

Towards a More Comprehensive Queer Urbanism: Understanding the Spatial Aspirations of the Queer  
Non-Male Community in Seattle, WA

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Abstract

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This thesis explores the relationship between queer space and belonging in the City of Seattle for queer residents who do not identify as men (or queer non-males). A combination of focus groups, individual, and paired interviews with members of this population were conducted to understand how this population feels about belonging in Seattle and its queer spaces. Participants were also asked to envision queer spaces that they would like to see in the City to provide initial insights into how Seattle's queer spaces could better serve this population. The study found that Seattle's queer non-males feel strong ties to Capitol Hill, the City's gayborhood, suggesting a continued relevance for this population. However, participants shared that many queer spaces are cost-prohibitive, non-inclusive of intersecting identities such as race and ethnicity, and mostly center around alcohol. The desires of the participants included more variety in the types of queer spaces available, more accessible queer spaces in terms of cost and ability for those with disabilities and queer parents to use the space, and queer spaces or events that cater to a variety of intersecting identities. The participants also desired a mix of spaces that are just for queer people and those that support queer values regardless of the identities of those present. Overall, the study reveals that Seattle, while overwhelmingly accepting of queer identities, does not contain the spaces necessary for its queer non-males to find a sense of belonging in their queer community.

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## Introduction

Researchers are concerned about the loss of gay neighborhoods, but what if these “gayborhoods” never fully served the full spectrum of queer populations in the first place? Between 2007 and 2019, 36.6% of gay bar listings disappeared from the Damron Guide, a national publication of LGBT spaces across the United States (Mattson 2019). This decline of queer space mostly located within the gayborhood at large has been noted by numerous academics who recognize and advocate for the necessity of queer spaces (Gaziani 2014, Bitterman and Hess 2021, Doan and Higgins 2011). Not only are queer spaces hubs for political organization and resistance as well as cultural hubs for the queer community (Bitterman and Hess 2021, xii-xiii), but queer people who live in neighborhoods with high densities of sexual minorities have better mental health outcomes than those who do not (Wienke, Whaley, and Braatz 2021). There is also a growing understanding amongst scholars of the importance of people finding a sense of belonging in support of positive mental health outcomes (Marlin, Lewis, and McLaren 2022, Allen et al. 2020). Allen et al. (2020) created a framework made up of four categories necessary for an individual to achieve belonging, with one of these being *opportunities* to find belonging. When applied to the queer community, this framework points to the necessity of queer spaces and is already being used by researchers in Australia to understand rural queer belonging (Marlin, Lewis, and McLaren 2022).

While the disappearance of queer spaces broadly is undoubtedly alarming, the gayborhood has already failed to serve the entire queer population, particularly those who are not gay, white men (Mattson 2019). The gayborhood has struggled in recent years to straddle the line between exclusively serving queer populations and opening their doors to other patrons (Branton and

Compton 2021). Part of this difficulty comes from the need for spaces to be economically viable, which can lead to the commodification of queerness (Sears 2005), but there is also an internal struggle within the queer community between those whose aim is to conform to heteronormative standards and those who resist this push (Warner 1999). This strive towards so-called “homonormativity” can be used as context for understanding the sanitized version of queerness that is present in many established queer spaces (Sears 2005).

Beyond the gayborhood’s spatial representation of this internal struggle over normative vs non-normative, the gayborhood has also historically been a space that caters to gay, white men (Mattson 2019). Due to the economic disparity between men and women in America, queer women’s spaces have often faced economic conditions that make it difficult for them to survive (Giesecking 2020b, 945). Queer women have historically had significantly fewer established spaces for their exclusive use when compared to gay men (Mattson 2019) and often organize in ways that aren’t tied to permanent space, which leads them to be misunderstood by mainstream planning (Frisch 2002). Jack Jen Giesecking (2020) has coined the term “constellations” to describe these ephemeral patterns, but the phenomenon is still not widely researched.

It should be noted that Giesecking’s work has focused not only on queer women but also on transgender and gender non-conforming people (TGNCP) (Giesecking 2020a). This definition goes beyond rigid gender categorizations that have been understood by scholars to be mere social constructions (Butler 1990) and instead focuses on the effects of such societal-imposed categorizations. This research will similarly focus on queer women (whether they be queer due to their sexuality or gender identity) and nonbinary/genderqueer people who do not identify as men. From here on out this study population will be referred to as “queer non-males.”

While research is emerging on how queer non-males operate in space across various cities (Giesecking 2020a, Podmore 2006, Ozlem and Doan 2020), less attention is paid in both the social and academic realms to how queer non-males envision space in ways that engender a sense of belonging for their community. Rooted in Queer theory, the idea of Queer Urbanism seeks to create spaces that engender belonging for the queer community and to rethink planning practice in ways that challenge the normative ideals that planning is so often based on (Greiner 2023). Yet not all queer experiences are the same, and historic queer urban development has catered to a particular type of queer person. What does the remainder of the queer population see as a future of urbanism that serves their needs? Without this knowledge, the project of Queer Urbanism will be incomplete at best.

In this study, the primary aim is to address a specific knowledge gap in the existing research. While researchers like Jack Jen Giesecking (2020a) have begun to explore how queer non-males navigate urban spaces beyond the permanent-place-based narratives that constrain understandings of this community's spatial patterns (Frisch 2002), there remains a lack of attention to how these individuals envision an urban environment that fosters a sense of belonging within their community. This research seeks to fill that gap by investigating how queer non-males conceptualize and create urban spaces that promote a sense of belonging through the use of focus groups, paired interviews, and individual interviews with queer non-males in the city of Seattle, Washington. The result will be a more comprehensive understanding of the spatial aspirations of the queer non-male population beyond an analysis of the community's existing spatial patterns, which are constrained by the patriarchal structures inherent in American capitalist economic systems (Giesecking 2020a).

To understand this population, they must be fully present at the table to articulate their needs and desires both individually and collectively. Thus, this research actively engaged with members of the queer non-male community as primary sources. The focus of this research was queer non-males who reside in Seattle, WA, which is recognized as a liberal city that has a distinct gayborhood (Capitol Hill) and is home to the oldest remaining lesbian bar in the country (The Wildrose). Despite this, the emergence of queer non-male space in Seattle began outside of its gayborhood through spaces that were not tied to alcohol (Brown 2004; Mesec 1992). Most of these spaces have since disappeared or moved to the Capitol Hill neighborhood (Brown 2004). The historical development of queer non-male space in Seattle aligns with the literature on queer non-male space and the relatively well-documented history allowed for a strong basis for this research.

Another local context that should be noted is a recent debate over the potential displacement of a queer nude beach in the city by the parks department. Local pushback by the queer community shut down these plans, but the decision by the parks department to pursue this project in the first place is alarming (Beekman 2023). While not a criterion for the selection of this study area, this anecdote highlights the importance of queer voices in planning conversations, even in liberal cities like Seattle. To that aim, this research looked to answer the following question:

*How well do existing queer spaces serve the queer non-male community in Seattle, WA in terms of creating a sense of belonging and what does this community see as possibilities for existing or new spaces that could engender a greater sense of belonging?*

This was achieved via focus groups, interviews, and paired interviews with queer non-males who live in Seattle. These conversations followed a semi-structured format using a series of prompts.

The resulting transcripts were coded using relational content analysis with affect extraction. The results are distilled in the findings section followed by recommendations based on these results. The following section will discuss existing literature framing the topic of study.

## Literature Review

### **Leonie Sandercock's Radical Planning Umbrella**

In a rejection of prominent planning theories, Leonie Sandercock (1998) called for a radical planning project, which understands planning through its enactments of oppression along diverse yet intersecting axes. This project centers on upending marginalization but rejects earlier planning theories professing to achieve the same ends. Rather than planners speaking on behalf of marginalized communities, as in advocacy planning (172), or redistributing power and resources without input from marginalized communities, as in equity planning (174), planners must actively give space for these voices within planning (180). Planners must recognize that in the face of oppression, marginalized communities have become insurgent citizens, challenging planning practitioners and theorists alike to embrace difference. A planner's role is to move between these groups and the state, maintaining what Friedmann calls a "critical distance" (Friedmann 1987 as cited in Sandercock 1998). Marginalized communities must be given a voice in planning decisions, but if the state is bypassed in this project, it can only go so far (178). Instead, we must understand both the state and the masses as oppressors, and see planners as negotiating this tension (179-180). The radical planner must develop new ways of knowing, which can be created by listening to the voices of those at the margins (180). When planners embrace these differences and develop strategies for negotiating contexts of oppression, they can begin the work of unraveling the structures at the root of these oppressions.

While Sandercock nods to various communities at the margins who face the forces of structural oppression, she does not make it her project to outline these forces. Other theorists have taken up this task, arguing that planning upholds white supremacy (Williams 2020), class oppression (Harvey 1978), colonialism (Porter 2010), and sexual hierarchy (Frisch 2002). Yet these projects may not all align with Sandercock's intersectional vision. David Harvey's (1978) argument that planning upholds social harmony within the oppressive system of capitalism was explicitly rejected by Sandercock (1998) due to its disregard for other forms of oppression and its inability to offer a solution to capitalist domination (173). Although Rashad Akeem Williams (2020) does provide concrete steps toward racially reparative planning, he also limits his analysis to race and class. Dolores Hayden (1980) envisioned a planning future that was gender aware but largely limited her analysis to factors of gender and class.

This does not mean these identity-specific projects reject Sandercock's intersectionality, and in fact many of them overlap one another. For example, Hayden's (1980) vision was specifically highlighted by Michael Frisch (2002) in the conclusion of his argument for "queer inclusive" planning (264). This example of crossing over identities is a start to what Sandercock envisions as requisite coalitions (181-182); however, it has the opportunity to go much further. In fact, it must go further. Radical planning projects must not position intersectionality as an afterthought but instead make it integral to their methods, aims, and analyses. This concept of intersectionality, first popularized by Kimberle Crenshaw (1991), is brought to the fore of planning action through Sandercock's radical project (1997, 169, 181-182) and must be similarly positioned in projects that exist under her radical planning umbrella.

Over two decades since Frisch (2002) argued for queer-inclusive planning and Sandercock (1998) proposed an intersectional approach to address planning's structural oppressions, we can

see how planning continues to fail queer communities, particularly those with intersecting identities of marginalization. America is facing a loss of queer space, and more acutely a loss of queer bars for lesbians and queers of color (Mattson 2019). Yet even this analysis is limited in its lack of understanding that queer women and transgender/gender non-conforming people (TGNCP) often network in ways that are not tied to established space (Giesecking 2020a). The lack of understanding of how sexuality is regulated across identities continues to fail those who are further marginalized within the queer community.

In the face of this, we must understand not just how planning structurally enforces heterosexism (Frisch 2002), but also how this is enacted across identities within the queer community.<sup>1</sup> To this end, I will argue for a response to Frisch's assertion that planning is heterosexist (2002) within the radical, intersectional, and reparative framework proposed by Sandercock (1998). This response, dubbed "Queer Urbanism," is really a queering of planning.<sup>2</sup> It understands one of planning's roles as a regulator of human sexuality but sees this as working in concert with planning's other forms of social oppression. It challenges planners to consider the layered facets of identity and the corresponding marginalization that planning was intentionally created to enact, and then it asks planners to actively work to unravel these structures of oppression.

Sandercock (1998) concludes her argument with the assertion that "in this radically altered planning framework, the very notion of certainty has been abandoned in favor of a more complex, historically informed and situation-specific reading of competing claims. For this new

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<sup>1</sup> Here, I am using Frisch's understanding of "queer" being associated with the LGBTQIA+ community (Frisch 2002, 255). However, as we will see, this meaning of the term "queer" has been contested by other thinkers.

<sup>2</sup> "Queering" can be understood within the framework of queer theory, where queering is an act of "mak[ing] room for difference, question[ing] the powers behind the purported 'normal', and situat[ing] pleasure and politics side-by-side" (Giesecking 2013, 179).

framework to be successful requires a very different mindset and set of skills to those associated with modernist planning.” (184) She offers that planners must be given “socio-cultural or multiracial literacy” (184) if we are to succeed in a radical planning project. To this end, I will begin with a summary of Michael Frisch’s seminal work discussing the roots of planning’s heterosexism, followed by an assessment of more recent works that move us towards a more radical, intersectional, and broad project of queer urbanism. This will serve both as a lineage of queer oppressions (although one that is certainly far from comprehensive) and an argument for a queer urbanism that repairs the systemic oppression that has resulted from this lineage.

### **Heterosexism as an Axis of Oppression**

Michael Frisch’s “Planning as a Heterosexist Project” (2002) takes up the task of outlining planning’s oppression of sexual minorities.<sup>3</sup> Through an examination of the planning dichotomies of order/disorder, household/family, and public/private, he argues that planning promotes heterosexuality, hurting lesbian and gay communities.

In his analysis of the order/disorder paradigm, Frisch turned to the writings of Patrick Geddes and Lewis Mumford. Geddes, as a trained botanist, wrote biological texts praising heterosexuality as “the pinnacle of human existence” (258), and more explicitly denounced homosexuality in later works (258-259). Through planning, Geddes and his collaborator J. Arthur Thomson saw the opportunity to control human sexuality via a heterosexual ordering of space (259). Lewis Mumford’s work, building off of Geddes, explicitly discusses “homosexual love” as in conflict with natural order (259). Frisch uses this evidence to conclude that historical

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<sup>3</sup> Note that he limits his analysis to gay men and lesbians.

planners, in their aim to create order through planning, saw an explicit link between heterosexuality and their ideal of order.

Frisch (2002) discusses the dualism of family/household as being epitomized in single-family zoning, where apartments are seen as spaces of immorality. Homeownership is linked to the stability of family and childrearing, which is tied back to the preservation of the heterosexist “order” (260). Apartments were seen as antithetical to family values, termed by Frisch as “sites of difference” (261). In sum, a house was for a family (as implied by the terminology “single-family zoning”) while apartments were for households. The heterosexist implications of this divide were codified into law through legal definitions of who can be considered a “family” and thus who is allowed to reside in single-family homes. These definitions were restrictive based on the structure of marriage (261), which queer families were legally excluded from until 2015, thirteen years after Frisch’s publication.

The public/private divide was interrogated by Frisch (2002) through an analysis of how gays and lesbians utilize public space for “private” activities, which led planning to restrict these activities through zoning, forced closure, and policing (261-262). Yet even in private spaces, homosexual activity was legally restricted, barring gays and lesbians from the protections afforded to heterosexuals through the public/private dualism (263). These restrictions also limited the creation of established spaces for gays and lesbians, which were constantly threatened (263). The public/private dualism thus is created to protect heterosexuality, failing those who fall outside of this identity.

Frisch (2002) concludes his analyses by calling for a queer-inclusive project. He offers examples of urban interventions that encourage interaction, remove restrictive definitions of the family,

and rethink the structure of housing. These efforts serve to upend the primacy of the family in a rethinking of the family/household duality that restricts gay and lesbian spatiality. However, he also offers the idea of making family an inclusive term and posits that the advent of marriage equality will help achieve that end. In the end, he argues that understanding gays and lesbians and recognizing them as full citizens is the ultimate path toward a queer-inclusive project (264).

### **Understanding Frisch's Project Within Sandercock's Umbrella**

Frisch's (2002) work has been cited by many contemporary scholars as a framework for understanding planning's regulation of sexuality (Greiner 2023, Doan and Higgins 2011). His thorough history of planning's heterosexism is a crucial text for planners if they are to address these fundamental issues. Viewed alongside other radical planning texts that address the sexism (Hayden 1980), classism (Harvey 1978), and racism (Williams 2020) inherent in planning practice we can begin to envision the radical planning project that Sandercock proposed. However, when taken in isolation, the project may not fully hold under Sandercock's analysis due to its majority focus on a singular axis of oppression. Although Frisch (2002) does consider how lesbians have been impacted by planning, and briefly draws on class, race, and immigrant status, this is where his examination of intersecting identities of marginalization stops. The focus on sexuality does not account for transgender lives and the various enactments of gender within the queer community, focusing on just the LGB, or even just the LG of LGBT.<sup>4</sup> Using Sandercock's (1998) intersectional lens, Frisch's (2002) argument could be built upon to create

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<sup>4</sup> At the time of its writing, LGBT would have been more commonly used. However, we should still consider that when applied to contemporary times, the lack of consideration for other identities (or the "QIA+" of LGBTQIA+) does not hold. This is a factor of time and progress rather than a lack of consideration on the part of Frisch.

an understanding of how planning regulates the “queer” within a broader understanding of the term, not just same-sex attraction.

In his examination of the Family/Household dualism, Frisch (2002) interrogates the Supreme Court’s 1926 *Euclid v. Ambler* decision. He quotes a secondary source in its analysis of the case, which found that the case “underscored the deterministic relationship between environment and moral character,” and that “the man who seeks to place his home for his children in an orderly neighborhood is not motivated so much by considerations of taste or beauty as by the assumption that his children are likely to grow mentally, physically, and morally more healthful in such a neighborhood than in a disorderly, noisy, slovenly, blighted and slumlike neighborhood” (Gellen 1985, 112 as cited in Frisch 2002).

Extrapolating via the tie that he previously established between definitions of “order” and “heterosexuality,” Frisch positions this excerpt as evidence that zoning is a tool of sexual control. However, this quote can easily be seen through sexist, racist, and classist lenses as well. Access to single-family homeownership was limited for people of color and the focus on the man as the protector of familial values asserts the primacy of the male over the female. An analysis taken from this perspective opens the door for a nuanced understanding of how identities intersect, allowing for both an understanding of how the Black, lesbian mother experiences this divide, and how her experiences relate to that of the single, straight, working-class immigrant woman. As we draw out these intersections, we can begin to imagine how what was once an identity-based endeavor can expand to a “broad emancipatory project” (Sandercock 1998, 182) built on coalitions. This allows Frisch’s project to move into closer alignment with Sandercock’s (1998) vision.

Yet we can continue to drill into Frisch's (2002) analysis and find opportunities to expand our understanding of how sexuality is regulated through planning more broadly. For example, in the same section discussing the family/household dualism, Frisch (2002) discusses how apartment living was demonized for its "anti-family" values and exposure to "single men and women of different social backgrounds and cultural values" (261). Consider again the Black lesbian mother and place her in relation to a single, White, straight sex worker. Each of these women would be included in the definition of the "single women" this passage refers to. As neither is fully conforming to Geddes' ideal of [normative] heterosexual reproduction, both face institutionalized restrictions even though only one of them maintains a "queer" identity. We can thus see that Sandercock's intersectionality applies not just vertically through the LGBTQIA+ identity, but also horizontally, recognizing that planning's heterosexism regulates sexuality beyond LGBTQIA+ identities.

Finally, just as Sandercock critiques Harvey's difficulty in finding a solution to capitalist oppression (Sandercock 1998, 172-173), Frisch's conclusion could be better aligned with Sandercock's (1998) project by advocating for structural solutions to planning's heterosexism. Although his suggestions of using Hayden's (1980) feminist urban designs begins to imagine an intersectional response, design solutions will not fully resolve the heterosexist thinking that is entrenched in planning practice. Further, Frisch's suggestions originated from planning-based top-down solutions. A project rooted in Sandercock's (1998) mission would be a bottom-up endeavor that aims to restructure planning itself.

The next section will discuss work done since Frisch's publication as a justification for a rethinking of how we should respond to planning's regulation of sexuality that is in line with Sandercock's intersectional and reparative approach.

### **An Intersectional Reading of Frisch's project 20 years later**

In her 2008 "Critical Geographies and the Uses of Sexuality: deconstructing queer space," Natalie Oswin argues for both an intersectional understanding of the spatial deployments of sexuality and a broadening of the "queer" geographic project. In support of the former, she argues that a focus strictly on sexuality obscures co-constituted axes of oppression such as racism, classism, and transphobia and that, even within queer communities, these forms of oppression run rampant.

Recent examples demonstrate this layered oppression within queer space. DasGupta and Dasgupta (2018) studied queer belonging in the U.K. and found that queer space necessitates racial erasures, asking queer Muslim migrants to set aside their ethnic-religious identities to qualify as queer within white gay space. Jennifer Earles (2019) found that within lesbian spaces, queer women have historically employed restrictive definitions of gender. While this is in response to genuine threats that women face in a patriarchal society, attempts to impose rigid definitions of who can be in lesbian spaces further heterosexist patriarchal systems. The employment of what Earles dubs "the penis police" additionally excludes people of color from lesbian spaces, leading to spaces that exclude women who are not cis-gendered, white, and female-lesbian-presenting.

As these cases represent, even within more marginalized circles of the queer community, such as queer women, oppression is commonplace. Oswin (2008) similarly argues against viewing queer women and queers of color as "queer saviors" (96). She quotes Lisa Duggan's (2003) concept of "homonormativity," which explains how queer populations attempt to conform to normative practices to gain access to broader acceptance and what Sara Ahmed (2010) terms "the good

life.” Ahmed (2010) discussed the concept of the “good life” regarding queer populations through an analysis of how popular media depicts queer people. Through her discussion of various depictions of queer people, Ahmed reveals how LGBT people are shown as unhappy and incapable of accessing the idealized “good life” due to resisting heteronormative structures. Through accessing heteronormative ideals such as marriage, queer people gain entry into this so-called “good life,” without questioning the oppressive nature of these structures themselves (Spade and Wilse 2015, 7). In fact, one of Frisch’s concluding recommendations is to give lesbians and gays access to marriage (264). Yet this is just allowing gays access to oppressive structures instead of changing the structures to allow for the “differences” that Sandercock (1998) describes (Spade and Wilse 2015; Warner 1999).

From a spatial perspective, this conflict is reflected in the debate over whether queer space is even necessary (Ghaziani 2014, 251). However, even when they are seen as necessary, the tension persists within these established queer spaces. Scott Branton and Cristin Compton (2021) used participant observation and informal interviews at two gay bars to understand how queer spaces are enacted within current neo-liberal structures, particularly concerning the intersection of neo-liberalism and branding. The authors discovered a tension between the need for queer spaces that exist for the queer community and those that exist for everybody, queer or not. Their research revealed how the branding of gay bars and gay identities is used to create “safe spaces” that ultimately exclude many within the queer community. The authors discuss the need for gay bars to negotiate the “tension between ‘safety’ and ‘being yourself’” (84) to create more inclusive spaces. This reflects how the pressure to create spaces that feel welcoming to straight populations ostracizes the queer community. In attempting to fit queerness within a heterosexual understanding of space, queerness itself is normalized at the expense of queer experiences.

An intersectional reading of queer space and normativity can open this analysis to a more nuanced understanding of this tension. Alan Sears (2005) uses queer Marxist-feminist theory and an analysis of the history of queer social movements to argue for the queer political movement to adopt anti-capitalist queer Marxist-feminist frameworks. The incorporation of these frameworks would result in a project that centers those most marginalized within the queer community to reimagine space beyond the constraints imposed by the necessity of capital accumulation and outside of homonormative ideals. Sears finds that recent developments in queer social space have increasingly commodified queerness through "capitalist social relations" (107). Queerness is obscured through commodified homogeneity and the sexuality of queerness is erased. He argues that the response to this should be a radical queer project organized around the most marginalized within the queer community to envision a new queer anti-capitalist movement. Here, we can see how capitalist structures limit queer spatial enactments, forcing a sanitization of queerness that can appeal to the masses and threatening the presence of queer space for LGBTQIA+ populations.

In analyses of established queer spaces for queer women, who have less access to capital due to patriarchal structures, this pressure results in fewer established spaces for queer women. However, due to issues of safety, the public realm is not always comfortable for queer women and queers of color (Giesecking 2013, 181-182), thus further limiting their ability to occupy space. This reading extends to private spaces as well (Giesecking 2013). In a phenomenon also mentioned by Frisch (2002, 257), Jack Jen Giesecking (2013) discussed the limiting framing of a "queer neighborhood" when applied to lesbian-queers,<sup>5</sup> who do not conform to the "model of physical and commercial territoriality," thus rendering their spaces invisible (Giesecking 2013,

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<sup>5</sup> Defined as lesbians and transgender/gender-nonconforming people (Giesecking 2020a).

195). Giesecking's call for understanding a lesbian-queer use of space through the lens of constellations aims to address this specific phenomenon (Giesecking 2020a). This geographic reading of lesbian-queer space can address planning's struggle to recognize the spatial movements and place-making activities of this community (Frisch 2002, 257).

In a recent example of this in Seattle, WA, attempts to put a children's playground in the long-time nude, queer beach of Denny Blaine reveals a planning in conflict with queer ephemerality and public/private subversion (Jseattle 2023). This long-standing beach particularly catered to queer women and offered a safe space for transgender people, gender-nonconforming people, and queer people of color. Seattle allows public nudity, except when it is anticipated to cause reasonable harm, and when this occurs in the presence of someone under the age of 14, it becomes a felony (Beekman 2023). This long-established, inclusive, queer nude beach was thus threatened by an anonymous donor who specified that the playground must exist at this exact park. Many questioned why this park was chosen, noting that the playground would be dangerously close to the water (Seattle Child Staff 2023). This example reveals how planning's understanding of public/private is in conflict with queer movements, threatening spaces of queer inclusion and expression. Particularly, though, it shows how this conflict disparately impacts queer community members who are facing further layers of marginalization as it limits their claim to the public sphere.

Through this final example, we can also begin to understand Oswin's second argument, which calls for a more expansive queer geographic project, one that echoes ideas originally put forth by Cathy Cohen (1997). Cohen (1997) asserted that queer identity politics often reinforce dichotomies of sexual identity and argued for queer politics that transcend sexual identity to instead interrogate normativity through "one's relation to power" (438). In her own version of

this argument, Oswin (2008) believes that a true queer project must focus on normativity and non-normativity across a broad spectrum. While she understands the importance of queer space to LGBTQIA+ communities, she sees the potential for queer urbanism to move beyond this narrow focus and understand that heterosexuality itself is not always normative.

Using this framework to examine the Denny Blaine Park case study, we can see its practical applications in interrogating planning's policing of sexuality. While the prospect of losing the nude beach mobilized members of the LGBTQIA+ community to share their stories at a community meeting and ultimately succeeded in halting the project, it also mobilized members of the nudist community (Jseattle 2023). The threat to the park, while on one hand a policing of the queer community, was also a policing of sexuality more generally. In relating this back to Frisch's (2002) discussion of planning as heterosexist, we find evidence that planning, more broadly, regulates the sexuality of all humans.

This is epitomized in Lauren Berlant and Michael Warner's (1998) exploration of the privatization of sex and how this impacts our understanding of what is acceptable intimacy. This privatization does not just impact our ability to perform our sexuality. As the authors discuss how systemic inequalities and structural racism are hidden by a familial social ordering (549), they shed light on how systems of heterosexist oppression intersect with other axes of oppression such as racism, classism, and sexism. The cordoning off of one's intimate life from the public realm, political discourse, and capitalist relations distracts us from inequity, comforts us in the face of a broken humanity, and leads us to feel shameful for any divergence from what our intimate lives "should be" (553).

This does not mean that heterosexuality is not privileged over queer lives. Berlandt and Warner discuss the creation of queer counterpublics, which are threatened by zoning regulation that limits sexual activity. Queer urban space and queer political mobilizations are thus restricted and heteronormativity, as a “fundamental motor of social organization” (564) is protected (562-563). However, the authors challenge the reader to question what benefits are gained from this social ordering. Through their discussion of how heteronormativity promotes the ideals of normal intimacy as a path to the good life (553-554), we can hear echoes of Mumford and Geddes’ idealization of heterosexuality as the pinnacle of humanity (Frisch 2002, 258). Now, we can more fully understand planning’s heterosexist project is one of domination across identities.

Each of these examples demonstrates how the narrowness of the queer project proposed by Frisch (2002) fails to fully understand sexuality as an axis of oppression that acts both horizontally and vertically. Just looking at the heterosexism of planning precludes us from seeing how sexual oppression and other forms of marginalization are positioned in relation to each other and in relation to power. Further, the suggestions offered by Frisch to address this issue are not aimed at rethinking the structures of oppression that restrict sexualities but instead are one-off suggestions for how planning can incorporate queer concerns within existing structures of oppression. This only serves to move in the direction of a homonormative planning, rather than one that challenges heterosexism by embracing anti-normativity. While certainly crucial to understanding how planning systemically promotes heterosexuality and represses homosexuality, Frisch’s (2002) solution does not offer an analysis that works within Sandercock’s radical planning model. The next section of this literature review will discuss what a queer project can look like within Sandercock’s radical planning umbrella.

## Using Sandercock to Analyze Contemporary Projects of Queer Urbanism

Frisch's conclusion calls for "planning as a queer inclusive project," (2002, 264) but what if we went further than that? Rather than simply including queer identities, how could we "queer" planning itself? Although queer urbanism is a topic that has begun to gain traction in popular media and planning circles (Greiner 2023, Rojas n.d., Furman 2023), it has not been frequently discussed in explicit terms in academic literature. Ferdinand Lopez (2023) discusses the project of Queer Urbanism, which involves active participation by non-normative and queer individuals. Lopez finds queer urbanism to be practiced through insurgent politics based on Henri Lefebvre's "right to the city" (Lefebvre 1996 as cited by Lopez 2023) as queers engage in non-normative practices to resist heteronormative control (81-82). In this definition, Lopez understands "queer" to mean the "multiple forms of social antagonism against institutions and the social processes that produce, recognize, sustain, stabilize, and normalize identities" (81).

In contrast, Aaron Greiner (2023) equates "queerness" with the LGBTQ+ community in his call for queer urbanism. In a concrete call for planning to be more inclusive of this queer community, Greiner discusses limitations to queer spatial movements such as reduced access to capital in a world of pay-to-enter social infrastructure, prohibitive housing costs, and the discriminatory nature of public space. In his version of queer urbanism, he asserts the need for an intersectional project that uplifts BIPOC and Transgender communities. This can be done by including and centering queer voices, checking for heteronormative assumptions in planning decisions, and asking why queer people may or may not feel comfortable in certain spaces.

Whereas Lopez sees queer urbanism as an uprising of queerness in conflict with normative interactions with and within the built environment, Greiner sees queer urbanism as more akin to

Frisch's (2002) queer inclusion within established planning protocol. A Sandercock-ian (1998) project of queer urbanism would lie somewhere between these: seeing Lopez's queer uprisings as different ways of being, which must be understood and given space to exist in the urban environment, while understanding the planner depicted by Greiner as one who goes between these communities and the state, aiming not just to create a queer-inclusive project, but to understand how systems of sexual oppression can be undone across all communities.

Within this, we can imagine a more radical version of both of these queer urbanisms: one where planners question the roots of their entrenched ideas of public/private, family/household, and order/disorder. Just as Libby Porter (2010) challenged planners to question why land must be "productively" utilized to have value, queer planning can challenge planners to question why these ideals are at the heart of planning practice, and if they should be. In other words, the planner can begin to *queer the meaning of space itself*. For example, rather than seeing Denny Blaine Park as a discrete space for queer bodies to exist in full, the planner can use this example of the community actively queering space to reconceptualize what is "normal" in public. Once this is accomplished, the radical planner can begin the task of unraveling these systems of oppression that are entrenched in planning practice.

### **An Intersectional Queer Urbanism**

Sandercock's umbrella of inclusion must be broad if it is to fully encompass the axes of oppression she hopes to unravel. Her project requires a multiplicity of independent yet interconnected projects that tackle the various ways in which planning has worked to influence social ordering. The early, paternalistic roots of planning continue to run deep into modern-day planning practice and influence how planners understand space (Frisch 2002). As planners begin

to actively reckon with the white supremacist roots that run through planning (Williams 2020), they must also understand how the regulation of sexualities impacts LGBTQIA+ populations as well as society as a whole. This is especially true in an era of generational differences that affect how different groups relate to sexuality and heteronormativity (Fobear 2012).

These two projects (as well as the various others under Sandercock's umbrella) must not run in parallel, destined to never meet. To truly unravel systems of oppression, we must see these projects as ones that work in tandem, always considering one another as well as the various other axes of oppression. Although the regulation of sexuality and racialized bodies are not the same, these processes are mutually constituted, just as the regulation of feminized bodies, classed bodies, etc. work together to uphold an unjust social order (Oswin 2008, 94). From a more practical sense, we need to foster intersectionality to avoid politics of division; for, as Sandercock (1998) cautions, we must forge coalitions if we are to fully realize a "broad emancipatory project" (182).

The practicalities of this effort outlined by Sandercock are vague, and I will leave the reader with a similarly vague answer. Partially, because these projects are highly contextual; but also, because for this to be a bottom-up initiative, the answers must come from the community itself. The first step of this endeavor is for planning practitioners to begin to learn from those voices of difference so that they are adequately prepared to deal with each context-dependent scenario (Sandercock 1998, 184). This discussion serves as a step in this process, or at least an impetus for planners to begin their own journeys of learning about the sexual regulation inherent in planning and how this manifests across a variety of identities. However, the second step is to include voices from the margins to foster a rethinking of planning practice. Similar to, and in conjunction with Williams' (2020) call for the active inclusion of African Americans in

self-directed planning processes (8), the process of repairing sexual oppression must be led by those communities that are oppressed. Planning must be willing to embrace radical queer futures that are likely to be in direct conflict with entrenched planning ideals.

It is through this path that we can adequately address the constructs of planning's heterosexist oppression that Frisch (2002) puts forth. In Sandercock (1998), we are given the roadmap to addressing planning's heterosexism in a way that understands the intersection of marginalization both within the LGBTQIA+ community and across identities.

### **The Importance of a Sense of Belonging**

Sense of belonging is recognized as an important aspect of mental health (Maslow 1943, Baumeister and Leary 1995; Lee and Robbins 1995), and has been shown to have positive benefits for GLB populations (McCallum and McLaren 2011; McLaren 2009; McLaren, Jude, and McLachlan 2008), who are at a higher risk of mental health issues (Mental Health Foundation n.d.). Unfortunately, many members of the queer community face rejection by their own families, but engaging with the queer community to foster a sense of belonging helps build resilience for these individuals (Carastathis et al. 2017, 303). To understand how belonging related to depressive symptoms, Suzanne McLaren studied lesbians (2009) and bisexual women (McLaren and Castillo 2020) in Australia. For lesbian women, a sense of belonging to the general community was directly related to lower levels of depressive symptoms while a sense of belonging to the lesbian community was indirectly related. For bisexual women, a sense of belonging with the queer community was directly related to lower levels of depression. These findings show the importance of fostering a sense of belonging both within the queer community and in an individual's broader community. While McLaren and Castillo did look at other,

intersecting aspects of identity, the main focus was on lesbian and bisexual women. Other studies have looked at gay men (McLaren, Jude, and McLachlan 2008), rural queers (Marlin, Lewis, and McLaren 2022), elderly queers (Higgins, Sharek, and Glacken 2016), queer parents (Power et al. 2014), queer youth (Gonzales, Connaughton-Espino, and Reese 2022; McCallum and McLaren 2011), queers of color (Gonzales, Connaughton-Espino, and Reese 2022), people with disabilities (Maher et al. 2012), and people across economic brackets (Trawalter, Hoffman, and Palmer 2021). While many of these do not contain an explicit spatial component, Trawalter, Hoffman, and Palmer (2021) addressed the public/private divide in their analysis, finding that college students in lower economic brackets used iconic public spaces less, but experienced a higher sense of belonging as they used public spaces more. Although not a study on queer populations, the authors theorize that the same may be true for other minority populations. This is notable given the uneasiness that queer women feel around public spaces (Giesecking 2007, 182).

### **Defining “Sense of Belonging”**

Sense of belonging has been defined as a performative, contextual, dynamic process (Yuval-davis 2006, Youkhana 2015). Nira Yuval-Davis broke belonging down into three major levels: social locations, identifications/attachments to groups, and an individual’s value systems that they use to judge belonging (Yuval-davis 2006, 209). Hagerty et al. (1992) defined it at two levels: that a person feels valued, needed, or important and that their experiences fit with “other people, groups, objects, organizations, environments, or spiritual dimensions” (174). They also found three antecedents: the energy a person has for involvement, the person’s desire and potential for involvement, and the potential of the person to have shared or complementary

characteristics with others (Hagerty et al. 1992, 174). Youkhana (2015) added a spatial component to belonging, defining belonging as:

“A socio-material resource that arises by means of multiple and situated appropriation processes. Belonging describes alterable attachments that can be social, imagined, and sensual-material in nature. The material-semiotic and space-sensitive study of belonging reveals activities that produce belonging on different temporal and spatial platforms and within more or less institutionalized (repeated, performed, etc.) everyday practices, (imposed) rituals, and “regimes of belonging”. (Youkhana 2015, 16)

Youkhana (2015) finds that these “regimes of belonging” can be used to both mobilize and limit groups (12) and the question of what belonging is, how these performances of belonging take place, and by whom can unveil processes of “othering” and domination (20).

Allen et al (2021) did a comprehensive review of the literature on belonging to create a framework for understanding belonging and found that multiple elements are necessary for belonging to occur: competencies, opportunities, motivations, and perceptions (91). Although all must be present for belonging, the authors do not determine at what levels. The authors found that existing measures of belonging only assess the person’s feelings of belonging at a state in time, which conflicts with the dynamic nature of belonging. They recommend examining dynamic patterns of belonging over time. In this assessment, researchers should identify 1) how the participant’s sense of belonging has emerged from the four aspects of belonging; 2) the context that allowed this feeling to occur; and 3) the feedback mechanisms that either encourage

or discourage belonging (Allen et al. 2021, 95). In a study of rural Australian queers that relied on this framework, researchers had participants think about their life and note when they have and have not felt belonging (Marlin, Lewis, and McLaren 2022).

Through this method, researchers found that of the four elements of belonging identified by Allen et al. (2021), perceptions of belonging were the most important aspect for this population. This is because the queer community is so often hidden in rural environments (Marlin, Lewis, and McLaren 2022). Spatial components such as rainbow flags or stickers created a visible marker that allow rural queers to feel welcomed by businesses (Marlin, Lewis, and McLaren 2022, 3314). Another aspect of Allen et al's framework (2021) that is relevant to research on queer spatiality and urban planning is the "opportunities" element of belonging. They recognize that although people can be motivated to find connection, be competent at connecting, and have positive perceptions of their ability to find belonging, without opportunities for people to find connection with others, belonging will not be achieved.

Using the framework produced by Allen et al. (2021), the "perceptions" and "opportunities" elements of belonging are most relevant to the planning field. However, even within queer spaces, these elements are not addressed for the entire queer population. The following section will discuss these discrepancies, with a particular focus on the queer non-male population.

### **The Lack of Opportunities for Queer Belonging**

Much of the recent research on queer space concerns the shift away from the historical pattern of consolidation of LGBTQIA+ identities within a distinct neighborhood (or "gayborhood") (Ghaziani 2014; Mattson 2019; Bitterman and Hess 2021; Doan and Higgins 2011). This phenomenon was studied by Petra Doan and Harrison Higgins (2011) using a case study of

LGBTQIA+ neighborhoods in Atlanta, GA. Through an analysis of census data, planning documents, and interviews with residents, the authors found that a resurgence of gentrification in queer neighborhoods made it difficult for these areas to maintain their queer identities. Atlanta's queer residents were unable to access many of the neighborhoods they historically resided in due to rising prices, making LGBTQIA+ institutions vulnerable to closing and restricting the ability of LGBTQIA+ populations to politically organize. This new and uncertain state of gay neighborhoods has led researchers to ask what the future holds for queer space.

Amin Ghaziani's 2014 *There Goes the Gayborhood* and Alex Bitterman and Daniel Baldwin Hess' 2021 book *The Life and Afterlife of Gay Neighborhoods* begin to navigate this shift, but they find that the needs of the queer population cannot be understood as a monolith. In fact, within the queer community, the desire for queer space itself is contested (Ghaziani 2014, 251). Ghaziani (2014) understands this in the context of a more welcoming society to LGBTQIA+ individuals, but as will be explored throughout the literature review, not all queer people are given the same degree of acceptance, even within the queer community (Reczek and Bosley-Smith 2022, chap 8; Earles 2019). While this criticism is examined in the work, it still remains largely underexplored (Chalana 2022).

From a spatial perspective, those within the queer community that exist within other marginalized identities have historically been underrepresented (Mattson 2019). Mattson (2019) discussed the overarching pattern of the closure of queer spaces across the US, using the *Damron Guides* as a reference for historical queer spaces. Their analysis shows that while all queer spaces are vulnerable to closure, those most impacted include lesbian spaces and spaces for queers of color. In particular, lesbian bars have always had numbers that are significantly lower than gay

bars. While there has been a rise in the number of mixed-gender queer spaces since the 1990s, the sexuality of the women utilizing these spaces has not been specified.

Although there has always been a disparity between the number of lesbian bars compared to gay bars, a sharp decline in lesbian bars beginning in the 1990s has led to less than 30 existing in the United States prior to 2022 (Colarossi 2022). Podmore (2006) found two reasons for the acute disappearance of these spaces: 1) the gentrification brought about by other populations pushing lesbians out of the non-gayborhood enclaves they once occupied; and 2) the shift in lesbian identity to queer identity, which led to mixed-gender spaces that resisted the women-only spaces of lesbian bars. Yet it should be noted again that spaces for and by queer women do not often conform to the model of an established queer gayborhood (Giesecking 2020a).

### **Negative Perceptions of Belonging and Queer “Othering”**

As outlined previously, belonging in queer space is not a given. The work of DasGupta and Dasgupta (2018) and Oswin (2008) reveal that queer space is implicitly white space. Earles (2019) has shown how lesbian space has historically been hostile to transgender and genderqueer populations. The autoethnography by Petra Doan (2010) describing her experiences as a transgender woman operating in gendered space reveals the consequences of this organization of space along a gendered binary. Beyond the gendering of space having consequences for cis-gendered women, Doan discusses how this system impacts transgender/intersex/genderqueer populations. Doan's descriptions of her experiences with heteronormative, gendered spaces speak to the importance of incorporating a multitude of queer voices in the conversations around the creation of space. Her account raises concerns about how to approach the nuances of gender and gender performativity when creating spaces that foster a sense of belonging.

While this pattern of exclusive definitions of who belongs in queer spaces, and particularly queer women's spaces, has been noted throughout the history of queer spaces and movements (Earles 2019), more recent generations of queer people are expressing a desire to move away from this (Fobear 2012; Quick 2023). Fobear (2012) used anthropological ethnographic research and semistructured interviews with lesbian women in Amsterdam, Netherlands to understand how members of this community feel about the decline of lesbian space along generational lines. The author found that the younger generation of lesbian women was less aligned with identity politics, which created tensions between older and younger generations. This younger generation expressed that mixed spaces reduced the pressure to be "lesbian enough" or participate in lesbian hookup culture, and shared that it was difficult to enter the lesbian social scene, which was often hostile. Although the author found that there was a shared understanding that the lesbian community needs space, the nature of that space, and who should be allowed in it, was contested between generations.

### **Ramifications**

As LGBTQIA+ populations are gaining more acceptance in the United States, the gayborhood itself is being assimilated into straight society (Ghaziani 2014). While this leads to an identity crisis within queer spaces that asks who should be welcomed (Quick 2023; Sears 2005), it is clear that queer spaces have always dealt with conflicting ideas of who they serve (Mattson 2019, Earles 2019, DasGupta and Dasgupta 2008). This has left many marginalized populations within the queer identity without spaces to call their own (Mattson 2019). As we begin to ask what the future of queer space holds and how queer voices can inform planning practice through the project of queer urbanism, we must center the voices of those within the community who have traditionally been left out of established queer space and whose informal queer spaces have

been ignored and misunderstood. This is the gap in existing research that this project attempts at filling by working with the queer non-male community to understand their spatial aspirations and how spatial belonging can be fostered for this population. The following section will outline the proposed methods that will be used to achieve this aim.

## Methods

As outlined in the literature review, the gap in existing research is the need for an understanding of the spatial aspirations of the queer non-male to inform the project of queer urbanism. Seattle, WA was chosen due to its liberal and accepting nature and the historic development of its queer space, which aligns with how researchers have conceptualized the development of queer space.

The research asked:

*How well do existing queer spaces serve the queer non-male community in Seattle, WA in terms of creating a sense of belonging and what does this community see as possibilities for existing or new spaces that could engender a greater sense of belonging?*

The inductive nature of the research lends itself to a qualitative approach. This allows for the emergence of new understandings of the queer non-male community given that the research question addresses a largely under-explored topic. Due to the lack of existing data on this topic, the research needed to engage directly with the study population to collect the necessary data. The methods were derived from the work done by Giesecking (2020a) due to the similar nature of our research questions that both aim to explore queer non-male conceptions of space. Giesecking (2020a) utilized focus groups as their data collection method and specifically created a focus

group for women and transgender and gender non-conforming people (TGNCP) of color to amplify their voices. Similarly, this study organized three focus groups: one containing a mix of cis and TGNCP people who are both people of color (POC) and non-POC, one that was just cis and TGNCP of color, and one that was TGNCP participants alone. This was intended to amplify the two latter groups, who have historically faced marginalization within the queer non-male community (Earles 2019), while simultaneously allowing for a third group that encouraged conversation amongst people of varying identities, which can produce a greater understanding of the relational aspects of queer space and how that impacts belonging. Although participants were not asked about their disability status, due to attempts to accommodate physical ability, a Zoom-specific focus group included participants with mobility limitations. This group also tended to have older participants.

Scheduling constraints within a small sample pool limited the size and makeup of these groups, but a deliberate effort was made to include participants in the focus groups that span age, ability, gender identity, and race. As the topic was one with which the participants were very familiar and passionate, a smaller group size of four to six people was used for the focus groups (Krueger 1994); however, issues with scheduling conflicts, last-minute dropouts, and no-shows meant that the two identity-specific focus groups had only one or two participants. Baillie (2019) discusses this research problem as one that often occurs when working with participants who are difficult to recruit, which aligns with the prevalence of POC and TGNCP participant dropouts. Another consideration that may have influenced attrition was the limitation that participants were unable to receive compensation. Regardless, the decision was made to include these sessions as an individual semi-structured interview and paired semi-structured interview, largely because these two groups were made up of participants who had diverse perspectives. The additional benefit

was that these smaller settings allowed participants to share more personal experiences and give in-depth responses (Baillie 2019). This is beneficial for these groups in particular because they often face exclusion within lesbian and queer spaces (DasGupta and Dasgupta 2018; Earles 2019). For the POC-specific group, both participants happened to have the same ethnic background and were thus able to relate on many topics, which provided an opportunity for them to drill deeper into the topic of race and queerness. Since some participants who did drop out wanted to participate but were unable to due to physical limitations, a fourth, virtual focus group was added, which increased participant involvement. While this added another layer of difference within the data, it was an important accommodation to allow for the inclusion of a diversity of voices.

While the discussion prompts were initially vetted through a test focus group to determine any gaps or difficulties and further refine the prompts, because the prompts were largely unchanged and this group yielded unique answers, this focus group was also included in the final data. As this initial focus group was conducted in an informal setting with queer non-males close to the researcher, this session likely resulted in more candid responses than the other groups. Still, participants were asked to assume the role of a focus group participant and engage with the questions as if they were in that role. The only change to the prompts that resulted from this meeting was a reordering of questions and a removal of some prompts due to time constraints. The prompts removed were ones that received duplicate responses from the group due to their similarity to other questions.

The final result was five datasets: Three focus groups ranging from three to five people, one paired interview, and one individual interview.

## Combining Focus Groups and Interviews

Focus groups allow participants to engage with one another in a way that reveals new perspectives and ideas that may not emerge otherwise (Curry 2015a). Since the research question is looking to understand the aspirations of the queer non-male community, this approach is useful for generating creative and collaborative responses. Further, given the historic tension within the queer community about what qualifies a person to be allowed in a “lesbian” space (Earles 2019), bringing together people across multiple identities allows participants to reach a shared understanding of how spaces can best serve the needs of queer non-males with varying identities. Focus groups also allow for insights into how individuals discuss a certain issue (Curry 2015a) by making it easier for participants to engage in natural conversations that will allow for more patterns to emerge. One potential risk of this method is the inability to go very in-depth on the topic due to time constraints (Curry 2015a); however, the supplemental individual and paired interviews account for this gap as these types of data collection allow for more in-depth responses and reduce the risk of participants getting off-topic (Wilson, Onwuegbuzie, and Manning 2016). While the data resulting from individual interviews differs from the social construction inherent in focus groups, and to a degree paired interviews (Wilson, Onwuegbuzie, and Manning 2016), the combination of these methods, particularly when using the former for discussions with participants that may face greater marginalization in queer space, allows us to understand how different members of the queer community view the same phenomenon (belonging in queer space) from different points of view (Caillaud and Flick 2017). In the final analysis of the data, the origination of each data (interview vs. paired interview vs. focus group) was thus taken into account as providing meaningful context for interpretation (Caillaud and Flick 2017). This mix of interview methods also allowed the researcher to gain insight into what

methodologies provide the best results for a study of this sort, which has largely been underexplored. These findings can be used to inform future studies of this nature.

## Interviews and Focus Group Prompts

The final prompts that were used in the study are organized into four sections. The first section addresses belonging and begins by asking how participants define a sense of belonging. This question is meant to prompt participants to think about a sense of belonging broadly. For focus groups, the aim of this question is to have everyone participate to increase comfort and likelihood of involvement for all participants (Archer 2007). The researcher began by informing the participants that everyone has an opportunity to answer this question and that from there on any participant can answer the questions given. Next, following the guidance by Allen et al. (2021) and Marlin et al. (2022), participants were asked to think back on their time in Seattle and discuss times when they have felt a sense of belonging.

Section two discusses queer space and queer networks in Seattle. Participants were asked about their queer networks as well as how they define queer space. These prompts were chosen because of the ephemeral and ambiguous nature of queer space. Giesecking (2020a) describes lesbian-queer spaces as constellations that are highly individualistic, so what may be seen as a queer “space” to one person might not hold for another and vice versa. Giving participants room to define queer space in their own terms allowed new insights to emerge and prevent predetermined definitions from influencing the participants’ answers.

Once defined, participants are asked to discuss their feelings and perceptions of queer spaces in Seattle. This leads into the third section, which discusses the intersection of a sense of belonging and queer space. Participants were asked to think back on their experiences with Seattle's queer

spaces and discuss how or how they have or have not experienced belonging. The final section asked participants to envision a future Seattle that engenders a sense of belonging for the queer community. These questions address the second part of the research question, which asks how queer spaces could better serve the queer non-male community, and ties back to the purpose of uplifting non-male and marginalized voices in the project of queer urbanism.

### ***Section 1: Belonging***

1. *How would you define a sense of belonging?*
2. *Thinking back on your time in Seattle, when are some times when you have felt a sense of belonging?*

### ***Section 2: Queer Space***

3. *Could you describe the ways you network within the queer community?*
4. *How would you define a queer space?*
5. *How would you describe your interactions with queer space?*
  - i. *When you think of queer spaces what emotions come up for you?*
  - ii. *What is your perception of the queer spaces that exist in Seattle?*

### ***Section 3: Queer Space and Belonging***

6. *Thinking back on your experiences with queer spaces in Seattle could you share some times when you have felt a sense of belonging?*
  - i. *What caused you to feel a sense of belonging in these situations?*

7. *Thinking back on your experiences with queer space in Seattle could you share some times when you have not felt a sense of belonging?*
  - i. *What kept you from feeling a sense of belonging in these situations?*

#### ***Section 4: Envisioning Queer Futures***

8. *If you could design your own queer space without any limitations what would that queer space look like?*
  - i. *What steps would you take to ensure that space engendered a sense of belonging for further marginalized groups within the queer community?*
9. *If you could picture a utopian Seattle what would it look like?*
  - i. *Are there any special steps you would take to cater to the queer community and if so what would those be?*
10. *How could you be better served by the city of Seattle?*
11. *How could you be better served by Seattle's queer spaces?*

These prompts were intentionally broad due to the abstract nature of queer non-male space, aligning with Giesecking's (2020a) theorization of constellations of queer space. Approaching the participants with prompts that allow for a flexible understanding of queer space allows the participants to give insights into their understanding of queer space that is not influenced by preconceived notions of space or queerness that may be implied in more directive prompts. The focus group and paired interview methodology also allows participants to communicatively construct meaning and bring the conversation wherever they see fit, which allows for insights to

be derived from the decisions the group makes in how to direct the conversation. For the individual interview, the participant had the chance to take the topics wherever they saw fit, which allows us to make preliminary comparisons between the perspectives of the community vs the individual.

A conversational style was taken in the interview session to increase comfort among participants. I assumed an Insider/Outsider role as a queer non-male myself. Although my positionality as a researcher puts me outside of the group, my position as a queer non-male gains me insider status in the community. Using the conversational approach is intended to increase my approachability as a researcher and allow participants to feel comfortable sharing personal information with both myself and the group.

## Sampling

Participants were chosen initially using purposive sampling, mainly through my access to queer networks. These included friends, a queer Facebook group, and targeted fliers in Seattle's queer spaces such as The Wildrose, Charlie's Queer Books, and other locations within the Capitol Hill neighborhood. To ensure a diverse and intersectional sample, interest groups for asexual/aromantic, queer-disabled, and QTBIPOC people were also contacted; however, only a queer/disability-focused group ended up sharing the study in time for the sessions. From there, snowball sampling was used to grow the study sample size and ensure a representative sample that spans identities of gender, race, class, age, and physical ability. A Google form was created to gather demographic information and schedule availability for people who were interested in participating in the focus groups. The form allowed for open responses to questions of gender, sexual, and racial identity. Although these meant the responses were not standardized, the

decision was made because these identities are very personal and the researcher did not want to limit the ways in which participants could identify. For clarification for grouping purposes, there were yes/no questions allowing participants to indicate if they identified as BIPOC or transgender/genderqueer/non-cis-gender. This mixed approach meant that while some people may not have identified as non-cis-gender, they did share in their gender identity response that they did not identify fully with a female identity. While disability status was not asked, some participants chose to share this information in a free-response section at the end of the survey. This form was also used for participants to agree to participate in the study and give written permission to be recorded in their interviews. This process followed IRB guidelines for an exempt research study, which was granted via IRB application 00018223.

43 people responded to the request for interested participants and I contacted 33 of these people to participate in the final group. I began by contacting those with more marginalized identities to ensure a diverse sample set. This method prioritized BIPOC, disabled-identifying, trans/nonbinary, and older participants. Limitations of scheduling and time did reduce the ability for some members of these populations to join. From there, I contacted the remaining participants based on their availability, allowing for one follow-up email per correspondence before determining that the participant's non-response indicated a desire to no longer be included in the study. The response rate was 51% and 64% of scheduled participants ended up making it to the final focus group sessions, resulting in 14 participants total.

One limitation of this approach was that by using my network, there was bias in the types of people who were chosen for the focus group. This bias meant participants would lean towards those aged in their late 20s to early 30s and participants who are White. As seen in Figure 1, although attempts were made to disseminate the study amongst more diverse groups, the

participant breakdown still leans White and young. Additionally, no one who volunteered in time to participate in the study identified as Black or Indigenous. This limitation was accepted due to time constraints and the inability to provide monetary compensation to participants for their participation. Based on literature discussing the exclusion of racial minorities in queer space, this limitation most likely influenced questions about lack of belonging in queer space. Having identity-specific focus groups mitigated some of this bias by creating forums for those with similar identities to engage in conversation and uplifting their voices in the results. Future work should consider more robust sample sets to be able to draw stronger and more intersectional conclusions.

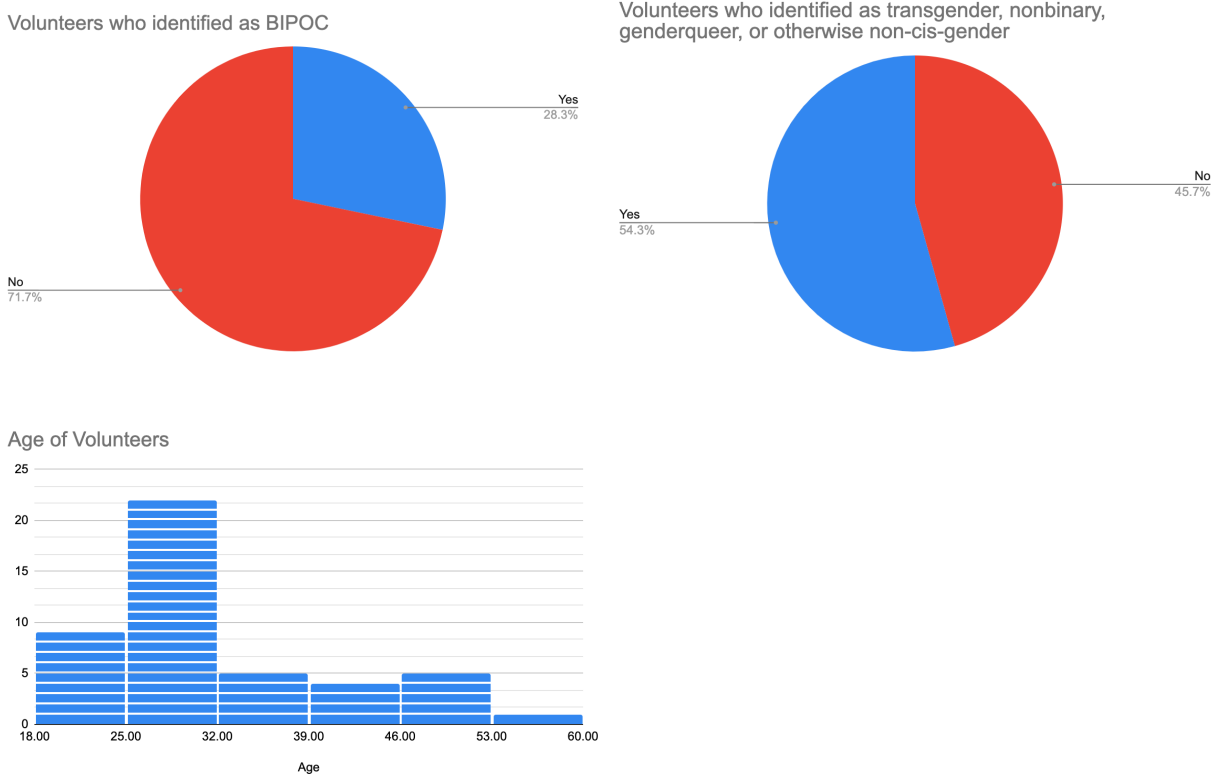


Figure 1. Demographics of those who volunteered to participate in the study.

## Focus Group/Interviewing Format

The methods used by the researcher to conduct the focus group follow the guidance of Archer (2007). Three interviews/focus groups were conducted in person on the UW campus in a private meeting room, one was conducted via video call to accommodate participants who had difficulty making it to the in-person sessions, and one group was conducted at the researcher's home as it was initially intended to be a test group. They were conducted on a Monday morning, a Wednesday afternoon, a Wednesday evening, a Saturday morning, and a Friday evening, which were chosen based on the availability of participants. No group was scheduled on the same day to ensure the moderator was not fatigued for any of the groups (Archer 2007, 38). The researcher moderated the conversation by ensuring that dominant speakers did not control too much of the conversation and giving room to more shy participants (Archer 2007, 40). If a certain participant was taking too long to answer the questions, the researcher attempted to limit the conversation to ensure that all participants were asked every single question (Archer 2007, 39); however, at times the conversations broached topics that were meant to be addressed in later questions and thus the researcher let the participants continue speaking. This meant that not every group made it through every single question, particularly if they already answered the questions in their other responses.

The researcher's position as a moderator is to observe and not to participate. As such questions were not clarified for participants and the moderator was not involved in the conversation other than to facilitate participant discourse (Archer 2007, 39). Ground rules and introductions were given at the beginning of the conversation, and the researcher took minimal notes, instead relying on recording the conversation for future analysis (Archer 2007, 39).

## Interview/Focus Group Participants

As seen in Figure 2, the resulting sample had a similar demographic breakdown to the population that volunteered for the survey. The interview groups were as follows:

- One semi-structured interview with a Transgender White Heterosexual woman in her early thirties.
- One paired interview with two Vietnamese-American people who identified as nonbinary/non-cis-gender and either pansexual or lesbian. Both are in their late twenties.
- One mixed focus group containing one BIPOC-identified participant and four White participants. One non-binary participant, three female-identifying gender-queer or gender-questioning participants, and one cisgender female-identifying participant. All were in their mid-to-late twenties or early thirties. One participant identified as asexual/aromantic, three as lesbian/sapphic, and one as queer/lesbian/bi.
- One mixed focus group that contained three participants, two in their late 40s and one in their mid-50s. One identified as BIPOC and two as White/Caucasian, one of whom also identified as Ashkenazi Jewish. One participant identified as Intersex/Transgender, one as “not entirely binary,” and one as nonbinary. One identified as queer, one as queer/lesbian/bisexual, and one as pan/gray/ace.
- One group that contained three participants in their mid-to-late twenties. All identified as cis women and non-BIPOC. One identified as half White and Half South Asian, and two identified as White. Two identified as lesbians and one as gay.

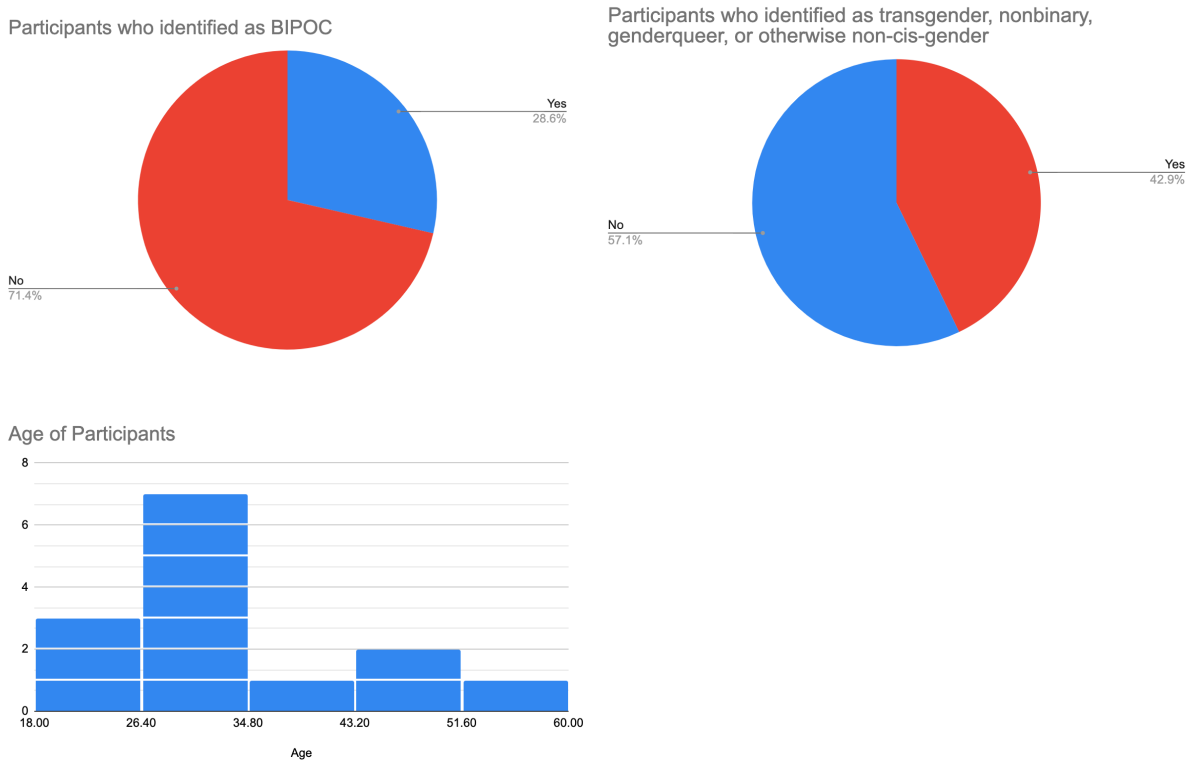


Figure 2. Demographics of research participants

As the researcher conducting the interview, my identity as a queer non-male allowed the participants to feel more comfortable sharing their experiences and discussing the topic of their queerness freely. For example, participants often used insider terminology without explaining themselves to me. While I was initially concerned about my positionality as a researcher making it difficult for participants to engage in a natural discussion about their feelings on the topic of queer belonging, they did not seem to hold back in discussing the topic and typically assumed an informal conversational style. However, being a White able-bodied younger person did make me an outsider to some of the conversations. The use of focus groups was chosen to help alleviate this by creating an environment where participants could discuss with themselves, which did seem to make participants feel more comfortable discussing topics. For example, in a paired

interview with two Vietnamese-American participants, they often discussed topics of race freely with one another. However, further steps were also taken to account for my insider-outsider positionality. Beyond my position as a queer non-male researcher, my own experiences influence my worldview and impact my ability to relate to participants. Thus, it is crucial to share both my identity and experiences with participants (Giesecking 2020a, xxi). This transparency both enhances credibility and creates trust with participants (Bukamal 2022, 328; Tang 2006, 16; Giesecking 2020a, xxi-xxii). I chose to introduce myself to the participants in this way:

*My name is Jess or Jessica and I use she/her pronouns. I am a 27-year-old queer graduate student studying queer urbanism. I grew up in the rural conservative South and lived in both Dallas and Austin before moving to Seattle two years ago. I currently reside in the Green Lake neighborhood with my girlfriend, our dog, and our cat.*

## Analysis

Beyond an awareness of my positionality in conducting focus groups, Finlay (2002) discusses the importance for researchers to engage in reflexivity to understand how their positionality impacts all steps of the research process. Specifically, reflexivity as intersubject reflection involves an exploration of the relationship between the researcher and the interview participants (Finlay 2002, 216-217). Giesecking (2020a) does this in their recognition that their whiteness meant that queer participants of color did not likely share everything with them despite their insider identity as a queer person. Tang (2006) analyzed her interviews with lesbians in Hong Kong through a similar lens to understand how her positionality and actions as a researcher impacted the responses of her interview participants. A similar method was used in my analysis of the focus groups I conducted. For example, in the BIPOC-specific focus group, there were

instances where my Whiteness was referred to, and participants prefaced certain answers with statements such as “I hope this doesn’t offend you.”

All focus groups were conducted in person except for one virtual session and were recorded with the explicit permission of participants. The recording was transcribed using a combination of transcribing software and manual edits. This was done to shorten the time needed for transcription and allow for a focus on data analysis. Transcriptions were analyzed using an integrated coding approach that developed broad codes initially based on the literature and hypothesis but became more detailed through the themes that emerged from the transcripts themselves (Curry 2015b). Once the code was finalized, all transcripts were re-coded using the finalized code.

The data was then analyzed using content analysis, specifically relational analysis, with affect extraction. This method of analysis was chosen due to the research question’s specific concern with the relationship between aspects of space (the independent variables) and sense of belonging (the dependent variable). The concept of “sense of belonging” was operationalized through the creation of the codebook such that specific feelings could be systematically understood to indicate a sense of belonging or the lack thereof. Code co-occurrence of terms within a phrase was then used to highlight the relationship between the different variables to draw conclusions from the data. Per Curry (2015a), where the data originated from a focus group or paired interview, the group was used as the unit analysis rather than the individual as a unit of analysis. Still, within the analysis process, it was noted whether the insights within the transcript were shared or given by a single individual (Curry 2015a). As a decision rule, all relationships that emerged between space and belonging were considered valuable conclusions; however,

repeated relationships or those agreed upon by the group were noted and given additional weight when drawing conclusions.

## Findings

The codes were broken down into the following sections:

Theme	Concept
Actions	Towards Participant, By Participant, General
Attributes of a Person	Marginalized Identities, Queer Identities, Privileged Identities, General
Attributes of a Space	Physical Attributes, Social Attributes, Attributes of Good/Service Provided
Belonging	Belonging, Lack of Belonging, Barriers to Belonging
Connection	Connection, Lack of Connection, Attributes of Connection, Intimate Relationships
Feelings	Positive, Negative, Neutral

Related to Values	Normativity/Power Structures, Subverting Normativity
Time Period	Past, Present, Future, Passing of Time
Types of Space	Specific Spaces in Seattle, Specific Space Outside of Seattle, Type of Queer Space, Type of General Space, Amenity/Service, Constellations (Giesecking 2020a)

While an inductive approach was taken, themes emerged that aligned with existing literature such as Giesecking's (2020a) constellations and Allen et al's (2021) framework for belonging. Participant feelings were categorized to indicate belonging or lack of belonging based on an analysis of the co-occurrence of terms. When a feeling was not associated with belonging, it was sorted into one of three categories: positive, negative, or neutral. Participants' definitions of queer space were used to understand the various categories of queer space along with other categories of general space and basic amenities (such as healthcare, transportation, etc). The themes of attributes of space, attributes of a person, actions, and connection are used to understand what aspects of space and community engender belonging for queer individuals as well as what they would like to see in future queer space.

# Belonging

## Definitions of Belonging

Participants were explicitly asked to define a sense of belonging as well as to share examples of when they have felt belonging. The concept of belonging was found to be associated with 13 themes that can be understood as attributes of belonging: 1) affirmation, 2) agency, 3) blending in, 4) comfort, 5) community, 6) connection, 7) being one's "full self," 8) lack of alienation, 9) not having to be cognizant of one's actions, 10) not having to explain oneself, 11) safety, 12) taking up space, and 13) visibility. The strongest association was between belonging and the ability to be one's full self. At 20 co-occurrences, this association constituted 5% of all discussions of belonging and was stronger than the second-strongest attribute of belonging by a factor of four. This suggests that feelings of belonging are most strongly felt when one feels that they can be their full self. This is similar to one of Hagerty et al's (1992) aspects of belonging, which was defined as "the person experiences a fit or congruence with other people, groups, objects, organizations, environments, or spiritual dimensions through shared or complementary characteristics" (174).

The ability to be one's full self was itself most strongly associated with intersecting identities as well as the act of performing. Further, the code "intersecting identities" was more strongly associated with "lack of belonging" and "compromising [one's full self]" than it was with "belonging" and "[the ability to be one's] full self," although all held strong associations. In the interviews, participants often discussed belonging as a holistic concept, encompassing their multiplicity of identities. One participant poignantly described belonging by saying: "I have a sense of all the different parts of me that have been separated and stuffed away into little tin cans

or something are now things that I just drag around behind me everywhere, and it's noisy and messy so maybe belonging is like a place where people see me trailing all these cans and are like, let us help you with that.” While another shared that they feel the most unsafe (read: lack of belonging) when they “have to pick and choose which identity is more salient within a setting.”

The act of performing was another concept that was often discussed concerning a lack of belonging, particularly in queer space. Examples included queer participants in heterosexual relationships that felt the need to refer to their male partner in gender-neutral terms to ensure that they were read as queer and femme participants needing to prove their queerness through external signs or the presence of a non-male partner. However, some noted that feeling the need to perform was an intrinsically motivated fear, particularly around queer friends who ultimately did not care whether the person was dating a cis-gender man or not. For this particular example, the participant noted that being able to find friends who felt this way after moving to Seattle contributed to feelings of belonging in the city.

Performing was coded as being different than compromising one's full self, with the former describing someone taking intentional action to either prove that they are enough of a certain identity or to pretend to be an identity that they are not and the latter describing the need to *discard* one of their identities to gain access to acceptance within another identity, although not necessarily *hiding* that identity. “Compromising” was termed using the words of the participants themselves, but occurs in the literature as DasGupta and Dasgupta (2018) and Oswin (2008) discuss the intersection of identities within queer space and the erasure of (particularly racial) identities. Although not explicitly discussed in the literature, “performing” was distinguished from compromising through the coding process as it emerged as its own distinct concept. While these concepts are independent, they are not mutually exclusive. As an example of

compromising, one participant discussed the need to discard their Asian identity to gain access to queer spaces. This is in line with existing literature that finds queer people need to leave their racial identities at the door of (implicitly White) queer spaces (Oswin 2008, DasGupta and Dasgupta 2018). However, the participant contrasted this with the need to perform straightness within Asian spaces to avoid feeling alienated. For this participant, belonging was ultimately felt in queer Asian spaces. This example leads to the second finding, which was a strong association between belonging and the types of people present. At 21 overlaps, this was the strongest co-occurrence between belonging and another code, suggesting that this population's sense of belonging is strongly impacted by the people present in a space. Belonging was associated with related attributes of connection: shared activities, shared identities, shared interests, shared struggles, and shared values. Belonging also had a strong association with friendship at 15 co-occurrences.

Participants in two different focus groups discussed the concepts of acceptance versus belonging. While acceptance was valued, it was not seen as synonymous with belonging. Participants in the older focus group shared that in their younger years, they were able to find or assert acceptance, but that this was different than feeling belonging in their full selves. This was not an idea that emerged in the literature, and in fact Haggerty et al. (1992) listed acceptance as part of belonging. This may suggest that this population experiences acceptance and belonging in a unique way that may differ from the broader population, although more work would need to be done on this topic. While not explicitly discussed, when the interviews were re-coded this concept was found in discussions of how some participants felt about the Capitol Hill neighborhood and when they visited gay (male) bars.

Within the interviews, participants discussed three aspects of belonging related to Allen et al's (2021) model of belonging: opportunities to belong, perceptions of belonging, and motivations to find belonging. Within this framework, concepts that prevented someone from accessing opportunities for belonging were coded as "barriers [to belonging]." They were inductively derived from the interviews and included the codes: cost prohibitive, lack of a place that used to exist, lack of accessibility, lack of opportunities to belong (broadly), lack of queer space, lack of variety [in queer spaces], physical distance [from opportunities to belong], and time investment. Participants in two different focus groups equated time investments with cost prohibitive, reasoning that for many the investment of time prevents someone from using that time to earn money, a concern that is particularly notable for lower-income individuals.

### Perceptions of Belonging in Seattle

Participants were asked about experiences of belonging and lack of belonging within Seattle as well as in Seattle's queer spaces. Belonging was explicitly discussed with Seattle 13 times in contrast to lack of belonging and Seattle, which co-occurred 5 times; however, this could be influenced by the fact that two questions asked about Seattle and belonging while only one asked about Seattle and lack of belonging. Seattle was associated with belonging or any sub-code of belonging 33 times. Overall, participants framed Seattle as an accepting city for queer people and particularly queer nonmales. This was in contrast to cities like San Francisco, which were seen as catering to the gay male, and other (often rural) areas of the United States, where queerness is less accepted. Many shared that this factors into their long-term planning and shared that it was a large reason for their desire to continue living in Seattle. One participant who has been recently discovering their queerness shared that it was moving to Seattle that helped them discover this part of themselves, and that they have made many friends here that engender belonging for them.

Many associated Capitol Hill with feelings of belonging, with 13 co-occurrences with at least one aspect of belonging, and over half of the participants either live, lived, or will live in Capitol Hill soon. However, one of these participants, who had lived in Capitol Hill for 25 years, was displaced out of the neighborhood. This participant discussed their displacement in terms of the loss of a routine and emotional ties to spaces within the neighborhood, but also as a loss of Capitol Hill as a safe space. In direct contrast, another participant discussed plans to move to Capitol Hill through a voucher program, sharing that she decided to try to live in Capitol Hill so that she could find queer community with her neighbors.

When asked how the City of Seattle could better serve its queer community, one participant discussed frustration with Capitol Hill being lived in and most accessible to cis, white, straight people who do not benefit from the queer amenities in the area, while most affordable housing is in spaces that are physically distant from the neighborhood and thus makes it difficult for lower-income queers to access these amenities. In fact, many participants discussed Capitol Hill in terms of their physical distance or proximity to the neighborhood. This, along with the large number of participants residing in the neighborhood, suggests the importance of physical proximity to Capitol Hill for this population. One participant who will be moving there shortly discussed her excitement about the opportunities for connection with other queer people, and another discussed their feelings of belonging in Seattle with the caveat that they may be biased because they live in Capitol Hill. This suggests that despite the idea that the gayborhood is becoming obsolete (an idea that Amin Ghaziani rejects in his 2014 “There Goes The Gayborhood?”), Seattle’s queer non-males continue to find value in Capitol Hill.

Although many participants shared that Seattle was largely a space of belonging or at least acceptance, this was not the case across the board. One participant noted that when asked where

they've felt a sense of belonging in Seattle, their immediate response was "nowhere." They then reflected on queer spaces that failed to be accessible to them. Another participant shared that she does not have a physical space in Seattle where she can find connection, meaning that she often must turn to virtual space. However, she held out hope that Capitol Hill would be a space of belonging if she were to be in closer physical proximity. The emergence of virtual space as a way for this population to find belonging was not initially planned for, but participants often brought it up when asked about their interactions with queer space. This suggests that virtual space is an important source of connection for queer non-males that should be further studied.

Even though Seattle was largely seen as a queer-friendly city by the queer non-males in the study, multiple groups shared that this was tempered by the area being so cost-prohibitive, with one participant stating: "I love Seattle's queer culture, but Seattle does not love their queer people." At 17 co-occurrences, this association was stronger than that between Seattle and belonging (with 13 co-occurrences). This was the most commonly mentioned barrier to belonging by a factor of five. Other barriers to belonging that the participants associated with Seattle were physical distance and transportation options either being time-intensive, which was particularly an issue for participants with accessibility concerns, or cost-prohibitive. Further, the lack of desired queer spaces within Seattle was noted, which will be expanded upon in the next section. Other, structural issues were associated with Seattle and its queer population, including costly, non-secular, or difficult-to-find healthcare that acted as barriers to appropriate mental health services, fertility services, and other medical needs for the queer community.

Another structural concern was the cost of housing. Particularly for asexual/aromantic queers, this limits their options for housing as housing costs decrease when one has a partner to share them with. One participant shared "We live in this culture, like with a political climate where it's

really hard to be a single person who just lives by themselves anywhere or goes anywhere by themselves safely.” The current housing structure is amatonormative in nature, meaning that it assumes that all humans will pursue monogamous, long-term love (Brake 2012). However, this is not aligned with queer values and actions. Not only does this fail to align with asexual/aromantic and polyamorous queers, but many within the study expressed a desire for communal housing in contrast to a household built around the nuclear family. Community living was discussed in three of the five focus groups for a total of 16 mentions. When participants discussed community living, 10% of the time they discussed it as something they desire, another 10% was in relation to providing support amongst the queer community, and 5% of the time participants discussed it concerning cost-prohibitive housing. The subject of communal housing often emerged when participants were asked to describe what queer space they would create if they had no limitations. Some participants currently live or previously lived in communal housing, and one participant is actively working to start a community living situation. However, this participant expressed that due to Seattle being so expensive, they would have to move to a rural area to afford the land to do so, and the participant expressed unease at moving to a conservative area as a queer person of color. This participant shared strategies of self-preservation that they were planning for their eventual move to ensure their safety both as a queer person and as an Asian person.

Finally, participants across focus groups discussed the regressive nature of Seattle’s tax structure that disadvantages queer and low-income populations and leads to high costs of food and other amenities. This is directly related to concerns about Seattle’s queer spaces being cost-prohibitive, which will be expanded on in the following section.

## Queer Space

### Definitions of Queer Space

Participants discussed queer space as being valuable twenty-two times. However, they discussed a lack of interaction with queer space 42 times, most commonly in association with queer bars and queer nightlife. Participants often expressed a desire for queer spaces that were not oriented around clubbing or nightlife, discussing this topic a total of 40 times. This code most commonly occurred with the codes “value” or “hope/desire,” indicating a need for more non-alcohol-oriented queer space. While queer space is often associated with queer bars, other work suggests that this is not always the case, especially for queer non-males (Giesecking 2020a). As such, participants were asked to share how they would define a queer space, and while answers varied, themes emerged across the groups. There were six main types of queer space identified within the groups:

- Spaces that self-identify as queer spaces. These are largely associated with queer or gay bars.
- Spaces where queer people are. These are either queer-only spaces or spaces with mostly queer people, regardless of how the space itself is labeled.
- Non-queer spaces can become queer spaces:
  - When they host queer events (for example, the local climbing gyms host queer climb nights in partnership with The Queer Mountaineers, a queer outdoors organization)

- When a queer-friendly establishment is frequented by queer people/friend groups (for example, one participant frequents Diva Espresso with her queer friends)
- When a non-queer-identified establishment is located in a queer area (such as Capitol Hill)
- Some participants felt that any space they are in automatically becomes a queer space.
- Queer-owned businesses were identified as queer spaces but also debated. It was noted that a queer-owned business may not be explicitly queer and thus not necessarily a queer space.
- Anti-heteronormative spaces, spaces of political resistance, or “alternative” spaces were seen as queer spaces, regardless of the people present in the space. This differs from an “LGBT” space, as participants found the term “queer” to have an element of radicalism to it. This definition aligns with understandings of the “queer” emerging from queer theory, essentially equating it with the non-normative (Quick 2023).

These results indicate that perceptions of queer space may be more expansive than a self-identified queer establishment.

## Queer Space and Belonging

### Lack of Belonging within Queer Space

Participants commonly cited a lack of safety or belonging in queer space due to being hit on by cis-gendered straight men. This is something that distinguishes queer non-males from queer males. Some shared that even within spaces that self-identified as queer they experienced this

phenomenon. However, it was noted that within Capitol Hill this is a less common occurrence. Many participants discussed the value of consent education, which had a 6% co-occurrence with safety. The concept of safety also had a 6% overlap with the types of people present and a 10% overlap with queer space. One participant discussed a positive interaction in a queer space where they had a respectful romantic encounter with a presumably bisexual man at a queer club. While this may initially call into tension questions of heterosexual romantic encounters within queer space, there was a distinct difference between what participants described as unwanted attention and respectful/consensual interactions. Participants discussed looking for romantic/sexual encounters in queer spaces and the value of sex-positive spaces, particularly those with consent monitoring and consent education; however, they also noted a need for space where they can exist without the expectation of trying to have a romantic or sexual encounter and discussed feeling a lack of belonging in spaces where there was a disconnect between their intentions and that of the majority of other patrons. Particularly, this concerned asexual/aromantic queers concerning queer nightlife, but it also was noted by participants who are in monogamous relationships or those who may be hoping to connect with the polyamorous community despite not actively looking for other partners at the moment. This brings up a second tension: the focus on a particular “type” of queerness, often meaning same-sex attraction.

Participants repeatedly mentioned feelings of erasure of their queer identities that didn't fit neatly or at all within this classification. This often concerned bisexual, femme, and asexual erasure within the focus group conversations. Although belonging is understood by participants as being able to be one's full self, the results show that participants often discuss feeling that part of their identity is discounted within queer space or that others try to fit them into a stereotype based on their identities. This was most commonly noted around asexuality and neurodivergence. The

focus group containing older participants discussed this in relation to the lesbian community, akin to Earles' (2019) "Penis Police," wherein transgender people are excluded from lesbian space. As noted earlier, participants also felt that within queer space they had to leave out other parts of their identity, often racial. This aligns with existing literature on queer space and intersecting identities (Dasgupta and DasGupta 2018, Earles 2019, Oswin 2008). Overall, the results indicate that these are issues that continue to occur in Seattle's queer spaces, disallowing certain members of the queer non-male community from experiencing belonging.

Overall, participants shared that queer space lacks variety, and often centers around alcohol or nightlife. This excludes many in the queer community who struggle with alcohol dependence (Parks 1999) and those with sensory needs or health concerns that may disallow them from being in crowded or loud spaces, but it also leaves out those who may simply not be interested in these activities. Queer spaces oriented around nightlife were also noted as being largely cost-prohibitive, often requiring cover charges or high costs for drinks, particularly in Seattle. One participant noted that many spaces that don't center around alcohol are located in churches, which can be an unwelcoming environment for many in the queer community. Even secular non-alcohol-centric queer spaces were noted as cost prohibitive, for example, spaces like cafes require "table rent" for their use. This itself is a symptom of these spaces existing in a city that requires they charge money to remain viable, and participants found that the most accessible physical queer spaces were public spaces located in the gayborhood, such as Cal Anderson Park or Volunteer Park.

Participants noted that queer spaces may not be accessible for their mobility needs, citing specific queer bars in Seattle that they cannot access because of a lack of accessibility measures. Physical distance from these locations was noted as having similar effects of exclusion. While

many mentioned queer sports leagues as a popular way to find a community for queer non-males, this can also be limiting to those with physical disabilities. Additionally, participants noted that there is a barrier to entry due to the high cost of necessary equipment and necessary time commitment. While participants valued regularly occurring events to meet other queer people, those that required regular attendance were noted as being exclusionary to many for the same reason. Beyond the lack of variety, some participants lamented the lack of queer space overall or the loss of spaces that used to exist, such as spaces in Capitol Hill that may not have been queer in name but provided a feeling of belonging for one since-displaced resident.

### Belonging and queer space

Overall, many participants found that they connected most with the queer community via virtual spaces, which removes many of the aforementioned barriers. Some even shared that this was the only way they connected to the queer community, although they still desired physical connection. Virtual spaces were described as providing a degree of escapism, allowing them to forget about the larger issues of queer non-acceptance, and some found that virtual spaces allowed them to share themselves more fully in their intersectional identities. Virtual spaces were also spaces where information about queer events could be spread and queer people could find each other. This is a continuation of Seattle's queer history - as an older, long-time resident of Seattle shared, queer news has been spread virtually in the area since the early days of the internet. While this history included things like mailing lists, the concept still holds.

Queer history was highlighted as another way that the participants connected with the queer community, although within one focus group the participants shared that while they have an interest in this history, they're not very aware of the queer history of Seattle, particularly the

sapphic history. Participants also found value in intergenerational connection. However, some shared that intergenerational connections could be challenging for transgender and gender nonconforming individuals given differences in how some elder queers feel about gender. Notably, participants placing value on intergenerational connection persisted across all age groups, although it was not explicitly mentioned as something they would like to see in future queer spaces.

Multiple participants found belonging through shared values and politics, finding that in protest environments they felt that they were in a queer space. This revealed a tension, however, as some raised a concern about this excluding queer people who are just discovering their identities or those who are not familiar with the politics associated with queerness. They noted that even the term 'queer' can be seen as offensive to some, despite personally feeling that 'LGBT' feels like something associated with a government organization rather than with the actual queer community. Yet these participants felt that they personally found value in the political action associated with queerness, with one saying "People are like, 'Why are all queer people like liberal?' and whatever. I'm like, because it - it impacts us directly. And so we can't just turn a blind eye the way that some people can." This is similar to feelings in other focus groups, where participants felt that an important part of queer space is anti-normativity. Describing this, one participant stated:

"Probably the key part of being queer really is not so much about same gender, though obviously, that's a huge part of it, but the ability to kind of tear apart assumptions about relationships and kinship and family, and then stick it back together in a way that works for you. And some people, when they stick it back together, it is sometimes heterosexual couples who are monogamous. It's

just the people I know who live like that, they did go through a process of figuring out what works for them.”

While the sample set was more likely to be passionate about activism as they self-selected into this research study, the findings reveal that the element of political action is still large in the queer community. This conflicts with the idea that marriage equality would end the need for political action within the queer community (Warner 1999). In a similar vein, participants described feeling that Pride was overly commercialized and contrasted it with other cities whose Pride events felt more like a protest. One participant questioned why pride needs to be confined to one month, and similarly why queer celebration should be contained within Capitol Hill.

Within the varying definitions of queer space exists a tension over who belongs in queer space. This is an important conversation given the association between belonging and the types of people present. While some participants felt that a queer space is one where only queer people exist, others felt that a space can be queer by being one that questions the dominant norms, regardless of whether the people present are queer or not. In between was the idea that a queer space is one where there are a majority of queer people or a space that celebrates queerness. Ultimately, this speaks to the need for variety in queer space such that these varying needs can be met.

## Envisioning Queer Futures

### Desires for Queer Space

Participants' desires for queer space were coded with "hope/desire," which was then cross-referenced with co-occurring terms to yield the following list (from most to least number of co-occurrences):

- Variety/not club oriented
- Inclusive of all queer people/celebrating differences
- Providing general or fiscal support
- Free/affordable
- Queer events/general events
- Community/connection
- Food
- Accessible
- Nature
- Regularly occurring
- Queer people creating spaces for the queer community
- Community living
- Types of people present
- Exclusive to queer people
- Community teaching one another
- Third places
- Art/queer media
- Mental health services

Overwhelmingly, the most common desire was for more variety in queer space. This was expressed as both a desire for more queer spaces that cater to different needs, but also for queer spaces that serve a variety of purposes. Participants shared examples of queer spaces they have experienced in other cities or have created within their own homes that serve multiple purposes.

These included spaces with designated quiet or socializing spaces, spaces that are both nightclubs and coffee shops, queer spaces/stores that also put on events, and spaces that cater to different populations either in different spaces, at different times, or through targeted events. Many White and cisgender participants expressed a desire for spaces that are not for them and instead serve the needs of other marginalized queer groups. This feeds into the second most popular desire: inclusion and the celebration of differences. Other desires expressed by participants address this issue, such as accessibility, free/affordable, and providing either general or financial support. Some suggestions given by participants for how to achieve this included tax breaks for queer businesses, providing public space, unused space, or space in community centers for the use of queer businesses/queer placemaking efforts, allowing more informality in the built environments for things like queer outdoor markets or events, and allies providing fiscal support. One participant shared that the lattermost model of allies providing fiscal support to identity-specific groups is already used by a BIPOC group that she is a member of.

Accessibility was noted as a need across the board, and participants noted a need for childcare, places to rest, accessible/affordable/free transportation, free/affordable food, access for those with disabilities, and spaces for those who are not comfortable in loud or crowded spaces. It was noted that some of these things would also be addressed if there were more variety in the types of queer spaces.

Participants valued queer events, which they felt would help cater to different identities and provide opportunities for queer people to connect with one another through shared interests, values, and activities. They also valued regularly occurring events or consistently available spaces. The latter was expressed concerning a desire for queer third spaces, or queer spaces where groups of friends could spend time together. This desire was often coupled with a desire

for free or accessible spaces. Additionally, community living or queer collectives/retreats were something that multiple participants envisioned when asked what type of queer space they would make. Other attributes of queer space that participants hoped to see were a connection to nature, oriented around food/providing food, including or oriented around art or queer media (as well as queer history), and providing mental health services.

Discussions around the types of people that should be present in queer space yielded a variety of opinions. There was a consensus overall that the types of people present have a substantial impact on feelings of belonging, particularly when those present are prejudiced, do not respect personal boundaries, require the participant to compromise one or multiple of their identities, or are accepting rather than celebratory of the participant's identities. This was noted as being particularly true within workplaces, and especially for participants who have worked in tech. Having queer leadership in a workplace resulted in greater feelings of belonging. In general, being surrounded by others with similar identities was associated with stronger feelings of belonging. Participants expressed value in having spaces that were mostly or all queer people. For some participants, having all-queer spaces meant that they felt less likely to face erasure. One femme-presenting participant shared that when she was in a queer-only space she didn't have to worry about people thinking she was a straight person due to her appearance. One group discussed the difficulties of implementing such a space and determined that having people self-select into queer space was the best method, with the hope that allies would choose to refrain from entering queer spaces. Still, other participants valued mixed spaces, with some saying that they don't want to be surrounded by people who are only like them and others feeling that a queer space can be one that is anti-normative, regardless of the sexualities or gender identities of

those present. These conversations reveal a multiplicity of desires for queer space, in line with participants' desires for a variety of queer spaces.

Notably, a few participants already have plans to implement queer spaces. One participant expressed a desire for more members of the queer community to take the initiative in creating queer space, even if it was just through small acts. One of the older participants discussed their experiences building the queer community in Seattle during their younger years with fondness, sharing this as an example of when they have felt belonging in queer space. There were numerous mentions of the queer community creating their own space, supporting one another, and teaching one another in relation to desired queer space. While many alcohol-centric queer spaces in Seattle were discussed frequently, such as Queer/Bar and The Wildrose, other non-alcohol-centric spaces such as Charlie's Queer Books and Howdy Bagel (located in nearby Tacoma) were mentioned as promising examples of non-alcohol-centric spaces that engendered a sense of belonging.

## Takeaways

This research began with the question:

*How well do existing queer spaces serve the queer non-male community in Seattle, WA in terms of creating a sense of belonging and what does this community see as possibilities for existing or new spaces that could engender a greater sense of belonging?*

The findings suggest that while Seattle is a space of acceptance that is valued by the queer non-male community, there was a difference between acceptance and belonging. While some valued rainbow symbols within the city, others saw them as symbols of acceptance rather than

belonging. Although participants shared glimmers of belonging in the City and were able to find other people that engendered belonging for them, they discussed many limitations to accessing belonging, particularly within Seattle's queer spaces. Seattle's existing queer spaces offer a limited variety that mainly caters to one type of queer person. Participants with multiple marginalized identities find themselves lacking spaces to be their full selves, often needing to compromise aspects of their identity to gain acceptance. Others find that they need to perform or signal queerness to avoid the erasure of their queer identities. However, participants expressed that when they are in inclusive queer spaces, they valued queer spaces and felt safe in them. This was largely related to the types of people present in said space. The City's queer spaces were overwhelmingly seen as cost-prohibitive; however, other barriers included physical distance from queer spaces, lack of queer space in general, and lack of accessible queer space or queer spaces that fit their needs. The city's gayborhood, Capitol Hill, was seen as a valuable place for the queer community and often provided a safe space; however, some participants expressed that this area was inaccessible to many in the queer community due to cost. These findings indicate a value inherent in queer space and the gayborhood, but many participants expressed that the aforementioned barriers led to limited or no interaction with queer space. The alternative was often virtual space, or augmented by virtual space.

The participants shared numerous visions of queer space, as well as references to existing queer space both inside and outside of the City that provide positive examples of what future queer space could look like. The most common desire was for more variety in queer space. This could be more types of queer space or more variety within queer space. Spaces or queer events that cater to a variety of interests, spaces or queer events specifically for more marginalized and intersecting identities, and spaces that serve multiple purposes were some examples of queer

space that these groups envisioned. The groups also valued spaces that provide support within the queer community, whether this be fiscal support, mental health services, or just general support services. Participants also envisioned spaces that were free or affordable and provided queer areas that community members could use as a third place. They valued both spaces that only include queer people and spaces that have a variety of identities present. They often associated queerness with liberal and anti-normative values, finding that spaces that subverted heteronormativity were queer in their own right. Finally, the participants valued the ability of the queer non-male community to create spaces that are for them, and some actively had plans to implement these spaces.

## Recommendations

### Affordability and Belonging

Jack Jen Giesecking noted in their “A Queer New York” (2020a) that queer non-male couples make less money than gay men and heterosexual couples. This gap widens for queer non-males who are racial minorities. Coupled with the fact that queer non-males are more likely to have children, the cost of housing is a major burden for this population. Further, TGNCP populations make even less than queer cis-gender women and struggle to find housing, although even cis-gendered lesbian couples tend to buy property later in life. While all who hold queer identities are more likely to face discrimination in the workplace and in daily life, these data show that queer non-males bear a greater financial burden than their male counterparts due to compounding discrimination on the basis of both gender and sexuality (Giesecking 2020a). Other marginalized intersecting identities such as race can exacerbate this effect (Giesecking 2020a). These financial stressors were often noted by participants of this study, and the data shows that

this population faces a greater financial burden due to structural inequalities. This subset of recommendations will focus on affordability concerns for the queer non-male community in Seattle. On one hand, this is necessary because this population faces structural disadvantages that must be remediated to create an equitable environment. However, this is also important because financial hardships make it difficult for this population to access queer areas and patron queer businesses that provide a sense of belonging and create positive mental health benefits. Given that queer people are more likely to face mental health struggles than non-queer people (Mental Health Foundation n.d.), providing more opportunities for this population to find belonging is a critical intervention that built environment practitioners can implement.

Findings indicate that Capitol Hill continues to be an important space for queer non-males in Seattle, but that the population does not find this space to be accessible. Efforts should be made to ensure affordable housing that can be utilized by Seattle's queer population. Participants expressed that they saw additional value in this space as a 15-minute city, which could explain the popularity of the neighborhood outside of the queer community; however, they expressed frustration that they have difficulty accessing the queer amenities in the neighborhood due to non-queers living in the neighborhood and pushing out queer people. This is important considering the finding that queer people who live in areas with higher densities of sexual minorities have better mental health outcomes (Wienke, Whaley, and Braatz 2021), another justification for the continued importance of the gayborhood. The city's efforts to increase connectivity and the presence of the light-rail station allow the area to be more accessible, but the City should consider how the presence of these transportation amenities may make the area less affordable. While the city attempts to implement elements of the 15-minute city across its neighborhoods, it should consider how this effort can be taken in tangent with giving

opportunities for queer people to live in and reliably access Capitol Hill. An example of this is Pride Place by GenPride, which caters to older queer individuals and provides affordable housing in the Capitol Hill neighborhood (Pride Place n.d.). More housing initiatives such as this are critical to ensuring that queer people are able to access and live in Capitol Hill. The City's Transportation Access Program (TAP) (SDOT n.d.) also allows for lower-income residents to access the neighborhood, but considering ways to allow all queer people to have reliable access such as subsidized transit for queer individuals into the Capitol Hill neighborhood would allow queer Seattleites to reliably access the neighborhood. For those with disabilities, this model could also be built into the City's Access program (King County n.d.).

The City should also consider what it would look like to encourage queer amenities across Seattle, making these spaces accessible to the queer community regardless of where they live and encouraging queer communities to emerge across the city. Further, what would it look like if elements of queer celebration were incorporated across the entire city as well as how these elements can be integrated with the celebration of other identities such as Black joy, immigrant pride, Indigenous celebration, etc. This could be achieved through intentional efforts in public art that offer visibility and celebration of these identities, and their various intersections. These same efforts could be used to share the queer history of Seattle, particularly that of queer non-males. For example, this community historically organized around the Wallingford and University District neighborhoods (Mesec 1992), but this knowledge is not widely known. Given that participants shared that connection to queer history is an important aspect of belonging to them, making efforts to uplift this history would be another way to bolster feelings of belonging in this community.

## Structural Inequalities and Belonging

The broader structural issues discussed by participants reveal how even in a post-marriage equality era, the queer community still faces a variety of structural inequalities. As Gieseeking (2020a) noted, queer non-males are more likely to be parents than gay men, but one participant shared her difficulty pursuing parenthood within Seattle's medical system. Others shared the difficulty of finding mental health services, particularly for transgender individuals. Given that this population is more likely to face mental health struggles that are often rooted in the discrimination they face on the basis of their sexuality or gender identities (Mental Health Foundation n.d.), there is a need for this population to have access to targeted healthcare. At the city scale, these can be addressed through things like programs to support queer parents and providing accessible healthcare and mental health services as well as programs through community centers and libraries. These services can also be built into queer spaces, such as queer housing developments. Aggregating information about queer-specific services online or disseminating this information through queer spaces and queer events would reduce reliance on word of mouth and provide greater opportunities for queer people to access the health services they need.

Limiting housing models also disproportionately impacts queer people. Beyond the impacts of family-based housing regulations on same-sex couples noted by Frisch (2002), asexual and polyamorous queer people are faced with a housing model that does not acknowledge or affirm their existence. To accommodate a variety of household structures, housing should be built that accommodates multiple people under one roof, and efforts should be made to make it financially feasible for a person to live alone. Given that many participants desired communal housing as a queer space, this is also directly related to feelings of belonging. It would also address concerns

about housing affordability in the gayborhood by offering alternative ways for queer people to live amongst one another that are more affordable. To reduce the burden on queer populations to create their own communal housing, the City could consider creating these spaces, sponsoring organizations in the creation of these spaces, or providing subsidies or grants. An example of a communal living initiative is the K20 Projekthaus in Germany, which blurs the public/private divide by creating workspace, opportunities for political organization, and mutual education (K20 Projekthaus n.d.). Hayden's (1980) vision of feminist housing models is another example of how queer values can be harnessed to create more inclusive living spaces. Reducing barriers to these models inherent in zoning code and housing regulations would create more opportunities for these initiatives to take form.

### Variety and Belonging

To address the need for more variety in queer space, the city should take steps to make it easier for the queer community to create space. This could include efforts like providing public space or unused buildings for use by the queer community, providing tax breaks for queer businesses, creating dedicated spaces within community centers that can be used by this population, allowing for more informality in public space for the queer community to utilize, and creating programs to support queer business owners through education and fiscal support. This does not need to be re-invented - partnerships with organizations like the GSBA that are already doing this work are a great way to support queer organizations and queer businesses (GSBA n.d.). These steps would make it easier for the queer community to create space that best serves their needs. An example of an initiative that could support long-standing queer businesses, such as The Wildrose, is San Francisco's Legacy Business initiative, which supports older businesses that are important to the community (Legacy Business n.d.). While a similar initiative in Seattle would be valuable for

supporting existing queer businesses and preserving queer history, applying this model to newer queer businesses would provide the community opportunities to create a variety of contemporary spaces that would serve its diverse needs.

Creating opportunities for queer people to gather in more “DIY” ways or through queer “pop-ups” would reduce the barrier to entry for this population. For example, providing grants, connecting those who want to organize events with those who have available space, or offering up unused city-owned space for queer events (Greiner 2024). Providing permanent community space or reducing barriers to occupy space in the public realm is another way to dismantle the institutionalized heterosexism inherent in the public/private divide (Frisch 2002). An example of this is a recent “Gays Eating Garlic Bread in the Park” event that was organized via fliers by a community member and held at a local Seattle public park. Pop-up events like this are an example of events that don’t necessarily need to be organized by a larger group. Reducing barriers such as permitting processes would create more opportunities for these sorts of events. Essentially, allowing queer people to self-organize in public space without interference as long as no one is getting hurt. Additionally, recognizing that queer non-males often organize in public ways within non-public spaces (e.g. “private” households) reveals another way this population subverts the public/private divide. One participant shared the way her communal household hosted all-day queer gatherings that catered to a variety of needs, revealing how queer space can be created without needing to acquire a public locale. Dismantling codified barriers to these sorts of self-organization would allow more “DIY” queer urbanism to take shape and grant greater agency to this community.

However, the City should also recognize the burden placed on the queer population to create their own spaces within a society that actively makes it difficult for them to exist as their true

selves. Although tearing down the barriers that keep this population from freely self-organizing is a crucial step to allowing this community to access spaces of belonging, the City must also listen to the desires of queer non-males and use this information to inform their own efforts. For example, sponsoring more events akin to “Pride in the Park” outside of pride month or organizing queer pop-ups or markets. The previous recommendation of supporting queer housing initiatives would also address this concern.

The preliminary desires of this community can also be used by queer business owners and community organizers to understand the needs of this community, but more research must be done to better understand these desires. Ultimately, the inclusion of queer voices should not be a one-off initiative, but a continuous effort. This is a critical aspect of queer urbanism (Greiner 2023) and could be achieved through community advisory boards and targeted community engagement efforts that engage a multiplicity of queer identities. The participants of this study constantly questioned normative ideas that limit planning and envisioned a future that does not exist within these predetermined boundaries. While the above suggestions will provide band-aid solutions to the issues found in this study, they will be incomplete without engagement with planners who allow themselves to think critically about limiting structures built into planning. To create an inclusive city, planners must be willing to intentionally engage in conversations with queer community members that may ultimately question existing planning practices.

## Limitations

The most notable limitation was that study participants were largely White. This was likely due to the researcher being White but also due to the lack of payment for participation. Many dropped out of the study, likely also due to lack of incentive. Participation increased for the

virtual session, but while participants still related well to each other during this session, distractions meant that less time was able to be spent on the interview questions. This venue was still incredibly valuable as it allowed more participants to join due to the lower barrier to participation and greater accessibility. A small sample set was used due to time limitations and more research should be done with a larger sample set to ensure more robust data collection and conclusions.

## Directions for Future Research

This study has produced initial findings about how the queer non-male population feels about belonging and queer space in Seattle; however, more research should be done to draw more conclusive findings. Similarly, this format could be applied to other cities and rural areas. While this study shows that research around urban areas is still valuable due to a lack of belonging even in liberal cities, queer nonmales in rural locales are incredibly under-researched. This is especially notable given that many participants valued a connection to nature, which is less accessible in urban environments. Importantly, these studies should provide monetary compensation so as to not overburden non-elite groups and should ensure a diverse sample set that includes a range of queer identities, other marginalized identities, ages, locales, economic status, and life experiences.

Some participants mentioned feeling that living in Seattle allowed them to forget that there was so much lack of belonging in other areas of America. Although Seattle still has further to go, lessons from how it creates belonging from this community should be used to inform efforts for queer belonging in other cities and rural environments.

Research within Seattle must be done to understand housing dynamics for queer people both within and beyond Capitol Hill. This neighborhood continues to be a valuable place of belonging for the queer non-male community; however, there was a general concern amongst participants about the accessibility of this neighborhood to the queer population. Additional research should also be done on the use of virtual space as a means of connection for this population, particularly in the absence of physical queer spaces or for those who have difficulty accessing physical queer spaces.

While research participants shared valuable insights about queer spaces they would like to see, discussions with queer business owners would provide valuable insights into the barriers that they face when creating queer spaces. Queer spaces that break the mold of the traditional “gay bar” should be studied to understand how they remain financially viable and what actions they take to create queer inclusion. These lessons can be applied to other queer businesses to ensure a robust variety of queer spaces for the entirety of the queer community.

Queer models of living are an important research topic, as they don’t always align with the normative ideals that structure the majority of American housing design. These modes of living can provide value beyond the queer community to support aging in place, affordable housing models, and multi-generational housing.

Finally, further research should be done to solidify an understanding of the ways this population conceptualizes queer space. Creating a framework for understanding queer space within this community will allow for a better understanding of how to best serve their needs.

## Conclusion

Initial findings point to the continued value of queer space for Seattle's queer non-male population; however, there exist a number of barriers that prevent this population from accessing space that engenders belonging. The cost of accessing queer space is by far the largest barrier, and one that is cited as being incredibly specific to Seattle. Policy initiatives that enable queer spaces to be affordable to the population they serve are a critical avenue for the City to explore to ensure this population is well-served. Physical distance was the second-most-cited barrier to accessing queer space, particularly concerning the Capitol Hill gayborhood. Housing policy should prioritize making Capitol Hill a space that queer people can afford to live in.

Although queer space is important for belonging, many feel that they are still excluded from belonging within their intersectional identities. Queer space must go beyond celebrating queerness to uplift all marginalized identities. An intersectional approach to queer placemaking is essential, and this begins by ensuring opportunities for queer people of color, transgender/genderqueer people, queer people with disabilities, and every combination of identities to create and curate space that fits their needs. Queer incubators, access to placemaking opportunities within public space, queer collectives, fiscal support for queer businesses, and business development programs for queer business owners are a few options that would provide support for this community. These programs should target creating queer space that caters to a diversity of identities and a variety of interests.

We must understand that even though gay marriage has been legalized, structural barriers continue to exist in the United States, even in liberal cities like Seattle. Access to healthcare and mental health services continues to be an issue for this population, particularly

transgender/gender non-conforming people, queer parents, and queer people with lower economic status. Opportunities for fiscal support and resource sharing should be prioritized in tangent with efforts to improve queer belonging. Legal and financial benefits granted to marriage and long-term partnerships continue to disadvantage queer people, despite being accessible to same-sex couples. These structures are built into our housing model and limit opportunities for queer people to access affordable housing that meets their needs, something of particular significance for the queer non-male community given their reduced access to capital (Gieseeking 2024a). Planning must begin to question these models if it is to create a city that meets the needs of queer populations and beyond.

Finally, the recommendations produced by this study are not mine, but those of the queer community that engaged with this research study. The future of queer urbanism is not one of top-down paternalistic planning, but one where queer voices are uplifted and queer people can shape their own narratives. While the queer population can certainly be normative and exclusive in its own right, the queer voices in this study consistently valued support, inclusion, and questioning limiting norms that define our cities. If planning aims to foster an inclusive urban environment, we must take a page from Sandercock's (1998) book and create opportunities for *all* queer voices to contribute to a built environment that values diverse modes of living.

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