outdoor gathering (Nusser & Anacker 2013 and 2015). More generally, findings in both Kansas City and Cambridge suggest that a diversity of built form types are more compatible with queering spaces: “areas with incongruous relationships to the formal grid and distinct compositions relying on various design parameters, such as clustering or types of enclosure—promote a diversity of spaces and relationships to the public realm that allow for the queering of space” (Nusser & Anacker 2013, p. 188). Additionally, queer monuments, historical sites, and other landmarks should be recognized and preserved to foster a sense of ownership and belonging by queer community members. At the level of governance, planners can become more aware of queer individuals’ needs by appointing LGBT-identified staff, and by recognizing LGBT residents as priority groups in community plans (Nusser & Anacker 2013; Doan 2015).

Expanding the argument made by feminist geographers and urban theorists that space has profound consequences for women, Doan’s (2010) work highlights the unique experiences of intersexed and transgendered populations. People who transgress gender norms frequently face discrimination in the form of social and physical violence. Doan claims that “Most transgendered people are painfully aware that their visible transgression of gender norms makes them one of the most vulnerable and least protected communities in social space” (Doan, 2010, p. 61). Trans women living fully as women are subject to the same potential discrimination, while trans people who do not ‘pass’ and come across as visibly transgendered may trigger another set of discriminatory responses in public space (Namaste, 1996; Witten & Eyler, 1999). Namaste (1996a) refers to this violence as ‘gender-bashing’. Gender regulation in public space means that there is no safe social space for gender non-conforming individuals (Mackenzie 1994). Doan asks the critical question: “Are there social and spatial contexts that empower the performance of non-binary genders and how do they operate? How does non-normative gender performance influence others’ perception of space and the action they take as a result?” (Doan, 2010, p. 649). One might also add to this list of questions: how do other identity categories including race, age, and class intersect with gender performance to complicate experiences in public space?

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4 Doan uses autoethnography to illustrate how the “tyranny of gender” is experienced by those who transgress gender norms along a continuum of private to public spaces including parking lots, public restrooms, shopping malls, the workplace, and the home (Doan, 2010, p. 635).
Queering ‘Queer Space’

A few key scholars working at the intersection of geography, queer theory, and, more recently, urban planning, have set the stage for more critical approaches to understanding sexuality and space. Much in the same way that scholars have discussed the heterosexist and heteronormative assumptions about planning practice, these scholars challenge our homonormative assumptions, particularly as it regards ‘queer space’: What is queer and what constitutes queer space? And how can its critical theoretical and practical potential be reclaimed?

The notion of queer space arguably began as a psychological one. The metaphorical “closet” symbolizes the standard Western binary construction between “heterosexual” and “homosexual”, a binary that, Sedgewick (1990) argues, essentializes sexuality’s complexity. Betsky conceptualizes queer space as a “counterarchitecture”, a kind of third space that, regardless of the sexual preferences of those using or making it, subverts the conventional use of such space (Betsky 1997, p. 20). In a similar way, Halberstam refers to queer as “nonnormative logics and organizations of community, sexual identity, embodiment, and activity in space and time” (Halberstam 2005, p. 6). Halberstam argues for a “queer time and space”: queer time is “those specific models of temporality that emerge within postmodernism once one leaves the temporal frames of bourgeois reproduction and family, longevity, risk/safety, and inheritance”. Queer space refers to “the place-making practices within postmodernism in which queer people engage” and the “new understandings of space enabled by the production of queer counterpublics” (p. 6). These conceptions of queer suggest a clear but non essential relationship to LGBTQ subjects.

Studying queer space, or queer experiences in space, is useful for deconstructing the gendered and sexed nature of spaces and the coercion of bodies through socio-spatial demarcations (Knopp, 2007), but its critical potential is lost when it overlooks the lived experiences of many who are the subjects of queer studies.

Regarding public space for instance, Namaste (1996b) argues that queer theory’s tendency is to highlight the potential for liberation from transgressing gender codes, while ignoring the lived realities of transgendered people, who often face violence for simply being themselves. Doan’s (2007) study of transgendered individuals’ perceptions of urban spaces revealed the overwhelming disparity in experiences of public discrimination in comparison with the LGB population, underlining the understandable degree of fear that many transgender individuals harbor when entering urban public spaces. The same study suggests that, although transgendered people who are in the early phases of transition may find acceptance and safety in queer spaces, visibly queer neighborhoods fall short of meeting this population’s residential needs. Existing queer spaces mostly
consist of gay and lesbian residential and commercial establishments that are still highly gendered (Doan 2007).

In recent decades, city agencies have engaged in issues involving queer enclaves, mostly for the purposes of neighborhood revitalization, economic development and tourism, and in response to grassroots efforts to create a gay district. Binnie and Skeggs (2004) show how good intentions associated with public agency plans do not always align with inclusive outcomes for LGBTQ communities. The creation of gay neighborhoods has often come at the expense of excluding working class queers. State-sponsored public space projects of this kind, by limiting the ‘gay public sphere’ to consumption spaces and gentrified neighborhoods only, limit the forms of sexual expression in those spaces (Bell and Binnie, 2004).

As an alternative to these ‘homonormative spaces’, G. Brown (2007) highlights the potentialities and limitations of “queer autonomous spaces”, which are places and actions that are fundamentally anti-capitalist and as opposed to homonormativity as they are to heteronormativity. As an example, he describes the work of London’s ‘Queeruptors’, who organize events that “fuse politics, culture, and sex in a spirit of creative playfulness to question the rights claims made by more mainstream gay activists” (Brown, p. 2686). G. Brown (2006) also notes the complexity and contradictions of spaces in the city where immigrants, people of color, and non-straight people coincide and interact, revealing and complicating the production of class and ethnicity within fluid queer spaces.

In “Place/Out: Planning for Radical Queer Activism” (2015), Kian Goh highlights the organizing work of two New York City-based radical queer activist groups: FIERCE’s (Fabulous Independent Educated Radicals for Community Empowerment) campaign for safe spaces for youth in the West Village, and the Audre Lorde Project’s safe neighborhood campaign in the Bedford-Stuyvesant neighborhood of Brooklyn. The work of these organizations not only evidences the continued existence of queer urban struggles, heightened by sociopolitical and economic pressures, including race and class, and state violence, but demonstrates how the priorities of the mainstream LGBT movement are often in opposition to their goals. By prioritizing same-sex marriage, gays serving in the military, and hate crimes legislation, the mainstream LGBT movement overlooks more pressing issues like safety, access, affordability, and shelter (Goh, 2015).

Goh asks the critical question: “How might planners engaged with LGBT-framed or oriented research work with and for communities at the intersection of marginalities or systems of oppression—particularly considering the institutional contexts in which many planners reside, and from which they practice?” (Goh, 2015, p. 219). On the level of practice, Goh suggests that planners
might engage on two levels: one, by focusing their knowledge and skills on the spaces and issues that are clear problems, for instance, the design of safe spaces; two, by building a shared political awareness and analysis that enable strategies and implementation towards social and spatial change. Ultimately the latter requires planners to not only use their tools and know-how to address inequality, but to learn how they might “confront and attempt to dismantle power structures” (Goh, 2015, p. 229-230).

These literatures provide the historical basis for the variety of queer space types and configurations used by LGBTQ individuals in order to protect themselves, create a sense of community and identity, make a living, and express desire. It also unpacks our assumptions about what is “queer” and who queer spaces are for, as the layers of oppression and (in)visibility often obscure the privileged blinders of planning practice and the academy.

There are also those who would argue that *queer* as a critical concept should be separate from its historical identification with the LGBTQ community. Is *queer* better conceived of in ontological terms, to disrupt binaries and existing power structures that leads to radical, anti-capitalist action? Is it still productive to tie the concept of *queer* to the identities, spaces, or behaviors of LGBTQ-identifying individuals? Perhaps this is not an either/or question. This thesis does not directly engage with this debate rather, this purpose of this thesis is to further interrogate the link between urban design and planning for safe public spaces by focusing on the unique, understudied experiences of TWOC in Los Angeles, using an intersectional lens.
CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODS AND HYPOTHESES

An Intersectional Approach

This research calls for an intersectional approach, one that draws from individuals’ identities that are multiple and overlapping as opposed to singular and fixed (Frisch 2016, Gieseking 2013, Crenshaw 1991). The concept of intersectionality arose out of an attempt to describe the experience of living within multiple categories of identity. Crenshaw (1991) identified the “intersectional” experience as the result of multiple types of intersectionality. Structural intersectionality is where discriminatory structures of racism, sexism, and class intersect. Political intersectionality refers to the politics of conflicting social movements responding to discriminatory structures. According to Crenshaw: “Through an awareness of intersectionality, we can better acknowledge and ground the differences among us and negotiate the means by which these differences will find expression in constructing group politics” (Crenshaw, 1991, p. 149). Rather than simply framing people within a group as the objects of discrimination, intersectionality highlights the ways that individuals and collective organizations experience structures of power. For planners to begin thinking about how to address the complex, intersectional nature of queer struggles, they must first understand the power relationships embedded within multiple levels of social and spatial oppression (Goh, 2015).

How does one go about employing an intersectional approach to understanding one’s experience in space? Valentine (2007) provides an example of how intersectionality is employed as a method. The key is registering the different emotional responses to various time and space settings. She uses short narratives of one individual’s experiences over various spatial and temporal contexts in order to attempt to “capture the complexity and dynamism of intersectionality as she [the participant] has lived it” (Valentine, 2007, p. 15). Valentine’s work reflects on the ways gender, sexuality, class, motherhood, disability, and the cultural/linguistic identity “Deaf” become salient/disappear, are claimed/rejected, and are made relevant/irrelevant in the narrative of Jeanette (pseud.), a white, now middle-aged, woman. Through the process of identification/disidentification and fluctuating emotional investment in these different subject positions, Jeanette’s sense of self constantly emerges and unfolds in different spatial contexts and at different biographical moments. Jeanette’s account attempts to capture the complexity and dynamism of intersectionality as she has lived it. To make the narrative comprehensible for the reader, Valentine assembles Jeanette’s accounts chronologically as a series of ‘stories’ and passages to “explore the relation between subjectivities, materialities, and bodily competencies” (Valentine, 2007). These stories bring to light the specific identifications/disidentifications that emerge for Jeanette in particular spatial and
temporal moments.

Inspired by Valentine, I analyze participants’ emotional readings of urban spaces to tease out the various identifications/disidentifications that occur across various time/spaces. In my interviews, I asked participants to talk about how their feelings of comfort being themselves change from space to space. In doing so, I purposefully made room in the conversation for participants to share their broader stories, histories, and experiences, so that they could share additional factors, circumstances, or aspects of their life that have an impact on the way they navigate the city. The participatory visual documentation was an additional method I employed to assist participants in thinking about and reflecting upon the spaces they inhabit and how they feel in those spaces.

**Methods**

Fieldwork for this research took place between January 2017 and May 2017 in the ‘everyday’ (Chase, Crawford, Kaliski, 2009) public spaces of Los Angeles, CA. ‘Everyday’, here, refers to the spaces and places we inhabit in everyday life as we go from home to work. Valentine (2007) argues that everyday spaces frame our existence and define the possibilities of whom we might meet. The geography of our everyday lives is intertwined with the institutions and individual relationships that reflect identity categories. These identities are both chosen by an individual and imposed upon an individual. Expression of these identities is a constant negotiation and it may differ as we move from a “safe” space to places of lesser safety (Valentine, 2007).

The thesis uses qualitative methods, centered on a preliminary set of semi-structured interviews followed by participant visual documentation, and concluded with a second set of semi-structured interviews. I solicited research participants with the help of my thesis committee member, Professor Ian Holloway, and Friends Community Center (FCC); a Hollywood-based nonprofit that provides services and conducts research with substance-using gay and bisexual men, other men who have sex with men, and high-risk transgender women. In total I interviewed 22 TWOC, each of whom was invited to visually document the public spaces they use on a regular, everyday basis, and to consider how their feelings of comfort vary across these spaces.

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5 Unlike ‘queer space’, which is created by and for the LGBTQ community (Gieseking, 2013), ‘everyday space’ is by default ‘heteronormative space’, where “hetero-normative culture thinks of itself as the elemental form of human association, as the very model of inter-gender relations, as the indivisible basis of all community, and as the means of production without which society wouldn’t exist” (Warner, 1993).

6 The work of urban planning is to improve the places we inhabit. Understanding patterns of everyday life in an area is a critical part of planning analysis. Thus inclusion and recognition of people and categories of people within these spaces may be a necessary ingredient of democratic practice (Frisch p. 137).
Collaboration with participants followed three stages: The first stage involved a first semi-structured interview, lasting between 30 and 60 minutes, where participants were asked about the everyday spaces they use, and how their other identities—including their TWOC identities—might impact their experiences in public space. In the second stage, participants were invited to document using photographs and/or video their frequently used public spaces discussed in the first interview, and to consider their feelings of comfort within and between those spaces. Participants were asked to focus on outdoor public spaces like streets, sidewalks, parks, freeways, and transit lines. The third and final step involved a semi-structured wrap-up interview, lasting between 30 and 45 minutes, where we discussed the spaces participants chose to document. Using participants’ photographs and videos, I asked them to explain how their feelings of comfort of being themselves changed across different public spaces. I used their responses to identity the different social and physical characteristics of each space that, based on participants’ responses, contributed to participants feeling comfortable being themselves.

Hypotheses

My overarching hypothesis is that all everyday public spaces reflect social norms around gender identity, sexual orientation, and race, leading to compounded experiences of discomfort among TWOC. My sub-hypotheses are as follows:

- The built environment of certain spaces communicates inclusivity more than others, and therefore translates to participants feeling more or less comfortable being themselves. Examples of built environment characteristics that communicate inclusivity might include symbols and signage (TWOC-friendly business or institutional signs and symbols), the presence of TWOC landmarks (such as monuments or buildings that affirm queer identity), quality (cleanliness and maintenance versus dirtiness and dilapidation) and semi-enclosed, mixed-use spaces as opposed to open, single-use spaces.

- The social environment of spaces will positively or negatively affect TWOC feelings of comfort being themselves. I hypothesize that participants will generally feel more comfortable in areas of the city where there is a visible presence of other TWOC, gender non-conforming individuals.

- Participants’ feelings of comfort being themselves will vary in part due to participants’ other identities (or subjectivities) in addition to their TWOC identities. Participants’ physical, emotional and physiological state, financial circumstances, social stability, and history of
being discriminated against, are some of the additional factors that I anticipate shape how TWOC experience degrees of comfort across space.

**Positionality and Representation**

It goes without saying that each of us comes from a different place, with a unique set of identities that shapes how each of us sees the world and, in turn, how the world sees us. Recognizing and interrogating the implications of my positionality for this project has been important from the outset. As a tall, cisgender, middle-upper class white man, I inherently bring to the work a degree of assumption, cultural and social bias, in other words, “privilege”, that affects my work and cannot go without interrogation. No amount of prep work or self-awareness can absolve me of the privileges and attendant world-view I carry into any given space. By studying an historically marginalized segment of the population and their everyday spaces, it is critical that I maintain a constant awareness of my own internal biases and assumptions.

My position as an ‘outsider’ also inherently affects the quality of the data collected. No matter how respectful, knowledgeable, or deferential I may be when conducting interviews, a participant may not trust me—and has every right not to—simply because I am not transgender, nor a woman, nor a person of color, nor share any meaningful common identity or experience with the participant. For this reason, participants may have been more reluctant to share aspects of the experiences during the interviews. I found that most participants were quite comfortable answering all the interview questions and sharing their stories. Those who were initially less forthcoming tended to be more open during the second interview.
CHAPTER 4: TWOC IN L.A.

Los Angeles: epicenter of LGBTQ struggles

Los Angeles’s role in the larger LGBTQ movement in the U.S. is not popularly known and has only recently come to the attention of scholars. Moira Kenney’s *Mapping Gay L.A.* (2001) attempts to rectify this omission by positioning Los Angeles as one of the most important cities for the beginning of the gay and lesbian rights movement in U.S. Los Angeles is where many of the first nation-wide LGBTQ advocacy groups originated. The Mattachine Society, the first long-running national gay organization, was founded in Silver Lake in the 1950s, along with the first gay-focused publications like *ONE* magazine, and lesbian-focused *Vice-Versa*. An omission within Kenney’s history is the role of transgender activists, including TWOC activists, in transforming the American political landscape through its recognition of transgender and gender nonconforming people.

Transgender people, including TWOC, have in many ways led the fight for broader LGBTQ equality in Los Angeles and in the country at-large. Lucy Hicks Anderson was one of the early TWOC activists pushed the boundaries of what it mean to be a “woman”. Lucy had spent nearly sixty years of her life living as a woman when, in 1944, she and her husband were charged for “perjury” when authorities discovered that she was assigned male at birth. Her decision to fight the charge in court is considered one of the first challenges to discriminatory laws on the basis of gender identity and sexual orientation both in in Southern California and in the nation. Sir Lady Java, a prominent performer and female impersonator in Los Angeles in the 1960s, partnered with the ACLU to challenge the city’s Rule No. 9, which made it illegal to impersonate someone of the opposite sex using costume or dress. While she failed to overturn the ordinance, her efforts set the stage for the rule to eventually be struck down two years later.

There is a strong need to properly insert these stories into the broader LGBTQ history in the U.S., which continues to privilege a primarily white, cisgender narrative. Films like *Tangerine* (2015), which was shot in Los Angeles, may signal a recent trend towards uplifting the unique stories and experiences of transgender women of color, and the spatial dimensions of their lives. On the activist front, organizations like the TransLatin@ Coalition, Familia: Trans Queer Liberation Movement, and Transgender Law Center, to name a few, continue to fight for LGBTQ equality in Southern California, and particularly emphasize issues that disproportionately affect TWOC.

That is not to say that histories like Kenney’s are not useful. Indeed, in addition to Los Angeles’ vibrant queer history, the city is home to one of the largest LGBTQ populations in the western hemisphere and is racially and ethnically heterogeneous. Los Angeles is a rich context for
further scholarship on issues affecting the TWOC community. Kenney’s book is perhaps most useful for the way it frames Los Angeles as a *spatially* unique site: “The enigma of Los Angeles begins with the geographic. Manhattan and San Francisco together cover less area than central Los Angeles. The size and sprawl of the city necessitates a mobility of daily life that scatters ethnic, racial, religious, and other culturally defined communities, reducing the possibilities of the kind of geographic concentrations of community landmarks that characterize enclaves like Greenwich Village or the Castro. Across the Los Angeles region, gay and lesbian communities exist at all scale and levels of visibility” (Kenney, 2001, p. 5). Kenney argues that Los Angeles’s complex social and physical geography, unlike those of New York and San Francisco, more closely resembles the built environment typologies of most American cities whose navigation continues to depend on the automobile. For this reason, Los Angeles might serve as a better proxy for understanding the experiences of queer people in cities.

*TWOC: subjects of marginalization*

From an empirical standpoint, LGBTQ people, and TWOC in particular, are relatively understudied in comparison to other groups. This is largely due to the inadequacy of conventional data-collecting tools to gauge non-binary sexualities and gender identities. Future data collection will surely become more difficult due to the current presidential administration’s recent decision to discontinue the U.S. Census’ work collecting data on LGBTQ Americans (Fernandes, 2017). Statistical data is important for anyone attempting to make informed policy decisions about the health and wellbeing of the LGBTQ community, much less the TWOC community.

Several nationwide nonprofits have conducted regional and national sample surveys of the transgender population, giving us a starting point for understanding the unique experiences and hardships faced by TWOC. In December 2016, the TransLatin@ Coalition released a report on the physical, socio-economic, and emotional conditions of transgender latin@s in Southern California. Of the 129 survey respondents, 57% reported earning less than $10,000 a year. 26% are undocumented immigrants. 33% of participants are homeless, living in temporary housing, or rely on someone else to pay for housing. 26% reported being unemployed, while only 20% reported having full-time employment. With regards to health care, 50% of respondents have Medical or Medicaid, while 28% have no health insurance. 51% of participants reported currently experiencing anxiety, while 26% are experiencing depression.

While I was unable to find any similar survey or statistical data specific to other race/ethnicity categories in Southern California, several reports illustrate survey data conducted at a
national level. A 2015 report by the Human Rights Campaign found that TWOC are four times as likely as the general population to be unemployed (HRC, 2015). The 2015 U.S. Transgender Survey, conducted by the National Center for Transgender Equality (James, Herman, Rankin, Keisling, 2015), found that Transgender people of color—particularly Black transgender women—experience greater health disparities. While 1.4% of all survey respondents were living with HIV—nearly five times the rate in the U.S. population (0.3)—the rate among Black respondents (6.7%) was substantially higher, and the rate for Black transgender women was 19%.

In March of 2017, the Transgender Law Center (Chung, Kalra, McBride, Roebuck, 2016) released two reports on transgender people living with HIV, finding 41% of respondents—across race, gender, income, and region—have been incarcerated at least once in their lifetimes (although the survey did not reach currently incarcerated individuals), and face greater disparities with regards to employment, housing, education, and income.

The 2015 U.S. Transgender Survey also found that the transgender community is more likely to experience mistreatment and harassment by policy. 58% of respondents reported experiencing some form of police harassment in the last year. This included being verbally harassed, repeatedly referred to as the wrong gender, physically or sexually assaulted, including being forced by officers to engage in sexual activity to avoid arrest. The report also found that police frequently assumed that respondents—particularly transgender women of color—were sex workers. In the past year, of those who interacted with law enforcement officers who thought or knew they were transgender, one-third (33%) of Black transgender women and 30% of multiracial women said that an officer assumed they were sex workers.

These findings demonstrate the intersectional nature of oppression, and how transgender individuals, especially transgender women of color—and Black trans women in particular—are excluded from the formal economy without access to adequate health care, education, and housing, leading to increased vulnerability to discrimination and violence from law enforcement, the judicial system, and the general public. I have found that the experiences—the discrimination, employment, health, and socio-economic circumstances—of my participants largely reflect this data. I asked participants if they would mind sharing their employment status and employment type. 11 participants stated they were unemployed. Four participants said they worked or had worked as sex workers at some point in their lives. I also asked where in the city participants lived, to which five responded that they were either experiencing homelessness or were temporarily housed. While I did not explicitly ask about education levels, incarceration, disability, health history or HIV status,
several participants disclosed these and other aspects of their subjectivities which they felt were important to their stories and day-to-day livelihoods.

A 31 year-old Asian Pacific Islander (API), Native American, White participant spoke about being discriminated against when trying to find work, “I’ve been trying to find jobs but it’s been so hard to find them, because I get turned down a lot especially after they hear about my gender. Sometimes the manager will ask “are you trans?” and I’ll say like I have no other option, so yea. Then they’ll say they already have other people.”

Regarding the outdoor, public realm, a 53 year-old Black participant said discrimination, both from the general public and from the police, was a problem everywhere, “Let me tell you something. It’s bad all over. They won’t even investigate. (Be)cause girls get killed all the time, you hear me? And they put you on the news just to draw attention towards it, and they don’t investigate. A man could beat you to death, but they’re not going to do nothing because you’re gay. You hear me? And that’s bad. You hear me?... Six girls got killed back in New Orleans, and we watch it on video.”

A 28 year-old Black, API participant told me about the discrimination she faced while in prison, “Another thing I think I should talk about is imprisonment. Discrimination in the prison system that we don’t know about out here on the streets. It’s a lot worse in there. I had my chin busted by an officer who told me I was a flaming faggot and who did I think I was walking around looking like a woman…You have more problems with the actual officers than with the actual inmates.” She talked about the difficulty she has had trying to find employment since her incarceration, and why that left her with no other option than to pursue sex work, “If I had the kind of money I’d like, I’d definitely like to be involved in a ministry. I love to sing and I grew up singing in a choir so I’d like to really be involved, but at the moment I’m in a secondary lifestyle you know, and it’s needed at the moment or so I feel it is.”

For a 44 year-old, Black participant, the memory of transitioning was mostly one of hardship, “For me, the memory of being in LA is just a lot of depression. All I can remember was trying to find myself, while homeless, at the lowest points of my life, and another degrading thing happened to me. That’s what got me to making a decision where I knew I didn’t want to be a prostitute or sell drugs, otherwise I would die here. Some of those early decisions landed me in prison, so it made me try to become better.” She is now fully employed at a job in Los Angles, and owns a home in Orange County. But she pointed out that others still struggle to escape poverty and discrimination, “Even though we survive things, we do our best to stay strong and present ourselves as strong. Sometimes it gets unbearable. And in this community they’ll be quick to run to some kind
of substance abuse, drugs, and alcohol, because that’s a way of drowning out what’s really going on, the reality of trying to live the way you want to live and not being able to get a job. And that’s why many of my community members get involved in crime because there is no other way…One of my transgender friends is in the mix of it right now.”

When we talk about urban or public space “design” in urban planning discourse, I argue that we should expand our definition of design beyond traditionally architectural design to include social, cultural, political, and economic factors. In thinking about what designing for TWOC might look like, a starting point would be to recognize the systemic causes of discrimination that lead to disparities related to health, housing, employment, education, incarceration, and violence from the police and general public. Each of the stories participants shared during this study reflects the unique experiences of TWOC and has implications for the way TWOC experience the everyday public spaces of the city.
CHAPTER 5: SPATIAL ANALYSIS

Street Scale: Prevailing Conditions

Every participant in this study described having experienced some sort of discomfort in public space due to negative perceptions of their transgender identity. Negative perceptions ranged from subtle changes in body language or facial expression to more explicit verbal, and sometimes physical aggression. Petra Doan (2010) calls this the “tyranny of gender”, which occurs when a transgendered person disrupts the gender binary in space. Participants’ experiences of discrimination, and the subsequent constrains on their behavior, reflect the reality of being transgender in all public spaces (Doan, 2010). Some participants also commented on the racism and ableism they experience in tandem with the tyranny of gender. In this section I will discuss how participants experienced the tyranny of gender as a prevailing condition, one that plays out in all public spaces at the human scale: on the street/sidewalk, taking or waiting for public transportation, hanging out in a park or plaza, accessing public restrooms, and other public accommodations.

The Sidewalk

The sidewalk is often an overlooked public space, yet it is probably the most ubiquitous and frequently used, since few people go about their day without having used the sidewalk at least once (Loukaitou-Sideris & Ehrenfeucht, 2012). Most participants did not own a car, and described using the sidewalk on a daily basis, if only to get to the nearest public transit station. Participants' feelings of comfort using sidewalks vary from neighborhood to neighborhood, yet nearly every participant described a least one moment when they felt uncomfortable using the sidewalk, and nearly everyone said their comfort level depends on how they carry themselves, and the strategies they employ to stay safe.

Several older participants described feeling more uncomfortable in the past than in the present, revealing the important role of time in one’s life and the ability to make desired gender transitions. One participant said, “In the past I wouldn’t even want to cross the street because I’d fear somebody is talking about me… I think that when girls get older and set in their ways compared to girls when they’re younger, they talk better. And right now I got used to it, but when I was 19, 20, I used to be scared to walk across the street. I was like “oh my god” like I’m on stage. But now I walk with my head up and I’m like oh they can’t touch me. But a long time ago I was scared to just cross the street. Some people can’t cope with it so they stop being a girl, but you know I don’t mind waking up and doing my hair, being pretty.” For older participants, having more experience in public
space meant knowing how to be more aware in public, and how to carry one’s self to avoid drawing unwanted attention. This knowledge, they said, came from experience.

Some participants emphasized the importance of dressing a certain way in order to avoid unwanted attention, though the way in which they dressed varied among them. For example, one participant said it was important to wear less make-up and fancy clothes: “If you wear makeup you draw attention to yourself…Sometimes they’ll ask so many questions. Usually I’m not up to answering so many questions. When I started transitioning I was like I don’t give a F what you think. I slowly tried to increase the levels in my dressing appearance. But if people start giving me attention I’ll have to decrease. They can end up doing name calls or try to hurt me or accuse me of something.” In contrast to this experience, most participants expressed the need to fully “pass” as a woman, as that was the only way to avoid someone “clocking your tea” or figuring out you are a transgendered person. One participant put it this way: “The only thing I do to feel safer is change my appearance. My hair, my makeup. I’ll change that up real quick. I’ll change my hair color, or my dress. Sometimes I’ll dress up real sexy, sometimes more old fashion.”

The ability to dress and present one’s self according to how they will feel most safe is also contingent upon the means of the individual; someone with little financial and social resources is less likely to have the time and money to invest in making themselves presentable according to what society requires. The various ways in which TWOC alter their appearance or behavior when simply using the sidewalk, and the barriers many face while trying to adjust their behavior, speaks to the overwhelmingly gendered nature of the sidewalk, and public space generally.

**Public Transportation**

As stated earlier, most participants use public transit to get around Los Angeles, all of whom expressed varying degrees of discomfort while being themselves when waiting for or riding the bus or train. As I will discuss later, the discomfort many experience while riding the bus or train has important implications in terms of access to different parts of the city and its resources. This is especially concerning for TWOC, who face other oppressions as a result of their identity(ies).

A participant with a disability reflected on the compounded discrimination she experiences on a bus she takes daily, and how she copes: “Buses like the 16 can get really packed, and people can be really rude. And I’m also disabled, and sometimes I’m sitting in disabled spot, and someone else comes on and questions my disability. And you don’t know my condition. I have an Access card and I need personal assistance sometimes to make it to my appointments. And I don’t know why these people are trying to get me off the seats. And they’re just targeting me for no reason. And there are other spots for disability. I have to show them that I have a disability too, I lose my balance for no
reason. If I stop I have to hold on to something. Sometimes my leg hurts a lot. That’s one of the things I have issues on public transportation. Another is people sitting super close to me. Sometimes they’ll try to communicate with me, and start asking questions, ‘are you a dude or a lady?’ I don’t know why you’re asking me these questions. So I usually take the trains with the single seaters, (be)cause one it’s faster and seats are more available. Makes it easier on me and reduces chances of people sitting next to me. Sometimes people are so picky about their seats. I wanna be in this seat. I don’t want to sit next to the window because my leg gets cramped. That’s one of my disabilities. I need room for my legs and to expand them out. And I really don’t want to go through the stress and hassle about the seat situation. I do music therapy too, and try to just listen to my music.”

Another participant felt unsafe when entering and waiting at the Pershing Square Metro Station, “I know LA's trying to improve public transportation, but there is a lot of fear of public transportation. You have to deal with a lot of traffic, a lot of people.” As a solution, she said, “We need more buses more frequently and less people. I noticed more security around Pershing Square and I was kind of glad to see it.” Another participant who takes the train brought up intercoms, “In the Blue Line they have an intercom in case you’re harassed. The Red Line needs that. They should have that on all of them.” Other participants who had the means said they would drive or using ride-share in order to avoid discrimination. A participant said: “I like to order Lyft cars to go to different restaurants. We’re more safe in Lyft cars than taking the bus.”

The paradox of public transportation in Los Angeles is that while many Angelenos choose to drive due to the inconvenience and discomfort they experience while riding the bus or train, the most socially and financially vulnerable Angelenos—including TWOC—often have no other choice than to take public transit.

Public Accommodation and Public Restrooms

A 30 year-old Black, Hispanic participant discussed the intersectional nature of the discrimination Black and transgender woman often face while accessing public accommodation such as a restaurant, “If they feel like one (TWOC) is unattractive, they will maybe give you a certain eye, taunt you a little bit, serve you less, take longer to serve you, won’t let you use the bathroom, even if it’s working. You know…But as soon as you see me because I’m transgender and a person of color, you think you can just give me anything, or just take as long as you want, so it’s just about what you’re willing to take.” TWOC experience added layers of discrimination based on assumptions about who TWOC.

Public restrooms were specific sites of discomfort for participants. When a participant described where in the city she felt uncomfortable being herself, the first place she said was public
restrooms: “I don’t feel comfortable using the men’s restroom.” Another participant described the importance of being able to access the restroom that aligns with one’s gender identity: “I never go in the men’s bathroom. I go in the women’s bathroom all the time. Because I had my name changed, my birth certificate changed. So they can’t tell me to go back. Because now you know they’re telling you the sex you were born, that’s the bathroom you got to go in. and that’s going to have a lot of problems because a lot of people are going to get raped, beat up. And I don’t like a lot of people knowing my business.”

Another participant, when describing what a “safe space” meant to her, said, “A place where I can go and relax, where no one criticizes me. My personal restroom. You know, private.” Another participant described never having had an issue with public restrooms, “But me personally I never really had a problem with the bathroom thing because I’m passable, or so I feel that I am.”

Indeed, in no other public space is the gender binary so explicit: it’s labeled at the entrance. The harassment transgender women experience at the restroom is what Browne (2004) has called ‘the bathroom problem’, and is often more dangerous for transgender women who appear more masculine. It goes without saying that no one should have to fear for their lives for trying to perform a basic bodily function.

**Parks, Plazas, and the Beach**

Several participants described places they go for pleasure, or simply to relax with friends, family, or by themselves. Most participants said they prefer to visit the beach, describing it mostly as a space they felt comfortable being themselves. A smaller number of respondents said they sought out public parks and plazas.

One participant described her concern regarding heterosexual perceptions in parks, “Because it’s outdoorsy and like for instance I’ll go out to a park and I’m not trying to be the center of attraction, like they’re straight and they’re not really looking at you, like you just there, so I feel really uncomfortable just trying to strike a conversation with a straight person because they don’t know where I’m coming from or they might take me offensive.”

Another participant said her decision to show affection depended on the park’s aesthetics, “I tend to be a little more shy, I’m not into PDA (public displays affection) typically. It would be a completely spontaneous thing and it would depend on where I was and who was around, if I want to kiss or embrace someone or hold hands. Maybe sometimes at the movie theater I feel more comfortable. Otherwise I steer clear of that when I have a significant other. If it’s a beautiful park, appealing and comfortable.”
For several participants, aversion towards parks, plazas, and other gathering spaces was driven by a fear of crowds. A participant said, “I can deal with a typical crowd, but if there are too many people then I begin to feel uncomfortable. I don’t like people too near me and I don’t like to be touched, so if there are a lot of people, that can turn me off.” Like other public spaces, she deals with crowds by being more aware and adjusting her behavior, “I try to first be a wallflower. Gauge the scene. See who’s being caddy and who’s being real, and know how to come to them. You have to get on everybody’s level.”

Participants were generally more likely to feel comfortable at beaches than at parks or plazas. A participant in her early 20s described the beach as her favorite place to hang out, “I felt better at the beach. Just so much goodness.” Another participant in her 40s responded to “what is a ‘safe space’ to you by simply saying; “beach”. Part of the reason beaches are more comfortable than other public spaces is because the crowds are more diffused. As one participant put it, “The beach is a different story. Everybody is doing their own thing. If you see a crowd of guys you’re not going to sit next to them.”

**Summary of Street-Scale Conditions**

These experiences demonstrate the complex ways TWOC experience and adjust to the transphobic, gendered, and racialized spaces they inhabit on a day-to-day basis. While not fully comprehensive of all the different typologies of human-scale spaces that TWOC come across, participants’ experiences using sidewalks, parks, plazas, beaches, public transportation, public restrooms and public accommodation generally, are indicative of pervasive feelings of discomfort across all public spaces in the city. As the following section will discuss, degrees of discomfort vary depending on where public spaces are located throughout the city.

**District Scale: A Lynchian Analysis**

My analysis at the district scale is inspired by Nusser’s and Anacker’s (2015) use of Kevin Lynch’s (1986) *performance dimensions* to analyze ‘queer space’ in Kansas City, MO and Cambridge, MA. Lynch is careful to avoid making a claim for a set of performance *standards*, acknowledging that all spaces reflect different values and are contingent upon socio-spatial contexts. Rather, he calls for performance *dimensions*, that is, “certain identifiable characteristics of the performance of cities which are due primarily to their spatial qualities and which are measurable scales, along which different groups will prefer to achieve different positions” (1986, p.111) In the same way that Nusser and Anacker explore the performance dimensions of space that allow for the performance of non-hetero identities, I ask, what are the performance dimensions of spaces in Los Angeles that empower
TWOC to feel comfortable being themselves? To answer this question, I evaluate each district in terms of its sense, vitality, fit, access, and control. I include some of the participants photographs and recorded video throughout the analysis to give the reader a sense of the spaces participants observed. Each photo and video is accompanied by a quote from the participant who took the photo or video.

**Sense** – Sense is the degree to which an environment can be perceived and identified, and the degree to which its physical elements can be linked with other events and places in a “coherent mental representation of time and space”. Sense is defined by *identity*, or the extent to which a person can recognize or recall a place as being distinct from another place, and *structure*—or the way in which the environment’s physical structures fit together in a way that is imaginable. To evaluate sense, I look at the ways in which participants expressed a sense of belonging to a particular area, and the physical components of space that indicate inclusivity.

**Vitality** – Lynch says that a vital place is one that “supports the health and biological well-functioning of the individual and the survival of the species” (1986, p. 121). Three principles contribute to the vitality of a place: Sustenance, Safety, and Consonance. Sustenance refers to the supply and quality of resources—the availability of food, energy, water, and air—and is affected by the environment’s physical systems and location. Lynch mostly conceives of safety in terms of protection from biological hazards like poisons and diseases. Consonance refers to the environment’s conduciveness to human biological rhythms, such as sleeping, walking, alertness and inattention. To evaluate vitality, I look at participants’ feelings of safety across different spaces, as well as the resources within those spaces that support participants’ livelihood, like grocery stores, adequate park space, and LGBTQ-specific service centers and organizations.

**Fit** – Fit refers to how well the environment’s physical patterns match or enable the behaviors—or uses—of its inhabitants. I expand fit to include the social, as well as the physical, aspects of space. Physical aspects include the degree of enclosure, building types and massings, and the quality of the streetscape in terms of aesthetics and maintenance. Social aspects include other user groups, their behaviors, and the way they arrange themselves within the space.

**Access** – Access considers the degree of choice made available to different inhabitants of a space. To evaluate access, I examine both the ability to reach a given space or territory and the associated modes of travel, as well as the degree to which participants are able to make use of all the resources available within that space.

**Control** – Lynch defines control as the regulation of space and behavior through city codes, private legal contracts, private management of space, and the perpetuation or disruption of norms
symbolized in space. To evaluate control, I consider more explicit, or formal mechanisms, like presence of law enforcement and surveillance, as well as less formal, sometimes implicit mechanisms of control like behavior or verbal cues among other user groups.

I evaluate these five performance characteristics at the scale of five “districts” in Los Angeles. I defined these districts based on the neighborhoods that participants most frequently mentioned in terms of where they spend their day-to-day lives. They include: Hollywood/West Hollywood. South LA, Downtown, Mid City, and the Beach.

**Hollywood**

The interviews and photographs reveal Hollywood and West Hollywood as the district where interviewees felt the most comfortable being themselves. I refer to Hollywood and West Hollywood together here because that is how participants most often referred to them; as a singular district or area. More often a participant would simply refer to the area as “Hollywood”, meaning both the City of West Hollywood and the Hollywood neighborhood of Los Angeles. Nearly every participant mentioned “Hollywood” first when describing where they feel the most comfortable being themselves. Hollywood is also the district participants visit most frequently for recreation activities like dining, clubbing, or visiting a park; accessing LGBTQ-specific services like Friends Community Center and the Los Angeles LGBT Center; and, in some cases, to make living. While Hollywood is among the most comfortable districts, many participants expressed increasing difficulty accessing the neighborhood and its resources due to distance from where they live, the increasing cost of spending time and money, and the increasing police presence and attendant harassment.

**Sense**

One of the reasons Hollywood is regarded as the most comfortable district is because it is where many within the TWOC community, as well as within the broader LGBTQ community, congregate, and therefore have an identity attached to the area. As one participant put it, “Hollywood is more a place where my people are. You know what I’m saying? My people are there.”
Throughout the interviews, participants were more likely to compare different parts of the city with Hollywood, using the district as a standard by which all other spaces were measure.

Identity is also reflected in Hollywood’s physical environment. A 42 year-old Latina woman referenced the importance of symbols in Hollywood: “Maybe because they have posters and signs all over this part of town, I feel more at home. Just having something more that signifies my community is present makes me feel better.” In the second interview, she reiterated the importance of the images and representation of her community, “In a perfect world, if we have our visibility, like if in the metro there was a transgender woman in an advertisement for makeup or something, it would change the whole environment. In a perfect world having more visibility whether it’s in advertising, movies, etc. People are going to begin to think differently.”

Hollywood is imaginable because it combines a socially inclusive environment where TWOC are physically present, and built form that is saturated with LGBTQ inclusive images and messages. Taken together these create a district that is at once a place where TWOC feel welcome, and feel is theirs.

Vitality

Safety and sustenance are two of the criteria that Lynch says contribute to the vitality of an environment. One participant said about Hollywood, “It’s just really safe out there and it’s really nice.” In addition to feeling safer in Hollywood, several interviewees highlighted the important presence of LGBTQ-friendly activities, service organizations, and resources in the district. A
participant described the reasons she loves going to Hollywood: “Hollywood and west Hollywood is more LGBT and it’s really wonderful. They have like a festival too. Sometimes I go to the library too. It’s pretty cool. I usually just like walk through it. I like to go window shopping. Between Vine and Highland you see all the mannequins and the wigs and lingerie. It’s pretty interesting to eat in Hollywood but sometimes it’s pricey…They also have trans centers”. Hollywood is a place where participants felt comfortable using not both LGBTQ-specific, as well as the non-LGBTQ specific, organizations and services. The participant’s mention of the high cost to dining out in Hollywood foregrounds the Access section, which discusses the barriers to using all of Hollywood’s amenities.

Another participant similarly referenced LGBTQ-specific organizations as important to her, “(The) LGBT community center is right across the street…Hollywood, West Hollywood, ‘Gayborhood’. So everybody is accepted there. I feel amazing walking around there, especially when I look great. I’ve learned to embrace the stares, even those of disgust.” Here, the participant’s mention of LGBTQ-specific organizations indicates their high concentration in Hollywood, and their role in contributing to the district’s broader LGBTQ-inclusive identity.

Hollywood is vital because of its high concentration of services and organizations that participants enjoy and rely on, especially LGBTQ-specific services and organizations. While participants mostly felt safe in Hollywood, a few mentioned discomfort in certain instances, like at night, and certain places, like at transit stops, which will be discussed under Access.

Fit

Lynch describes comfort and satisfaction as two indicators strongly associated with fit. Interviewees described Hollywood as the space where they felt most comfortable being themselves. A 41 year-old, African American was quite clear: “I feel comfortable in Hollywood…Hollywood
area all over.” When asked why, she said “Um, just you know, Hollywood, West Hollywood, gay. You don’t really have to think about anything. Any other place you really have to, kina have to be on your p’s and q’s...All Hollywood, from the East to the West, I feel comfortable.”

Another participant in her late 40’s talked about how comfortable she felt participating in the variety of social, recreational, and employment activities she and her friends engage in: “Me and my sisters like to go to Hollywood. We like to walk on Hollywood Boulevard and do Facebook Live. We’re more comfortable there. We can be ourselves and let our hair down and act how we want to act.” When asked why, she cited the “great proportion of homosexuals, bisexuals, it’s a very open place. Both West Hollywood and Hollywood...And we love going on Hollywood boulevard because we can eat all different types of food.” She later indicated how feelings of comfort change at night, in accordance with the changes in user activity: “And you out late at night sometimes, we go to Hollywood Boulevard and say hi to the young girls and we try to help, mentor them and tell them to be safe out there. See if they need help or someone to talk to, you’re being an elder.” Her description highlights the importance of Hollywood as a place of mentorship and support for other TWOC, many of whom are younger, at earlier stages in their gender transition, and are more vulnerable in public spaces.

According to the same participant, the intersections of Santa Monica and Highland, and Santa Monica and La Brea, and
McDonald's are the meeting places for women engaged in sex work. The same interviewee said of the area: “It’s the new hangout for transgender displaced women or just period in general, and homosexuals as well. They prostitute there as well. It’s trans friendly, very trans, gay friendly, that particular area is. And people feel very comfortable prostituting there as well, soliciting would be a better word for it. They call the area the ‘bull’ like the ‘boulevard’.” The systemic, disproportionate discrimination transgender women—especially trans women of color—face, means that many are left with few employment options other than to perform sex work, and Hollywood was brought up repeatedly as an important place where some TWOC are able to make a living.

Participants made clear that Hollywood was a place where, mostly during the day, they felt comfortable congregating and partaking in a variety of social, recreational, and employment activities. This was mostly due to sociability of the district, though, when comparing Hollywood with other district discussed brought up in these interviews, it is clear that the cleanliness and high degree of maintenance of Hollywood’s streets and buildings distinguishes it from other districts. Hollywood’s built form is also characterized by a variety of scales and open and enclosed building types. Buildings range anywhere from single story to small skyscrapers, and range in age from 1920s to the present. The streetscapes range from wide open boulevards like those of Santa Monica Boulevard and Sunset, to smaller side streets and alleys, thus creating opportunities for both private and public uses of space, which creates possibilities for TWOC to be both visible and invisible on their terms.

**Access**

Due to their central location in the Los Angeles area and prominence as tourist destinations, Hollywood and West Hollywood are relatively well-served by several public transit routes including bus and metro. Despite the relative connectivity of the district to the rest of Los Angeles, a couple participants still felt uncomfortable at certain public transit stops in neighborhood. A participant described feeling uncomfortable at the Metro station at Hollywood and Vine, “You have touristy people there, so some of the stares are like wow I’ve never seen this before. Not all bad stares, but you know, people who don’t get to see this.” Being in close proximity to perceived heterosexual people is inevitable on any mode of public transit or station, including in Hollywood where many tourists from within and outside Los Angeles visit.
Another participant said that access to public restrooms in Hollywood was under threat, “And they need to stop taking the mirrors away, like in the bathrooms in Hollywood. They said they did it so that the women won’t take up as much time in the restroom. But that’s not right, they need the mirror. We primp all the time. I think that’s really fucked up. I think it’s actually discriminatory.” The role of the municipality is highlighted here, and begs the question if creating safe spaces for transgender people is a priority.

In addition to difficulties posed by barriers to access within Hollywood, participants implied how hard it was to reach Hollywood because of the distance between the district and where participants lived, and the high financial cost of being in Hollywood. Only one interviewee said she lives in Hollywood and two said they live in adjacent neighborhoods. Most of the rest of interviewees live in Mid City, Downtown, or South LA. Several participants felt that it was not beneficial to have so many LGBTQ services and organizations concentrated in Hollywood, “I don’t’ feel that everyone should have to run to Hollywood like it’s the headquarters…I would say the south-east region needs a presence…Because not everybody has the opportunity to go to Hollywood.”

Several interviewees expressed the desire to live in Hollywood, but said the rent was unaffordable to them. A participant living in Skid Row, Downtown, said she had no other choice because that is where SRO housing is most

*That’s Wilshire/Vermont Metro station. There’s a lot of homeless individuals there. They don’t have any security guards. I’ve seen people get mistreated there and people don’t even stop… It’s not a safe space to be alone.*

*This is the Metro station at Hollywood & Vine. You have touristy people there, so some of the stares are like wow I’ve never seen this before. Not all bad stares, but you know people who don’t get to see this.*
easily accessible. Her goal is to move to Hollywood, “The way people treat me Downtown, I’m usually more moody. But when I’m up in Hollywood I’m all chilled out. And I don’t get frustrated. It’s pretty much my natural home. I’ve been trying to move up there, it’s just hard to find housing…I’m trying to move up to Hollywood so I can be closer to my appointments and my hospital and be in a safer location where I’m happier with myself.” Her situation is emblematic of many within the TWOC community who would like to live in Hollywood due to its amenities, safety, and community, but cannot because it is simply out of reach financially. This condition will likely worsen in the current context of rising rents and processes of gentrification.

Control

With regards to control, Hollywood represents somewhat of a paradox. While the presence of LGBTQ institutions, service organizations, night life, and culture signifies control by and for the queer community, the increasing police presence at night in the district poses a threat to the transgender community. A 53 year-old Black participant described how Hollywood has changed over the past several decades: “Hollywood is so hot. The police got everything so hot up there. You can’t even really walk down the street with(out) the police pulling you over.” She compared it with Downtown, saying that, despite Downtown’s flaws, it was a place you could still “kick it and laugh”. “Hollywood used to be like that” she said, “but they been rounding everybody away”.

Similarly, another participant said her feelings of insecurity only recently began, “Just recently at night out in Hollywood, because I’ve been busted so many times out there, like I just got out I told you. So now I’m in Hollywood. I’m really paranoid. I’m not even doing anything I’m still paranoid. Cus Hollywood just fucks with you. Especially transgenders.” When asked to clarify “who” she was referring to she said “The police…I don’t have time for being harassed and all that…I go to Hollywood but I’m walking on eggshells. Because there’s police everywhere, then there’s the transgenders, the gay boys. Crazy doing all kinds of stuff. Drugs. But I don’t do all that no more. But it’s still going on out there. And me being busted four times, they can come just fuck with me. So I go but, on eggshells.”

A participant who works as a sex worker said that Hollywood was OK during the daytime, but that at night the scene changed, “I was once chased by a client with machete and the police didn’t even catch him.”
Another participant said the police have been cracking down in order to “clean up” the area. Despite this, she indicated that Hollywood was still an important place if only for its LGBTQ resources. “Back in the day that used to be a hangout for us, on Santa Monica and Highland. It was like headquarters for all LGBT. All the way to sunset. It was an area for prostitution. Everybody already know, it goes down 24/7. And the police are cracking down, yes they are. Now we have to create other spaces for us to be at. That’s why we have the Lesbian and Gay Center there around the corner from Santa Monica and Highland, where everybody goes. It would be nice to have more frequent places for gays to go to.”

One participant, highlighting the intersectional nature of police oppression, went so far as to say she now mostly avoids Hollywood, “I avoid more police involved in the area. It’s highly monitored. That’s aggravating to me when someone is constantly watching. That mostly happens in Hollywood area, because a lot of girls of color get caught for doing illegal stuff, and I get put in that box just walking into that door. They think “Oh that’s the girl from last time” and I’ve had to go off on them. It’s like pulling teeth trying to get them to apologize. But they’ll say “well you’re still black. You’re still transgender. I won’t apologize because the other person was black and transgender”…so since you’re like them you’re with them, and that’s not cool.”

The increasing police presence in Hollywood poses a threat to the district’s status not only as a space where TWOC feel relatively comfortable being themselves, but also a place where many TWOC make a living. On top of this, participants’ accounts show how TWOC are stereotyped along the lines of race, gender identity, sex, and class by police and the general public alike.

**Hollywood: Summary of socio-spatial trends**

Hollywood scores well in terms of sense, vitality, and fit. Regarding its physical characteristics, it’s many LGBTQ-inclusive signs and symbols displayed on bars, shops, billboards, and posters means that participants feel welcome and have a sense of belonging. In terms of use, Hollywood’s variable built form also creates opportunities for visibility and invisibility. Hollywood is
vital in that possesses numerous LGBTQ-specific resources, ranging from health centers to venues for socializing, and is generally a service-rich district due to its prominence as one of Los Angeles’ main tourist destinations. Most importantly, participants mostly feel safe walking around Hollywood during the day, meaning they are able to partake in the variety of activities the Hollywood’s amenities make possible. Hollywood is an essential place for many TWOC who rely on its LGBTQ services, the presence and visibility of the TWOC community, and, for some, the opportunity to provide for one’s self by making a living.

It is understandable then, why many TWOC like to spend time and would live in Hollywood if they had the choice. Unfortunately, access is an issue in terms of the distance between Hollywood and where most participants live. Once in Hollywood, the rising cost of experiencing many of the districts amenities, including rising rental prices, make living in Hollywood out of reach for many. Perhaps the biggest threat for the TWOC community in Hollywood is the increasing police presence and attendant discrimination directed towards TWOC. Any effort to address issues of access and control in Hollywood would certainly require reform on behalf of the LAPD.

**South LA**

South LA is the district where participants had the most varied experiences in public spaces. This is largely due South LA being a large district, and neighborhoods within South LA vary in terms of their physical and social characteristics. Most participants referred to “South Central,” though many of their experiences took place further south of what some would consider the boundaries of South Central. For this reason I refer to this broader region as “South LA,” which includes South Central, Vermont Harbor, Leimert Park, Park Mesa Heights, down to Westmont and Inglewood.

While South LA was not referred to as a destination in the way that Hollywood and West Hollywood are places to go where you can be comfortable being transgender, South LA is and was home for many participants. The district is deficient in terms of access to basic services like groceries and open space, but possesses important institutions, like churches, that some participants described as important community centers. In contrast to districts like Hollywood, many participants expressed a desire for more security in public spaces, presenting somewhat of a paradox.

*Sense*

In terms of sense, most participants described South LA as a place where they their identities
as TWOC were not affirmed. For example, a 52 year-old Black and Latina women, South LA was mostly a place for straight people, “Some of those spaces is where more straight folks are, because they’ll say you’re good, but then after a while it always turns different. First I was ok with you but know it’s being caddy, saying little things behind my back, so it’s not a good place for me…for example going (south) down Western, I avoid certain places down Western.” For other participants who grew up, lived in, or continued to have friends and family in the district, their relationship to South LA was more complicated. A Black, 42 year-old participant said, “I grew up in South Central and those were hard times…Back then, those were the times when I was hiding.” She still lives in South Central, is retired, and spends most of her time there and in Compton, “I mostly go to Compton a lot. My family is from Compton so I go there.”

For several participants who identified as religious, the churches in South LA were an important part of the communities where they grew up in and continued to live. For one participant, religion played a central role in her process of coming out, “I was raised in the church. And, you know, because at one point in time, homosexuality was a big abomination to the church, and I ran from the church at age 17, and I ended up getting incarcerated for a ticket, and I met a friend in there and she told me about a church called Unity, which was not a gay church but they called it a ‘gay church’, and so I left City of Refuge and went to Unity for 15 years. And that’s where I got my strength from…they taught me spirituality, that god is love and love is for everyone, and that includes me. Then I was able to learn and feel this
energy that I can’t see, but I can see it working when I pray for it…it’s kina weird but you have to find your niche in it, and it comes when you really hit rock bottom.” For her the role of the church is one that stems from childhood, and despite feelings of alienation from certain churches, she held onto her faith and considers it as an important part of her identity.

For one participant, South Central was of symbolic importance both because it was where she first immigrated to, and retained social and cultural ties, “I wanted to go back to my roots, when I first came to this country 20 years ago. And I was granted that wish. And it’s in South Central, the most fearful place for me.” In between our first and second interview, she visited South Central to attend an event for the birth of La Santisima Muerte. Where she typically felt uncomfortable, at this event she felt affirmed, “I walked in there and felt like a fucking movie star. There were a lot of kids, and remember kids can make me nervous, but I don’t know what it was about that day it was wonderful. I felt accepted. It felt so good. In the past I would go into a room full of insecurities. 50% of the time I think I create my own fear…I’m not sure. I stayed there for a couple hours, and I felt normalized. I mean I’m normal mind you, but in terms of what society thinks of as normal.”

In terms of sense, South LA did not reflect participants’ queer identities per se, but rather their experiences related to childhood, their families, and attendant social and cultural institutions, and the general notion of home.

*Vitality*
South LA does not possess as many basic resources like groceries and access to open space as neighborhoods in the way that districts like Hollywood do. Nor is South LA home to many LGBTQ-oriented services and organizations. Describing what she would improve about South Central, one participant described her frustration with the overwhelming presence of liquor stores, “More lighting would be helpful. And taking away the liquor stores. There’s one on every corner in South Central. But you go to Hollywood you don’t see a liquor store on every corner. You see a Starbucks.”

Other participants recalled specific resources they regularly frequented in South LA. One participant recalled specific salons she likes, and cultural and civic events she was involved in, “My friend worked at Taste of Soul, so I went to that. I worked the election, the pole over here. I get out but it has to be in the daytime. I don’t move around at night.” As mentioned earlier, for several participants referred to specific places of worship they attended on a regular basis, where they felt comfortable. One participant recalled a church she attends every Sunday with her family, “I’ve been going there 20 years and they’ve been really comfortable and supportive of me.” While South LA may be lacking basic resources like an adequate number of grocery stores, the district is home to several social and cultural centers that participants described as important to them.

South Central does not feel safe for many participants who go there or have experienced going there. One participant compared it to Hollywood, “Maybe West Hollywood, yes, I feel more comfortable. But when it comes to where I live, South Central, Huntington Park, it’s a completely different story. Anytime we hear a guy say something about us, it affects our self-esteem. You hear it so many times that I create my own fear, so my headphones are my best friend. I go everywhere with my headphones and play loud music.”

Another participant said it was impossible to compare Hollywood and the part of South LA she is familiar with, “You have a lot of gang bangers, shooting killing on an everyday basis in South Central than you would have in Hollywood or West Hollywood. They’re just completely different to
me. I’ve been here for 12 years, and it’s all new to me. I’m from Atlanta and it’s totally different. My ex-boyfriend was from LA…he went to jail. He got so many years and that made me get an apartment, and it was easier for me to get an apartment in South LA.”

Another participant described South LA as anti-gay, “There’s a lot of homophobia. They’ll call you names, say it’s against God. They talk loud. They don’t care who’s listening.”

Some participants said their feelings of safety were worse in certain parts of South LA more than others. For example, one participant said she specifically avoided Watts, “I would say Watts. Because it’s like real ghetto. You don’t know what you’re going to get into, any time of the day. I’ll go there but if I go I’ll be a bit standoffish, because you might run into a female who is real jealous, or her boyfriend notices you and she gets real jealous”.

The issue of safety in South LA highlights the dichotomy of public versus private space; participants experiences of discomfort in mostly public places lends increased importance to where there is privacy, which is mostly at home (if they have access to a home). It also highlights the importance of finding community where it exists, even if it is outside of more explicitly LGBTQ spaces. Religious centers, nail salons, and other social and cultural spaces are part of what makes South LA district vital for the TWOC who live there.

**Fit**

Regarding fit, participants mostly expressed an inability to perform the activities or behaviors they would normally like to in public. Most participants attributed this to the social environment of South LA, but several others described the physical conditions of the district as unsuitable to the lifestyle they aspire to. Regarding the social environment, one participant said, “And I’m actually moving to South Central. And I’ve been told to be careful. But hood girls will love a trans girl. When it comes to the men it can go two ways. One is they will yell, because he is so uncomfortable, and then I’m going to get the one that is going to holla…so he’s talking to me with his movements.”
She remained confident that, due to her ability to adapt her appearance and behavior according to her environment, she would be “OK” in her new neighborhood.

Another participant who lives in South Central was mostly concerned with the cleanliness of her neighborhood, “I never like(d) my neighborhood. I feel that South Central is not taken care of. They don’t keep stuff clean around there.” At first she faulted the neighborhood residents for the lack of cleanliness, “I just feel like it’s the people who make the neighborhood. And if you got people who care about the neighborhood, I dunno…if you want a clean neighborhood it can happen.” She later implicated the city for not properly investing in the neighborhood, “I feel like the city doesn’t put money in certain areas. If they put money in areas where I live, it would look different. I drive down a dirt road everyday in my car…And me parking my car across the freeway from where I live, it’s not gonna work for me. Too far to be waking at night like that. And going through the alley is a mess. People be throwing stuff back there, full of pot holes.”

Despite, or perhaps because of, general feelings of discomfort in South LA’s public spaces, for the many participants who live in the district, the most comfortable space is home. “My home is safe”, said a participant living near Western and Slauson. “Because these streets is crazy out here you see it in the news all the time. Some baby, kid is getting killed. So (a) safe space for me is at home.” Other participants struggled more to make home a comfortable and safe space. One participant described the lack of welcome she received when moving into Section 8 housing near the intersection of Slauson Avenue and Crenshaw Boulevard, “The people in this building, first they were very friendly, until they found out, you know, that I was transgender. Which doesn’t bother me. I stay to myself. I don’t interact. I think it’s best that they stay over there and I stay over here. And African Americans can be a bit much when they find out. Especially straight people. They wanted me to move, and I refused to because they have a barred gate, and so no one can get in here,
and I make sure I’m out early in the morning, and back before 6:30 in the afternoon, that way I
don’t have to deal with anybody bothering me, and if they do it’s in the daytime when someone else
can see it.”

In sum, the public realm of South LA is one where participants generally felt less free to be
themselves. In addition to the district’s heterosexual social environment, lack of services,
infrastructure maintenance, and cleanliness, South LA’s built form generally consists of more
uniform, residential buildings, with wide boulevards and more exposed sidewalks.

Access

Issues related to getting to and from South LA from other parts of the city, as well as
accessing resources within the district, were mostly arose out of fear of the social environment.
Several participants described their aversion towards shopping or recreating in parts of South LA
out of fear of using those spaces. The participant living in Section 8 housing described how her fear
limits her access to certain times of the day, “I don’t really travel around here, especially at night. If
I’m out I’m with somebody that’s gonna bring me home. And I make sure they wait till I’m through
the gate. Just my paranoia, but honey you just have to be careful.” When I asked her how she gets to
the grocery store, she said, “I go early in the morning, before 7:00. Sometimes I have friends that
might come by and take me to the store. But if I’m out in Hollywood I shop, but I don’t get too
much more than I can carry.” The pressure to leave home and return by a specific time
demonstrates just how stressful doing basic activities like grocery shopping can be for some, and the
additional stresses and risks faced by those who cannot adhere to such schedules due to long
working hours, working far from home, and limited transportations, and other factors.

Regarding access to commercial resources, several participants described how their
trepidation when approaching certain stores. For one participant the most trouble she had was
accessing the liquor stores, or merely passing by them: “Like going to a liquor store I can feel unsafe,
and I have to think twice: do I get this, or do I go two miles up to the next one. Because you never
know, guys, they don’t know, and one guy could figure it out and I don’t want to put myself in that
situation. And in South Central (liquor store) that’s all that’s on the block.” Part of her fear stemmed
from knowing of other TWOC who were recently murdered in Louisiana, “I just hate pulling up to a
liquor store and it’s just a bunch of guys, because a couple of girls got killed at the liquor store
because they were living their truth…in Louisiana.”
Another participant described her experience in and around Crenshaw Mall, “Shopping centers, restaurants, the Crenshaw Mall, I don’t really go there. You know I have to really build up my courage to go and buy clothes, to go out to a restaurant”. Her comfort going to the mall and other places was largely determined by whom she was with, and whether or not they affirmed her transgender identity, “Now if I’m among gay friends, it’s different. But when I’m with someone straight, like you know I was once invited to a baby shower and she was really upset with me because I told her I don’t really know those people, and you can’t just throw something at me.” This reality not only limits access to shopping centers, but to family and friends who live in South LA, “When I’m in a gay setting, I feel more comfortable, I can be myself. In a straight setting, I cannot. I don’t even visit my family because everybody in my family is straight, and they look at me like an alien. So I don’t deal with that. I stay away from that. That’s taboo to me.”

Another participant living in Mid City described the difficulties she faces when trying to visit her mother, who lives in South LA. “Manchester and Main, where Roscoe’s is. She’s in that area….You know it’s kinda rugged. You really have to watch the gang bangers and look over your shoulder at all times. So I don’t go that way at all. Sometimes it upsets me because I miss my family. And you know it’s not like we’re in different states. And sometimes you know for family functions I might go if it’s at night. That way I know if my sister coming to get me there and back, I won’t feel trapped. My sister is my safe haven too. She understands. Never judge.”

Access to restrooms came up with one participant who described how the issue arose the church she attends, “Just recently you know there was the bathroom law going in effect, and there were some issues at the church, and there are a lot of trans people and gay people that go to that church, and I had to step up for others. I was a voice to let them know that, you know, God is working with me, and there may be a girl that doesn’t pass but they prefer a certain restroom, and where are they gonna go? …These people have ties here, to the church, and it is what it is. That was
the only issue I had. The church has tried nationally all this bull crap, so we started this little campaign, girls wearing bikinis and stuff and asking, ‘Would you like us to go to the bathroom with your husband?’ The bathroom issue at her church was ultimately resolved, but it speaks to the continued issue of providing gender-appropriate restrooms, including in spaces where people have a strong sense of social, cultural, and spiritual belonging.

In terms of getting to and from South LA, one participant shared how uncomfortable she felt when taking the bus daily from her home in South Central to a place she volunteers downtown, “I’m nervous, very nervous you know. I pray every morning before I leave, and I pray every afternoon before I leave the Women’s Center. I ask God to protect me and keep me safe from seen and unseen danger. If there isn’t a seat in the front I just stand by the driver. Sometimes he tells me to sit down but I tell him I don’t want to sit down. I refuse to go to the back of that bus because there are a lot of gang members that ride that bus. There are a lot of heterosexual women that can clock your tea, and once they find out what you are its whispering.”

She described an incident in which she observed an attack on another transgender person while riding the bus, “One day I was coming and there was a trans person who really didn’t look fully trans, and they attacked that person on the bus. I just went and asked if they were OK, and we got off and took another bus. We got off on King and Western and waited for another bus.” Most unwanted attention, she said, came from groups of younger people riding public transit, “The train is OK, but when you first start out over here (Slauson Avenue and Crenshaw Boulevard) there’s a lot of young kids because there are a lot of schools over here. And that’s the problem. The young people is the problem. When they clock your tea and they find out what you are, then that’s when the problem creates right there. So that’s why I’m in the front and I don’t really say anything to
…anyone…I take a magazine to read. I focus on my surroundings, and not letting the negativity to come in.”

Access, then, is quite limited in South LA relative to other districts, and is mostly due to participants’ fear of the social environment. This was true when accessing the South LA from another district, as was made clear by participants who live elsewhere but still have social and familial ties to parts of South LA, and for participants living in South LA who regularly take public transit to other parts of the city. Fear as a limiting factor was also evident when accessing resources within South LA, which was mostly an issue for participants who lived in the district and felt highly restricted going about their daily errands like going to the grocery store, or simply walking down the street past a liquor store.

Control

Security personnel constitute some form of control in South LA, though participants’ experiences with state sanctioned security were varied. As is true in other districts, control in South LA was more determined by fear of a homophobic and transphobic public. South LA also exhibits another form of control in the form of gangs.

Regarding security, most participants who spent time in South LA were concerned with the lack of security in certain areas, and expressed an appreciation for instances when security personnel were present. One participant described a park she likes going to in South Central that is normally peaceful, but sometimes is unsafe, “Unfortunately there was some tension between whatever rivals were there, and I was caught in the middle of it. It felt pretty bad for me, it made me feel like no one was there for me. It was nice because there was an undercover officer in the park, and he actually led me to safety. He made me feel like a person again. And it still makes me teary eyed, you know, I’m just as human as everybody else, (be)cause you know they lookin’ at me funny…and they’ve gotta be used to this by now…the officer was like my savior.” Her story illustrates the tension between two forms of control: formal security personnel or police, and gangs. In this instance, the security guard came to her aid, indicating a preference for one form of control over another.

Another participant echoes this sentiment. When describing what would make her feel more comfortable in the neighborhood where she lives, she simply said, “I think we need more police around here”. She attributed part of her discomfort to the presents of gangs, “It’s the 60’s Hood, a lot of Crypts. The ‘rollin’ 60’s.’ Like you have a lot of Blood territory, you have a lot of Crypt territory. They are really strict who comes in and who comes out. As long as you’re neutral, they won’t bother you. If you come in sagging and wearing red, then they question you. I don’t wear red
over here.” This sort of dress code adds another layer to the uncodified social rules governing how transgender women present themselves in public.

As was made clear in the section on Hollywood, security does not necessarily guarantee safety, and may in fact make environments less safe for TWOC. Another participant described the ineffectiveness of security personnel at Fox Hill Mall, “There was one space I really wanted to go through, but I was nervous because I’ve seen other transgender people get in trouble…and the security don’t do anything. It’s the Fox Hill Mall. It’s like the Crenshaw Mall”. The indifference and ineffectiveness of security at Fox Hill Mall resembles that of the police who patrol Santa Monica Boulevard at night. “It’s (Fox Hill Mall) a place where transgender women get pickups…” she said, “…so I’ll sit back against the wall and assess the situation, and I’ll decide if it’s a good environment for me.”

The most prevalent control mechanisms were the social codes that limited how freely participants felt they could behave in public spaces. When asked if and where she felt she had to change her behavior to feel more comfortable, a participant said, “I do, not in this area here (Mid City) but that area down there (points towards the south), I gotta be tougher, like don’t say anything to nobody, just do what you gonna do and go about your business. And I don’t like to feel like that. And it makes me feel like I gotta watch may back. Somebody say something smart and I gotta smart and pop off too. So they know that I’m not afraid. So I feel you know you don’t gotta act like that because somebody put you in that position. So I just stay away from places like that.”

Participants illustrated several mechanisms of control in South LA that has implications for safety and movement. Control arising from of heterosexist and cissexist social norms in public space, in tandem with organized gang-related rules, creates an environment in which TWOC’s mere appearance in public, especially at night, is to risk one’s safety and wellbeing on a daily basis. If more security personnel is a necessary prerequisite to feeling safer, than so is a more effective and responsive security system. The question is, can the city provide the necessary training and cultural competence for its personnel?

**South LA: Summary of socio-spatial trends**

The scope of performing this analysis in South LA is undoubtedly difficult due to the district’s expansiveness. What is clear is that for many TWOC, South LA is home. Home is a physical structure, a private space where participants felt safest because it was a refuge from their surrounding neighborhoods. Home is also a space curated by one’s identity, where participants grew up and maintain familial and social bonds. Concerning vitality, while South LA is lacking both in
terms of resources and general feelings of safety, several places of worship and barber shops were cited as important assets to participants sense of identity and livelihood.

South LA scores less well regarding fit and access. While several participants cited the social environment as the main reason for their discomfort being themselves, participants were generally dismayed by built environment characteristics; the relative lack of infrastructure maintenance, amenities, and cleanliness compared to neighborhoods like Hollywood. South LA is also more uniform in its built form; the streets tend to be wider, and the buildings smaller and mostly single story. As a result public spaces like sidewalks and open spaces are less enclosed.

Access is limited both to and from, as well as within South LA. Fear of harassment in public transportation, and unwanted attention while walking on the sidewalks make South LA a relatively difficult place to navigate. Regarding control, the participants mostly expressed a desire for more effective security in public spaces like parks and malls since fear of public harassment in these spaces was common. Participants’ behavior and daily lives was also regulated by informal gang-related rules, as well as homophobic and transphobic norms governing the everyday spaces of the streets, sidewalks, parks, and shopping areas.

**Downtown LA**

Downtown LA is more concentrated spatially than other districts, and contains an array of services that make it at once an important place for many participants who need transitional housing or access to public amenities like libraries. It is also a culturally vibrant and diverse district, and participants described their feelings of comfort as largely contingent upon where exactly they happened to be at any given moment in Downtown. This section is primarily concerned the general feelings of comfort that participants expressed when visiting Downtown, and highlights specific experiences and places within Downtown where participants spent significant time or lived.

**Sense**

Several participants, while experiencing varying degrees of comfort, pointed out that Downtown is a where many different types of people congregate, and for this reason could identify with Downtown as a place where they felt somewhat represented relative to other districts. One
participant said she felt mostly comfortable in Downtown because that’s where other transgender people were, as well as other different types of people who would mostly mind their own business, “Downtown is fine, because there are a lot of transgenders there. And a lot of people Downtown, they don’t really trip on you like that. They too busy in their own world. They don’t say nothing to you and I don’t say nothing to them.” The general diversity of people found in Downtown LA would seem to signal an openness to diversity in gender identity and expression as well, and provide a sense of anonymity not found in more socially homogenous districts.

The same participant frequently visits Hollywood, and so I asked her to compare her feelings of comfort in Downtown with her experiences in Hollywood, “Hollywood is better than downtown because Hollywood has a more of a different type of a conversation and less of an attitude. Not so angry. You have to be very careful in DT because a lot of them will turn on you, so you got to watch yourself, keep it simple, keep it mute.” So while Downtown is a socially diverse place with a visible presence of other transgender people, a sense of belonging to Downtown is undermined by general feelings of insecurity related to the social environment.

Vitality

Participants referenced the high concentration of public services, amenities, and social service providers as reasons for visiting or spending time Downtown. The Central Library for example, was important for one participant, “I like to go to the library in DTLA. I was looking at books, but I just like the safe space that it is. It’s nice and big and I can sit out. I’m just real comfortable there. Everybody’s friendly and they just leave you alone.”

One participant commutes to Downtown from South Central to volunteer at the Women’s Center, “I go to trans groups and they have little things at the women’s center, they have like bingo night, they take trips and things of that nature. So I spend a lot of time there. There are some
women who come in and they are not accepting, but if that happens they are asked to leave.” In her follow-up interview she went into more depth as to why the Women’s Center was important to her, “Working here is a way of me giving back to traumatized transgender women. Some come from abusive families or relationships. When I see a trans that’s homeless that comes in, needs food, clothes, a shower, I help with those types of things. I give out clothing, showers. We help them with housing and shelter care.” To her, the Women’s Center was a place she went five days a week, working full time shifts. The center is one of the few places in Los Angeles where a participant specifically mentioned its service to both trans women and women of color, “I didn’t have those type of things when I was coming along. I grew up in the South and, my heart just goes out to people when I see them in the streets. It touches my soul. The Women’s Center is for trans women and women of color. It’s a safe haven, community setting. It’s sort of like home away from home, because we take pride in what we do there, cooking and making sure people have clothes, clean clothes, so it makes a difference.”

For several other participants, Downtown was important because it was one of the few places where SRO housing was available at any given time. Yet each of these participants expressed feeling unsafe in the area where SRO housing was located, which is in Skid Row. I asked a participant currently living in SRO
housing Downtown if she felt safe. She said, “No no I don’t like downtown.” When I asked her to explain why, she said, “It’s too busy, too much. Some people will say like ‘Hey you’re sexy’ and ‘Wanna fool around’ and that comes up and I try to ignore them. And others will try to give me name calls and people ask, ‘Are you a male or a female?’ and I don’t know why they’re asking me these questions I’m a female and just trying to do my thing. And I just try to ignore them and walk fast. Just get to the train station.”

Another participant who formerly lived in SRO housing similarly described feeling unsafe, “When I was really starting to transition, when I was living in SRO housing I had it really bad down there, 6th and Stanford. Everybody in the building, you know trans and queens, there’s all types of people. Either people will try to force me to buy stuff like meth. I have to tell them I don’t have the money. Usually happens outside the building, like when I’m trying to get home people will stop me and say like ‘oh you effing eff’ sometimes they try to pressure me into having intercourse and I’m not like interested in it and it’s like I don’t go that way.” When I asked which strategies she uses to cope with living in Skid Row, she said, “I’m trying to move to safer location, because there’s a lot of judgement. I’ve seen a lot of other transgenders get name called too. I’m not that kina person yelling, I usually just say back off or keep walking fast.”

Fit

In terms of fit, participants mostly referred to social reasons for feelings of discomfort, but implicated the physical environment when talking about Skid Row. A participant, when pointing that she lived in the direction of Skid Row, described the discomfort she experiences resulting from both the physical and social environment, “I’m talking about the tent city...Right now that’s where I’m staying because that’s where the SRO’s are. So that’s where you can easily get some help, but in acquiring that help, these are the obstacles you have to go through. You have to live around people who you may or may not care to be around, to achieve your goal you know. It can be physically
dangerous, it can be uncomfortable, it can be dirty, which you know makes me uncomfortable because I don’t like to see dirt and filth. I was raised in a very clean environment so it can be depressing. I have to be strong because I recently lost a lot of money and lost a really good life. So it’s harder for me to adjust to normal life now.”

Similarly, another participant, when describing where she had spent the most time since moving to LA, described her degree of comfort living Downtown, “Downtown only because when I first arrived I was in an SRO. That was a mixed bowl of hate and disgust, definitely a little bit less negativity…definitely day time you see more of the looks. On the flip side, at night I get different looks. One of the stereotypes a trans girl has is she is a hoe. So I’ll get a look of disgust…and then I get the lurker. I pay more attention during the day time. Compared to Hollywood it’s apples and oranges.”

Comfort levels depended mostly on the social environment in Downtown, “In Downtown you got your city folks, so not as accepting. The first stare I get Downtown, from 14th and Olympic onto 1rst and Broadway, any look falls into three categories. One is gonna be a complete shock that this is happening. That a man can transform into a woman, even though this has been happening throughout history. The second is disgust. The third look is one who’s stuck by the beauty. So I get those three looks. This happens downtown and in hood areas. South Central.”

Another participant described how abruptly feelings of safety changed when entering and leaving Skid Row, “Some girls have to be careful down there and downtown because the men approach them and say they look like circus acts and Halloween clowns and things. A friend of mine had a bad experience today. Someone told her ‘it’s not Halloween.’ We’re not safe down here. It’s very negative

“This is 3rd and San Pedro. I’m least comfortable down here because everybody is negative. I mean you know they think negative, they talk negative, they’re not positive at all so I don’t like going past there.”

“This is downtown, Skid Row. I just took that because of the ambulance the activity, there’s the norm of catastrophe’s going on the block now. You see what I mean?”
down here. The lower part of downtown. Right here it’s safe (6th and Spring).” When asked what made her feel uncomfortable, she described the social environment, “It’s the people. The homeless people that live in the lower part of downtown. Not the citizens that patronize the nice clubs and restaurants and the boutiques up here. It’s nice up here. People are civilized up here. But in that area (Skid Row) of Downtown we have drug abusers, ex-convicts, wayward women, you know so there are a lot of different personalities that are homeless and you know indigent there. So you know those people can be rude, they can be ignorant, they can be jealous, you know. On 3rd, 4th and 5th street.”

Another participant felt more comfortable around Pershing Square, attributing comfort levels to race, “I like Pershing Square. I’ve been there. I had a significant other who’s taken me to Pershing Square. As a matter of fact I was affectionate there. The population was um, the patrons were Caucasian. Sometimes that environment is appealing to me because they’re not so quick to judge I guess, as my own race would be because I’m African American…not as quick to be in your face or in your business you know so then you can feel comfortable in that environment. And you know people are coming and going and it’s like a metropolis up in there. You just constantly see movement.”

One participant seemed to mostly feel comfortable in and around the Center Library, but that it was not until she got home where she felt fully comfortable, “I feel comfortable when I come back home and I’m able to sit back and think about what’s taken place, and certain situations did I handle that correctly, you know and so if I’m out I’ll go to a library or somewhere where I can be alone, or I’ll walk down a different street like downtown or something, or I walk a different direction like going up 6th towards the big library is, on the other side of Pershing Square and I’ll sit, and nobody seems to bother me so that’s a good thing. I need that moment to kind of gather myself
to assess what has happened, what has taken place, because it’s more so sexually, so if you say no, that’s a whole new ball game. You have to be careful with all that.”

**Access**

Downtown has certain advantages when it comes to access, the most important being the close proximity of resources to one another. This means participants who live Downtown are able to walk and not have to own a car or deal with the hassle of taking public transit. Even still, most participants living downtown felt the need to keep their heads down while walking in Downtown, especially in and around Skid Row. One participant who lives in Downtown described her discomfort around metro stations in Downtown. “I don’t like to hang out downtown so much because the minute I wake up I go from point A to point B, and that means from my place in Skid Row to the train to Pershing Square. Because sometime at Pershing Square you have all these people trying to pick a fight. So I try to be careful. I get name calls so I just try to put my headphones, and sometimes they’ll step in front of me.” When I asked her where she usually goes from downtown, she said Hollywood, “Yea I usually take the train to Hollywood and then after that I’m just like totally relaxed. Most of my days are in Hollywood, but if I’m going to shopping or making a run to the store in Downtown, sometimes it’s like different people will say, homeless people will say ‘sir sir sir.’ and I’ll try to ignore them.”

The same participant described the difficulty of standing in line for food in Skid Row, “Sometimes I don’t have food, and there’s the lines, and I’ve been bullied in lines and stuff too. So it’s like I don’t want to go down
there. I try to blend in with the people down there but it doesn’t work because they think I’m suspicious or something you know when going into stores. But when I dress up nicely they’ll say like ‘ahh you rich b’ and I’m just trying to live the same as you and have decent wears. If I blend in with the other people I don’t get harassed as much, but you know if I get something flashy I’ll tend to get flirts.”

Another participant, the one who regularly visits and works at the Women’s Center, described some of the fear she faces when visiting the center, and how she prepares to defend herself in case of an incident, “When I first started going to the Women’s Center I had to be careful. I carried a little knife for my own protection, because some of the guys down there might start fighting you or knock you out. I know I should go walking around…it’s just a little pocket knife for my protection to keep them off of me. I have my mace also that I carry. I’m not gonna let nobody attack me.”

One participant liked going to Downtown to take part in the arts scene and night life, but acknowledged that doing so can be more difficult for some who are not as passing, “Well like downtown has a little art scene. I love it. I’m one of those who can go into the sports bars and blend in…but a lot of people can’t do that…The business owners may not let someone in…I saw it at a pizza place downtown once.”

In terms of reaching Downtown from other districts, participants expressed their discomfort while taking public transit. One participant described feeling fearful when taking the bus to the church she likes to go to Downtown, “I go to a gay church downtown on 6th and San Pedro. I go every Sunday when I’m able. I have to build up the courage. Because there are a lot of teenagers who ride the bus, and I’m sort of like afraid,
but I don’t show it. But once I get to where I’m going I can relax and be myself. But until then I have a shield up.”

Control

Control in Downtown was almost exclusively discussed in terms of social control that influenced how participants felt they could behave and present themselves. One participant described feeling like she had to act tougher when Downtown, “I may try to act a little bit more rough when I’m downtown. I may carry myself differently because I have to show a certain strength to where someone is gonna look at me and not think, you know, whatever they think. Some sort of façade in a way.” Another participant’s strategy was to dress down and stand out less, “Sometimes you go downtown, my way is to be more reserved and guarded. Because the girls down there look different and present themselves different. Because I’m a little polished and the guys come up. So when I go, I wear tennis shoes, maybe boots. No lipstick. I don’t want to be bothered, so I edit it.”

Another participant described how she adjusts her behavior to be more aggressive in Skid Row, “You adjust. There are times when you have to adjust depending on what’s going on in the environment. I get real aggressive. Because you can’t act like a punk or else people will try to take advantage of you, and rob you, rape you and whatever. So you have to act tougher in certain environments depending on what’s going on, sometimes you’re more demure, less sociable. And you have to be more on guard because when my girlfriend went through an experience where a girl came and approached her and she didn’t see her and she hit my girlfriend in the head, so you have to be careful wherever you go because people are sneaky. Sometimes you have to carry a mace or razors, or tasers just so you have some sort of protection for yourself against someone. There are people who are absolutely out of their minds walking around.”

One participant described feeling more comfortable in Little Tokyo because it was cleaner, less crowded, and has security personnel, "It’s a good place to play Pokémon Go. And meet people. I like going here because it’s more relaxed. There’s more security. It’s almost the safest spot in
DTLA. And it’s closer to the Gold Line. So living there would be good. It’s great for the culture too, and they have the best pork buns for like $2.50. Makes me think I want to get one later.”

**DTLA: Summary of socio-spatial trends**

Participants described the cosmopolitanism of Downtown as a reason for feeling like their identities were somewhat represented, but Downtown was not necessarily for them in the same way that Hollywood was. Downtown is home to several participants, but not by choice: Skid Row is one of the few places in the city where SRO housing is more easily attainable. So, while many participants have formed community, or have other transgender friends living in Downtown, the lack of choice means participants expressed having less of a stake in the district.

In terms of vitality, Downtown is where many public and cultural amenities like the Central Library, the Women’s Center, and religious institutions, as well as social services like SRO housing, are located. Access to these resources, particularly in the areas where participants lived in Skid Row, was hindered by feelings of insecurity. Feelings of insecurity were also expressed around transit stations like the Metro station at Pershing Square, and while riding the bus or train to and from Downtown. Downtown exhibits less formal mechanisms of control, where participants felt they needed to adjust their behavior or appearance in order to conform to the surrounding environment. Some participants said certain areas of Downtown enabled them to relax and be themselves more than others.

**Mid City**

A few participants, including several who live there, described Mid City in mostly positive terms, especially when compared to neighborhoods they had lived or grew up in. Mid City was mostly described in terms of comfort, and less in terms of sense or identity. Even still, some participants described feeling less comfortable in certain moments and locations in Mid City, mostly due to the presence of crowds of people in specific locations, like in front of smaller stores. Mid City is rich in terms of its high and concentration of resources like grocery stores, cultural and social institutions like churches and nail salons, and amenities like gyms.
**Sense**

Participants expressed a sense of identity with Mid City that was more related to their identities as older, African American residents who had lived or spent significant time in the district. More than any of the other respondents, the three of the participants who lived in Mid City, all African American in their 40s or 50s, expressed a lack of need or desire to leave their neighborhood on a day-to-day basis. A 44 year-old Black participant who is lives in Mid City said, “I go to certain stores, places. I walk to the grocery store, go to the nail shop. I stay mainly in the same vicinity”. One 41 year-old participant described the residential composition and attitudes of Mid City as one of the reasons she feels very much a part of the community, “Ms. Ernestine is still here and was the first black resident here back when it was still really racist. They’re very friendly in this neighborhood.”

**Vitality**

One of the reasons participants who lived in Mid City rarely left the district on a day-to-day basis was because felt they had all the resources they needed nearby. One participant had a long list of places she frequents on a day-to-day basis, all in Mid City, “At 5:00 I’m up walking the dog, from Adams to Arlington. After that I usually do banking if I have to, take him (dog) to the groomer, maybe do a light shopping, grocery store, Ralphs. The post office. Car wash. Lowes, on Pico and San Vicente. That’s the point, that makes everything around here. It’s everything around here…A whole shopping area. Oh, Planet Fitness gym. Sometimes I’ll go see a movie. I’ll go to the local library.” Another participant similarly referenced the shopping area on Pico and San Vicente as a place she frequents regularly. None of the participants mentioned the presence of significant cultural or service centers in Mid City, though one participant did mention a church she attends when it’s not in service.
In term so fit, Mid City was described as a place where participants mostly felt comfortable carrying out their day-to-day tasks, though there were moments of exception around liquor stores or in crowded areas. One participant described the various places she goes to in Mid City along a spectrum of physical and social quality, indicating that those of lesser quality were places that one has to go to out of necessity, to run errands, “Some are glamorous and some are not so glamorous. Some places you go because there is a need and you have to go there. Some places you go just to eat because you have to, you know? I would say the physical and social environment, like the recycling place, you see more people trying to get them cans, you see all ways of life. Whereas at the church you see people dressed up. At the recycling place you don’t know what the walk of life is. So you see that just watching the people.”

Another participant attributed the comfort she feels in Mid City to the privilege of passing as a woman and the way she carries herself, “Going to the store, Ralphs, the Mid Town area. I don’t have complications. It’s more than just my blending in, I carry myself and treat people the way I like to be treated. I command a certain level of respect from my peers. I do. Movies, riding the train. I don’t limit myself. 85% of the time they’re not going to get my tea. You know what I’m saying? Some will get it…but they’re going to respect it because of the way I carry myself. Every now and then you get a jerk, or the guy that tries to hit on you, says ‘you ain’t a woman anyway.’ I just try to walk it off.”

For another participant, her comfort in Mid City was dependent on when there were fewer people. When describing where in her neighborhood she felt more comfortable, she said, “Less crowds, depends on the area. I’m a night person anyway, and I’ll go shopping at night. I’ll go to Target probably an hour before it close. Or with a friend we’ll go eat at a drive through. I’ll wash my clothes late at night. And I’m comfortable there because there’s not so much movement”. The same participant, who was a self-described “homebody”, said the one public place she likes going to for fun was Queen Anne Park, “There’s a park near here I’m real comfortable with called Queen Anne
Park. Real quiet. And they actually have a water obstacle, so I'll sit by the water, read a book, put my earphones in and listen to music. No one bothers you.”

Access

Mid City is centrally located in Los Angeles, hence its name “Mid City”, and is relatively well-served by both bus and rail lines. Interestingly, participants were less likely to highlight this aspect of the district's accessibility, and were more interested in discussing what it was like moving within the district. “Everything is walkable around here,” said one participant, bringing attention to the fact that Mid City is fairly self-contained. Even still, using the sidewalk for some was easier than for others. For two other participants, avoiding crowds of men, and crowds generally, as well as keeping a wary eye at transit stops were important to their feelings of comfort in Mid City.

Control

Participants did not mention formal means of control, like security personal or surveillance mechanisms, in describing their experiences in Mid City. Like most other districts, control for TWOC in Mid City derives from the less formal, more social conditions. One participant’s experience walking to a nearby fish market exemplified the form of control whereby other people, in this case a group of guys standing nearby, have the ability to control her behavior. “Their fish is good but it’s one of those places where they got too many people and I may not go because of anxiety, because of the atmosphere and my transgenerism will contribute to them looking at me a certain way. The guys and the cars and all that. I do go to the fish market a lot, but sometimes it’ll be too crowded and I’ll go to another one.”
For the participant who preferred to spend most of her time at home, her reasons for doing so similarly derived from fear of other people in public space. When describing where she felt most comfortable being herself, she said, “At home. And a lot of people say come on, get out, but I don’t know, society is just disgusting to me sometimes, so I just feel like I don’t even want to deal. It’s frustrating. I don’t like the way it makes me feel.” When I asked her if there were specific times she felt less safe, she said, “Yes. All the time. Well mostly during the day time, that’s why I’m a nighttime person. So if I’m going to the store or the park, I stay focused on my surroundings. And if I don’t see too much it makes me feel more comfortable, I don’t feel like all eyes are on me or something. You know?”

Mid City: Summary of socio-spatial trends

Mid City gives participants a sense of identity due to feeling welcome in the community and connected to its racial heritage. Sense is less tied to queer identities in Mid City. The district’s many resources, from single corner stores and grocery stores to larger shopping centers, cultural resources like nail salons and churches, and public amenities like parks, make Mid City quite a vital district. Yet this vitality is tempered by some participants’ descriptions feeling insecure accessing some of these resources, especially smaller stores like liquor stores and markets, due to small, mostly male, crowds who congregate outside.

Participant’s descriptions of their experiences somewhat reflect their greater economic security in comparison to participants who described living and experiencing Downtown LA and South Central, which has implications for one’s ability to present themselves the way the want to, not to mention the ability to afford transition related costs that contribute to one’s ability to navigate through space without unwanted attention.

Beach Districts

Los Angeles is distinct from other U.S. cities in large part because of its year-round access to expansive, sunny beaches. While several participants simply referred to “the beach” during out
conversations, some referred to specific beaches that they visit because of their perceived quality, proximity to participants’ homes, and the inclusive nature of certain communities, like Long Beach. Most participants described the beach as one of the public environments where they felt most comfortable being themselves, and frequently visited for recreational use. This section attempts to better understand what about the beach and its adjacent communities provides for such an accommodating environment for participants.

**Sense**

Within the larger district I am referring to as the “Beach District”, Long Beach was the community most strongly associated with LGBTQ identity due to its known LGBTQ community and landmarks that symbolize LGBTQ identity. When describing Long Beach, one participant said, “I have a lot of friends out there. It’s like a second Hollywood, a better Hollywood.” Similar to Hollywood, Long Beach is a destination for participants because of its prominent LGBTQ presence that goes back decades. “Long Beach is very transgender loving,” said another participant. “They have Hamburger Mary’s from the 70s, very trans friendly.” A third participant said, “Everybody knows each other”. Though not explicitly stated in the interviews, another reason why the Beach District may communicate inclusivity more than other districts is because of the diversity of its users, in the same way that Downtown LA was regarded by some as a place where people’s differences are tolerated and, in some situations, celebrated.

**Vitality**

The beach districts, especially Long Beach and Santa Monica, have many resources in addition to the relaxation provided from swimming and lounging...
on the beach itself. The Long Beach Town Center was cited as an example of a space frequented by one participant, “It’s a nice entertainment hub. For me being who I am I haven’t had a lot of issues there.” In terms of safety, the beach districts were regarded as among the safest public spaces for participants. Describing a photo she took at Huntington Beach, one participant said, “There I feel real safe. I’m welcomed.”

What make Long Beach especially vital is that many of its services and events cater specifically to the LGBTQ population. When describing why she goes to Long Beach, a participant said, “They have parades. They have the best pride festival. Better than LA’s…They get the best people for entertainment, the hip hop stage is hoppin’. It’s at the end of May. And then WeHo’s is like two weeks later.”

*Fit*

For most participants, the beach was a place to go relax and lay out on the sand, and its neighboring towns a place to stroll, shop, and hang out, sometimes alone. When describing the public spaces she visits to relax, a participant said, “The beach of course. I like to go by myself sometimes.” Perhaps not surprisingly, the social and physical design of the beach districts is well-suited for this purpose. What is interesting is that, when compared to other crowded public spaces in the city, participants overwhelmingly felt comfortable participating in their respective activities at the beach. “We like going to Santa Monica beach, the pier, and watching the water,” said one participant when describing the public spaces she visits with her friends. “Yes, and being out and among the people.” The physical openness and vastness of the
beach itself provides the opportunity to engage in wide array of activities that span the public – private spectrum.

Another participant described Venice Beach as a place to reduce anxiety, “Venice Beach. One of my serene places. Me and a girlfriend of mine we’ll go out, walk her dogs, and get our sereneness. Every two months we’ll go and do our thing...We’ll write something in the sand and release it, stress, anxiety.” The stress releasing attribute of the beach was expressed across age categories. One participant in her early 20s said her favorite place to go was Dockweiler Beach, “I felt better when I was at the beach. Just so much goodness. Dockweiler Beach, ‘Ghetto Beach’. The water is great. I like to go early to the beach.”

Access

Participants did not express experiencing too much difficulty in accessing the beach itself and various resources once arrived at the Beach Districts. “Everything is walkable,” said one participant when describing Long Beach. Rather, access to the beach districts is restricted in much the same way that it is restricted in Hollywood: participants described uncomfortable moments while using public transportation when going to and from the district.

Beach districts also tend to be in more expensive areas, and are therefore less accessible to participants who have fewer financial means to experience or live near beach districts. It is notable that not a single participant lives in or near any of the beach districts. Expressing the desire to live in Long Beach, but also sharing her fear of reaching Long Beach via train, a participant said, “If I can’t find anyplace to live like Hollywood, Long Beach might be the next option. But also the Blue Line is
a little sketchy. Sometimes it gets really hectic.” Another participant similarly experienced discomfort while riding the Blue Line towards Long Beach, “I noticed a few butterflies in my stomach at the Long Beach platform. Only because the amount—it was like six or seven men—there weren’t that many other people on the platform, so it was an open door for a lot to happen, and nothing negative happened, so those few butterflies, I thought hmm should I stay here or just hang in the back.” The Blue Line cuts right through South LA, where, as discussed earlier, many participants lived, but felt largely uncomfortable being themselves. The fact that the Long Beach Metro station was also a site where participants felt uncomfortable being themselves reinforces the prevailing condition that taking public transit anywhere poses risks for TWOC.

**Control**

In terms of control, the beach districts in Los Angeles exhibit fewer forms of control by nature of their physical openness and relative lack of regulation in the form of signs and security personnel. The wide-open nature of the beaches has the effect of diffusing any sort of social control that might come with crowds of people. I refer back to an earlier quote where a participant made the comparison of control between beaches and parks and plazas, “The beach is a different story. Everybody is doing their own thing. If you see a crowd of guys you’re not going to sit next to them.” Unlike virtually every other public space that involves walking through it, the beach possesses the unique quality of being open enough where one can avoid certain user groups when feeling uncomfortable. In this way, the beach presents the opportunity to be one’s self more than other leisure spaces because participants can steer clear of unwanted attention.
Beach Districts: Summary of socio-spatial trends

The Beach District scores well in terms of sense and vitality. Communities like Long Beach are strongly associated with a broader LGBTQ identity due to its known LGBTQ community, landmarks and events. The beach itself is extremely ‘vital’ in the strict Lynchian sense of the term; the ability to relax, and take care of one’s mental and physical health are emblematic of what Lynch refers to as ‘consonance’, the environment’s conduciveness to “human biological rhythms.”

Regarding fit and control, in addition to participants’ preferred activity of relaxing and enjoying the beach itself, participants also spend time shopping or recreating in some of the beach’s adjacent communities, particularly Long Beach and Santa Monica. Participants were able to avoid unwanted attention more easily at the beach itself because of its ample space, and the anonymity that this openness provides.

Access is somewhat limited, but in much the same way that it is limited in other districts: getting to and from The Beach District via public transit poses the same set of risks, fears, and discomforts participants’ described in nearly all other districts. is restricted in much the same way that it is restricted in Hollywood: participants described uncomfortable moments while using public transportation en route to beach districts.
CHAPTER 6: TWOC INCLUSIVE DESIGN

In the two previous chapters I made an argument for why we should study the social and physical conditions of everyday public spaces that contribute to TWOC feeling more or less comfortable in those spaces, and why Los Angeles is a productive context for this work. In looking at space in Los Angeles at the scale of the individual and of the district, I show the different ways in which the characteristics of certain spaces empower the performance of TWOC being themselves. As I hypothesized, certain characteristic themes emerged, yet they do not necessarily translate well across each of the districts discussed due to the distinctness and vastness of each of the districts. Rather, I think it is more useful to think of each district as possessing a unique set of characteristics, some of which are shared across districts, that contribute to the way in which TWOC experience space. This analysis also complicates the presupposed binaries of safe/unsafe and comfortable/uncomfortable since feelings comfort are largely contingent on feelings of self, or what constitutes the self. And since the self is constantly changing and is also contingent upon place and space, feelings of comfort are also in flux. Before I engage the deeper implications of these findings, I will grant my original hypotheses their due diligence and discuss how they measure up to the findings. After returning to implications, I will discuss ways in which planners and policy makers can think about and design a more inclusive public realm. I will conclude with recommendations for future research.

Hypotheses Reviewed

- All everyday public spaces reflect social norms around gender identity, sexual orientation, and race, leading to compounded experiences of discomfort among TWOC.

The experiences of participants in this study demonstrate how intersectionality, manifested by experiencing multiple, overlapping oppressions in space, leads to compounded experiences of discomfort among TWOC. While not every participant made explicit whether, or in what way, they may have felt compounded discrimination resulting from heterosexist, cissexist, and racist, experiences in space, participants’ stories generally revealed instances in which one or more of these oppressions was felt in a particular time and place. The most common way this compounded oppression was described was through the explicit stereotyping of TWOC by police and business owners, whom several participants indicated treated them differently because of assumptions about who TWOC are.
• The built environment of certain spaces communicates inclusivity more than others, and therefore translates to participants feeling more or less comfortable being themselves. Examples of built environment characteristics that communicate inclusivity might include symbols and signage (TWOC-friendly business or institutional signs and symbols), the presence of TWOC landmarks (such as monuments or buildings that affirm queer identity), quality (cleanliness and maintenance versus dirtiness and dilapidation) and semi-enclosed, mixed-use spaces as opposed to open, single-use spaces.

Comparing built form characteristics across such a broad territory as Los Angeles is difficult. Nonetheless, certain built form traits emerged from this study that reflect several of Nusser’s and Anacker’s findings (2015). Inclusive images include rainbow flags and signs hung at entrances to businesses events, and other facades; billboards and smaller signs that depict LGBTQ individuals or messages directed at LGBTQ people; and the presence of LGBTQ-specific organizations and services. While these were not necessarily TWOC-specific symbols, an important finding is that participants expressed increasing levels of comfort in places, notably Hollywood and West Hollywood, where the broader LGBTQ population was represented. In a similar vein, participants mentioned specific places, or ‘landmarks’, like Hamburger Mary’s in Long Beach, or the Donut Shop in Hollywood.

An important finding was the way in which certain districts communicated inclusivity that did not necessarily rely on symbols directly reflecting LGBTQ identities. Participants expressed a sense of belonging in places associated with their childhoods, like South LA, where they mostly still retain social connections either because they continue to live there or have family and other social ties to the place. Associated with this sense of ‘home’ are several social, cultural, and religious institutions, like hair salons and churches, that contribute to a place’s sense of identity that contributes to TWOC feeling more comfortable. A place also communicated inclusivity through the diversity of its users, which in the case of Hollywood, Mid City, and Downtown meant that participants did not have to worry as much about standing out and receiving unwanted attention.

Regarding the quality of the built environment, the physical characteristics of space most associated with participants feeling more comfortable included cleanliness and a high degree of maintenance. Variety in the built environment was also positively associated with feeling more comfortable, a finding not explicitly stated in the interviews, but revealed through photographs and my own visits to districts. A district’s built form showed variety in terms of building use (i.e. a mix of commercial and residential) and building types (a mix of short and tall, young and old buildings).
These, combined with street widths that were smaller, provided a sense of enclosure at various points in a district like Hollywood.

Variety within the built form would seem to provide more opportunities for multiple uses, including private ones, where TWOC can be visible or invisible on their terms. Downtown LA is a district that most complicates this finding; more like Hollywood and less like South LA, Downtown is characterized by a variety of building types, densities, and streetscapes that provide spaces of enclosure, yet most participants expressed great discomfort in Downtown. This can mostly be attributed to Skid Row, where several participants lived. Skid Row is but one of several districts within Downtown that includes Little Tokyo, the Arts, Flower, Fashion, and Financial Districts, each with its own set of built form characteristics that deserves more fine-tuned analysis in relation to TWOC’s feelings of comfort.

- The social environment of spaces will positively or negatively affect TWOC feelings of comfort being themselves, and will vary depending on the subjectivity of each interviewee. Participants will generally feel more comfortable in areas of the city where there is a visible presence of other TWOC, gender non-conforming individuals.

Overwhelmingly, the findings indicate that participants felt more comfortable in spaces where there was a visible presence of other people who were perceived to identify as TWOC or the broader LGBTQ community. For this reason, Hollywood, West Hollywood, and Long Beach were specifically called out as spaces that were more comfortable. Places where participants read the social environment as containing more heterosexual people, like South LA or the Financial District in Downtown, were places where participants generally felt less comfortable.

Complicating this hypothesis is the finding described earlier, where places like South LA and Mid City were found to be comfortable to the extent that their social environments reflected participants’ upbringings and identities more closely tied to race than to sexual orientation or gender identity. Another sort of paradox is that, while participants described feeling uncomfortable around people experiencing homelessness, racial and ethnic minorities (particularly African American men), and crowds (particularly crowds of men near places like liquor stores), feelings of comfort were positively associated with places where there were diverse user groups. This suggests that single use spaces are less preferable to spaces where multiple uses and user groups are present. These findings also reflect the complicated reality of a society that at once stigmatizes Black men and people experiencing poverty and homelessness as inherently dangerous, and where TWOC—especially
Black trans women—are more likely to experience poverty and homelessness, and thus live in neighborhoods experiencing social and economic strife.

- Participants’ feelings of comfort being themselves will vary in part due to participants’ other identities (or subjectivities) in addition to their TWOC identities. Participants’ physical, emotional and physiological state, financial circumstances, social stability, and history of being discriminated against, are some of the additional factors that shape how TWOC experience degrees of comfort across space.

Participants who shared that they had a disability discussed how they felt increasingly vulnerable in certain public space settings. Public transportation was the site where participants felt their disabilities became most visible and subject to unwanted scrutiny from other transit users. Participants described how their disabilities discouraged or prevented them from walking, and were forced to use the bus or train despite their fears of public transit. Participants who shared their stories of living through multiple traumas due to being discriminated against for being trans or queer, and/or trauma from growing up in poverty, or around violence, described in various ways how those histories impacted their day-to-day experiences in public spaces. For instance, a participant described how living with PTSD, a condition she acquired after having been discriminated against for being transgender, meant that she often avoided crowded spaces where she might be psychologically triggered. The social, economic, and psychological condition of participants has important implications for planners and policy makers which I discuss next.

**Implications for Research**

These findings provide a starting point for understanding how certain everyday public spaces ether contribute to, or detract from TWOC’s feelings of comfort being themselves. The various social and physical characteristics (summarized at the District Scale in Table 1) that determine feelings of comfort do not operate independently of one another. A district such as Hollywood might perform best among the districts in terms of sense, vitality, and fit, but their associated attributes matter little if general access is limited by factors that govern or control behavior.

That most of Los Angeles’ organizations and services that specifically serve the LGBTQ population are concentrated in Hollywood and West Hollywood implies that vast segments of the LGBTQ community have to cross vast territory in order to access them. All but one of the 22 participants in this study live outside Hollywood, mostly in South LA (10 participants). Reaching
Hollywood is made more strenuous for TWOC relying on public transportation, a public space in-and-of-itself where nearly every TWOC felt on edge. Within Hollywood, specifically along Santa Monica Boulevard, is an area where many TWOC have historically found their community to be most visible, yet this visibility is at risk of disappearing. An increasing police presence is at once cracking down on sex work specifically along Santa Monica Boulevard, and discriminating against TWOC whom they assume are performing sex work, doing or selling drugs, or stealing.

These conditions, combined with increasing development pressures that send housing and rental prices ever upwards, fuels a process of gentrification and displacement that effectively pushes TWOC out of Hollywood. Thus, while there are important physical design solutions, like increasing TWOC visibility through signs and symbols that may enhance feelings of comfort in public space, design must go hand-in-hand with broader policies that address the city-wide affordable housing shortage, as well as more specific policies that increase safety on public transit and reign in discriminatory police practices.

At the same time, districts like South LA and Mid City exhibited a sense of identity more closely tied to race than that of sexual orientation or gender identity. Many TWOC’s have ties to family and cultural and social institutions within these make up these communities, and planners should think of ways to engage these sites in ways that empower these places and the people living there, on their terms.

Recommendations for Planners

The pervasive social stigma faced by participants across most public spaces speaks to the need for public space design solutions that are at once social and physical. Social stigma occurs simultaneously with, and contributes to other urgent issues facing TWOC, including mental health, homelessness, access to services, police harassment and violence, access to jobs, and gentrification and displacement. To begin to address these issues, planners should pursue multiple design and policy solutions in tandem (Irazábal and Huerta, 2016). Below I outline some of the concrete ways that planners and policy makers can begin to design public spaces to be more inclusive of TWOC.

Sense: Increase TWOC visibility

Increase the visibility of TWOC in the public realm through the use of signs, symbols, and messages. Even in places like Hollywood, the majority of LGBTQ billboards depict images of white, cisgender, gay men. Planners should think of ways to work with TWOC to create images for and by TWOC. On this topic, one participant said, “…like if in the metro there was a transgender woman
in an advertisement for makeup or something…(it)would change the whole environment. In a perfect world having more visibility whether it’s in advertising, movies, etc, people are going to begin to think differently.”

Planners should also work with TWOC community members to preserve historical TWOC sites, institutions, memorials, and other spaces that connote a sense of identity, belonging, and ownership. Two sites highlighted by participants included Donut Time, which used to be at the intersection of Highland Avenue and Santa Monica Boulevard, and Hamburger Mary’s in Long Beach.

Vitality: Investment

Planners should think about ways to invest in communities like South LA, which are deficient in terms of access to adequate grocery stores and open space. Investment should reflect the needs and priorities of community members, and not those of for-profit development that would see areas like South LA gentrify. Investing in housing that is affordable is critical, in addition to investing in temporary housing that appropriately serves transgender women. Planners should also consider ways to support job opportunities specifically for transgender people, who are disproportionately discriminated against in the hiring processes. Gender sensitive poverty reduction programs should also be a priority, and should be pursued along with minimum wage policies or earned income tax credit programs that can assist both LGBTQ and non-LGBTQ employees.

Fit: Spatial design

Consistent with Nusser’s and Anacker’s recommendations (2013, 2015), planners should design spaces keeping in mind a diverse user group. This calls for a diversity of built form types that allow for variations in enclosure, and opportunities for visibility and invisibility. Public spaces, specifically at transit stations and within areas of South LA and Skid Row should be well-lit and have access to Wi-Fi. New development or redevelopment should consider ways accommodate indoor and outdoor spaces for gathering.

Access: Transportation and economic security

Improve anti-harassment hotlines and mechanisms on public transit. Los Angeles County transportation officials recently launched a 24-hour hotline for riders who have been harassed, but not everyone carries a phone or have the right service provider, and Wi-Fi is only accessible in the subways in Downtown.
Ensure equal access to public restrooms. Access to safe, gender appropriate public restrooms is a key constraint highlighted by participants. Planners should advocate for and accommodate public restrooms that are more gender friendly, including more single access bathroom facilities.

Planners should also work with TWOC community members and organizations to expand the provision of TWOC-specific services outside of Hollywood. Organizations like Bienestar has begun to lead the way by opening up a service center in East LA, in addition to its locations in Hollywood and South LA.

Control: “Soft” and “hard” mechanisms

Increase transgender awareness training among police officers and public officials. A step in the right direction, Mayor Eric Garcetti announced the formation of the Transgender Advisory Council in March, 2016. The permanent council is made up of transgender community leaders who advise City leaders on issues facing the transgender community. The Los Angeles Police Department also enshrined new policies in 2012 that instruct officers how to avoid discriminating against transgender people, but the fact that these policies took effect prior to this study indicates that there is still much work to be done to ensure that police or other law enforcement officials do not discriminate against transgender people. The effects of these new policies on police conduct with regards to TWOC has yet to be seen.

Efforts to improve training and awareness among police officers must go hand-in-hand with ending the police crackdown against transgender women suspected of prostitution. These crackdowns typically occur along Santa Monica Boulevard in Hollywood, a neighborhood participants described as a trans-friendly but increasingly policed space. The ACLU, Black Women for Wellness, Familia: Trans Queer Liberation Movement, Gender Justice LA, Translatin@ Coalition, and several other advocacy groups in Southern California have called for decriminalizing sex work. In 2016 the ACLU and several other civil rights groups filed a friend-of-the-court brief with the Ninth circuit Court of Appeals, supporting a constitutional challenge to California’s statute that “prohibits solicitation and engagement in sex work for both buyers and sellers of sex” (Goodman, 2016).

Some of the new policies include: “Treat transgender persons in a manner that reveals respect for the individual’s gender identity and gender expression, which includes addressing them by their preferred name and using gender pronouns appropriate to the individual’s gender self-identity and expression; A search or frisk shall not be performed for the sole purpose of determining an individual’s anatomical gender; and Requests to remove appearance-related items, such as prosthetics, clothing that conveys gender identity, wigs, and cosmetics, shall be consistent with requirements for the removal of similar items for non-transgender individuals” (LAPD, 2012).
Methodology and Future Research Directions

In many ways, the findings from this thesis brings forth more questions than it resolves. Each of my research questions and hypotheses lend themselves to further study, additional methodologies, and refined scrutiny. Additional research directions should take the implications from this broad brush study, and follow up with a more

This study highlights some instances in which intersectional identities and oppressions impact TWOC in public space, though it is difficult to compare such a broad range of experiences and identities across the wide range of spaces that constitute Los Angeles. Further study can elaborate on an intersectional approach in many ways, starting with a more diverse interview pool that includes more Latina trans women and younger transgender women. A more refined study would help with this aim, and could ask more narrow questions across a smaller set of spaces. Why, for example, might access to certain public spaces be more an issue for TWOC who are HIV positive? How do feelings of comfort in Downtown LA’s public spaces compare between TWOC experiencing homeless and TWOC who are housed? How do the physical and social conditions vary within a neighborhood block in South LA compare to an adjacent block across the street? These and many other questions lend themselves to more focused, comparative analysis than what my research provides.

Further study should also more critically interrogate the role of race in relation to TWOC’s experiences in public space. Participants were generally less likely to bring up race as an issue in public space, particularly among older TWOC, who were the majority of participants. It is possible that my being a white man inhibited a more honest conversation about race, out of participants wanting to avoid offense, out of distrust, or out of my own inability to productively integrate race into the conversation. The generational divide may also partly explain the lack of discussion, since younger TWOC were much more inclined to discuss race as a determining factor in their experiences.

A more productive discussion about the role of race would also likely lead to a more nuanced understanding of the status of districts like West Hollywood, and Hollywood to a lesser degree, as ‘safe spaces’ for TWOC. Other scholars have shown how many queer people of color and transgender people do not identity with nor necessarily feel comfortable in ‘gay’ commercialized districts, like West Hollywood, that would seem to cater to moneyed, white cisgender gay men. Eric Reyes, who wrote his master’s thesis at UCLA on the subject of the spaces of lesbians and gay men of color in Los Angeles, argued that West Hollywood is “a white-coded gay male place and to assign
physical space as the only determinant of existence is to render queers of color invisible” (Reyes, 1993). In his study, he found the social and mental spaces (represented by community networks and self-development and awareness) of respondents to be more important to their identities as queer. My findings somewhat reflect the importance of these less physical, more social and psychological spaces in districts like South LA and Mid City, but fall short of explicitly engaging with these spaces as sites of comparison with places like Hollywood and West Hollywood.
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