Gentrification, Urban Development, and Belonging in the Mission

By: Winnie Vien

Professor Braulio Muñoz, Advisor
Department of Sociology and Anthropology
Swarthmore College
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgments ............................................................................................. 2  
Abstract ......................................................................................................... 3  
List of Figures ................................................................................................. 4  
Introduction ..................................................................................................... 5  
Chapter 1 – Literature Review and Methodology ....................................................... 22  
Chapter 2 – A Diverse and Multicultural Space: Finding One’s Place in the Mission .............. 43  
Chapter 3 – Gentrification in the Mission: What Does it Mean to You? ......................... 58  
Chapter 4 – Changing Communities: What Does it Mean to Belong in the Mission? ............. 72  
Chapter 5 – Theoretical Implications: Multiple Dimensions of Change and Belonging ............ 90  
Conclusion .................................................................................................... 97  
Appendix ..................................................................................................... 102  
Bibliography ................................................................................................ 108
I would like to thank the Swarthmore College Department of Sociology and Anthropology for providing me with the opportunity and skills to conduct this research project. Great thanks to my advisor Professor Muñoz for helpful feedback and continuous support. Thank you to Professor Viscelli for showing me the ropes on how to come up with and design a research project in his qualitative methods class. Thank you to Professor Johnson for lending me books on gentrification and giving me ideas on how to begin thinking about my project. Finally, thank you to all of the faculty and staff in the department who have supported me in this endeavor, including Rose, who always checks in to see where I am at in the thesis writing process.

This thesis on gentrification and urban development in the Mission District of San Francisco would not have been possible without the support and nurturing that I have received from Asian Americans Advancing Justice- Asian Law Caucus during the past two years. Thank you to the housing rights team at the caucus, and in particular, my supervisor and mentor Christina Dang, for helping foster my interest in housing rights issues in San Francisco. Great thanks to all of the community organizations in San Francisco that assisted me in reaching out to residents in the Mission, including the Housing Rights Committee of San Francisco, the San Francisco Tenants Union, and Eviction Free SF. An especially great thanks to the Anti-Eviction Mapping Project for taking me in and allowing me to interview some Mission residents in collaboration with their project. Finally, I am extremely grateful to all of the Mission residents who took the time to speak with me and humor me in my search for a better understanding of the neighborhood.

Last but not least, I would like to thank all of my friends and family for always being there for me when I needed support and guidance during this research and writing process. All of the late night talks, shared articles, and emotional support were so crucial in helping me stay passionate about the project and get through the difficult process of research, writing, and editing.
ABSTRACT

In much of the existing literature on gentrification, much of the focus is placed on the causes and effects of gentrification, whether they are seen as positive or negative. This thesis argues that it is equally important to consider residents’ experiences with gentrification as it affects their everyday lives in different ways depending on their personal networks and connections within the neighborhood. Building upon the work that has been done by the Anti-Eviction Mapping Project in San Francisco and drawing inspiration from the San Francisco Chronicle’s documentary *A Changing Mission*, my research engages with a more diverse group of residents with vary levels of connection to the Mission, assessing the ways they make sense of what gentrification means. Adopting Nancy Raquel Mirabal’s “oral history” approach, my thesis highlights the ways in which residents come to understand what the neighborhood of the Mission is about, the ways that they experience the changes in the area, and how they negotiate their own positions in the community, whatever they interpret that to be. Connecting this to existing theories of local belonging, I argue that residents’ experiences with gentrification are much more complicated than just their positionality within the gentrification debates. Change in the Mission can occur on multiple different levels and there are various dimensions to local belonging that residents struggle with to maintain a sense of place in the neighborhood.

Keywords: gentrification, urban development, belonging, local community
LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1. Map of San Francisco with levels of gentrification.................................................. 7

Figure 2. Top 10 1-Bedroom Median Rents in the U.S.- March 2016....................................... 10

Figure 3. Map of Median 1-Bedroom Rents in San Francisco- Winter 2015-16.................... 10

Figure 4(a) and 4(b). Parque Niños Unidos................................................................. 40

Figure 5. Mission Pool and Playground.......................................................... 41

Figure 6. Map of San Francisco................................................................. 44

Figure 7. The first Philz Coffee store.......................................................... 52

Figure 8. New luxury condos next to the New Mission Theater........................................... 60

Figure 9. Discolandia sign outside Pig & Pie restaurant..................................................... 85

Figure 10. La Palma Mexicatessen................................................................. 87
INTRODUCTION

My first encounter with the word “gentrification” came during my freshman year here at Swarthmore College. I had just attended a talk by Filipino-American rapper Bambu, hosted by the Swarthmore Womyn of Color Collective. In his talk, Bambu had discussed his music and how it was shaped by his struggles growing up in Los Angeles. Speaking on the change in his neighborhood, he mentioned all of the Starbucks that were popping up, and how people were being forced out of the neighborhood. At the end of the talk, I ended up having dinner with a friend who had also attended, and she expressed how it had really resonated with her experience growing up in Brooklyn, which was also experiencing lots of “gentrification”. That—was when I first learned about the concept of gentrification and the effect that it has on communities, especially those that are low-income and of color.

Since that initial encounter, I have grown increasingly aware of the process of gentrification, especially as it is occurring around me in cities like Philadelphia, San Francisco, and Oakland, eventually even deciding to focus on it as the topic of my thesis. Throughout my work, I use the term “gentrification” to describe the spatial, demographic, and social change that occurs when wealthier individuals move into a neighborhood and low-income residents, families, and people of color are evicted or displaced from their homes, often because of the lack of affordability. While the process of gentrification can be understood as a larger problem that involves shifts in global economic markets and business development, my thesis focuses on the experience of gentrification on the local level. Often accompanying the shifts in the housing market and the movement of new people into gentrifying neighborhoods is the increase in restaurants and businesses that cater to the tastes of these new individuals. These spatial and demographic changes in turn result in the altering of the overall character of the neighborhood,
and residents experience these changes in their day-to-day interactions with others in the
neighborhood.

This understanding of what gentrification means and the impact that it has on residents
living in different neighborhoods being gentrified was been shaped largely by my experience
interning with the housing rights team at the Asian Americans Advancing Justice- Asian Law
Caucus during the past two summers. Growing up receiving Section 8 housing assistance, I went
into my internship with the assumption that many members of low-income immigrant
communities were just unaware of the resources available to support them in housing. I was
unaware of the housing crisis in San Francisco, the sky-high rents that had taken over the city,
and the massive displacement of residents who could no longer afford to live there. During my
time interning at the Asian Law Caucus, I met with many tenants who were facing evictions, and
worked with the housing rights team at the organization to identify different ways to fight their
situation, depending on the basis in which they were being forced to move out. In addition, I also
participated in numerous meetings and rallies in support of housing reform policies and tenant
protections.

This experience was what sparked my interest in writing this thesis on gentrification in
San Francisco. Seeing tenants being forced out of their homes, priced out of their neighborhoods,
and sometimes even pushed out of the city of San Francisco, I was interested in learning more
about what these residents thought about the urban development and gentrification in the city and
in their neighborhoods. I was also curious to see the ways that residents who continue to live in
the city deal with the changes in their communities, and how they interact with the new people
moving into their neighborhood. When narrowing down my study to focus on one specific
neighborhood in San Francisco, the main thing that I considered was feasibility for research.
While I had worked with many residents living in Chinatown during my time interning at the Asian Law Caucus, my experience with these tenants was that many were hesitant to talk about their lives or share their experiences outside of the office when they weren’t receiving legal assistance. In addition, since most of these residents were elders and spoke only Chinese, translation and transcription of interviews would be difficult. As such, I eventually narrowed it down to one of the neighborhoods that I had seen to be most gentrified and where there also appeared to be a strong anti-displacement coalition and activist community—the Mission (see Figure I).

Prior to this research project, my knowledge and familiarity with the Mission had been limited. I knew that there was a strong Latinx community in the neighborhood and I had seen
members of this community active in rallies and Board of Supervisors meetings at City Hall. The names of popular spots in the neighborhood, such as Dolores Park, Philz Coffee, and Tartine Bakery, were familiar to me from images on Instagram and Facebook, but I had never actually visited them myself. The last time I was in the Mission was during my junior year in high school, when our AP English class went on a field trip to 826 Valencia, a non-profit writing center that helped us with our college personal statements. As such, I was excited about this opportunity to revisit the Mission, and learn more about the different parts of the neighborhood and how they have changed within the last 15 years. Yet at the same time, I was also very aware of my role as an outsider in the Mission, and even perhaps in San Francisco, despite growing up in the Bay Area, in Oakland, Alameda, and San Lorenzo. I wanted to be extremely careful to make sure I didn’t come off as just another tourist or visitor taking part in the gentrification of the neighborhood. In my project, my main concern was in getting to know members of the community within the neighborhood, speaking with residents in the area, and hearing about their experience living there amidst all of the spatial and demographic changes.

How did this neighborhood, which has historically been recognized as home to the predominantly working class Latinx (and previously Irish and Italian) populations in the city, transform into one of San Francisco’s trendiest centers of urban development, home to some of the hottest new restaurants, bars, and galleries in town? How did the neighborhood get divided into starkly different subsections, with 24th Street being recognized as the remaining center of Latinx culture and heart of the Mission, Dolores and Valencia Streets being the newly redeveloped young and upscale area, 16th and Valencia Streets bustling with nightlife, and the northeast industrial area along Bryant Street housing multiple hip and trendy restaurants (Banner 2002)? What do these spatial and cultural divisions within the Mission mean for the residents
and businesses occupying the area? Making sense of the spatial, demographic, and architectural changes in the neighborhood requires first an awareness of the history of the area and an understanding of how these processes are grounded within the social, political, and economic development of the city of San Francisco.

**Background on the Mission**

Located on the central-eastern part of San Francisco, the Mission District is often considered one of the sunniest parts of the city1. While it takes up only 1.481 square miles of San Francisco’s 46.7 square miles of land, it housed 51,578 of the city’s 817,501 residents in 2013 (city-data.com; Cespedes et al. 2015). In 2015, the UC Berkeley Center for Community Innovation also deemed it to be one of the most heavily gentrified areas in San Francisco, labeling it as a neighborhood under “advanced gentrification”, based on factors such as neighborhood vulnerability, demographic change, and the amount of real estate development in the area over the periods 1990-2000 and 2000-2013 (see Figure 1) (Zuk 2015). According to data on rental units in February 2016 from the real estate website zumper.com, San Francisco is now the city with the highest median rent for 1-bedroom units in the United States, at the cost of $3,590 per month (see Figure 2). The median rent for 1-bedroom units in the Mission District is not far behind this number, at $3,300 per month as of winter 2015-2016 (see Figure 3). These high figures can be understood as further signs of the increasing gentrification of the area.

---

1 According to the Department of Public Work, there are 3 main microclimates in San Francisco: the Fog Belt, the Transition Zone, and the Sunbelt. The Fog Belt lies across the western areas of SF, leading to the Transition Zone in the middle, which encompasses the Haight and the Marina. The Mission District is part of the Sunbelt, with the hills of Twin Peaks, Potrero Hill, and Bernal Hill blocking the fog from covering the area (Hirsh 2013).
Figure 2. Top 10 1-Bedroom Median Rents in the U.S.- March 2016 (Zumper)

Figure 3. Map of Median 1-Bedroom Rents in San Francisco- Winter 2015-16 (Zumper)
Quite ironically, the Mission District has been connected with the process of displacement since the point of its formation in 1776. The arrival of Spanish missionaries in the area not only marked the “founding” of the Mission District, which was named after the makeshift chapel Mission Dolores, given its name by the Spanish priest Father Palou, but it also resulted in the displacement of the Ohlone people who had lived in the area for over 5,000 years (Marti 2006, 2). With the establishment of ranchos by the Spanish and later Mexican settlers in the area, the Ohlone population eventually reached a sharp decline as a result of the diminishing of natural resources and subsistence opportunities; and many of the remaining Native Americans were converted into serfs or slaves on the Spanish-Mexican land.

However, these early Spanish colonizers were also eventually displaced. The advent of the gold-rush in 1849 brought in new Anglo residents who created new businesses, inhabited single and multi-unit buildings, and established the “first ‘bohemian’ Mission, bringing with them saloons, gambling dens, and fandango halls” (Marti 2006, 2). Furthermore, the construction of the San Francisco Municipal Railway (MUNI) facilitated transportation between the Mission District and the city center, resulting in even greater movement into the Inner Mission area (Lees, Slater, and Wyly 2008, 258). As such, it is evident that the Mission District has a long history of displacement and changing populations, yet each influx of new populations has also resulted in the formation of a distinct culture in the area. Moreover, the close proximity and accessibility of the neighborhood to the center of San Francisco only makes it even more attractive as a place of residence, business, and ongoing urban development.

The historical understanding of the Mission District as a predominately working-class neighborhood first came about in the early 20th century, after the 1906 earthquake shook up the whole city of San Francisco. Many homeless citizens displaced by the disaster began taking up
residence in Dolores Park and the many Victorian houses that previously lined the streets of the Mission were subdivided into flats, apartment, and single-room occupancy hotels in order to accommodate the large number of homeless and refugees. Soon the Mission District became home to the Irish communities arriving after the Potato Famine, Italians moving in from North Beach, and Germans and Scandinavians who had previously resided in the SOMA. Thus in addition to being a working-class neighborhood, 1/3 of the Mission was also made up of immigrants by 1910 (Martí 2006, 2-3). It was during this time period that the Mission began to show the early signs of what would eventually name San Francisco as a “Sanctuary City”.

Although Latinos from Central and South America had started arriving in San Francisco since the time of the Gold Rush, it wasn’t until the construction of the Panama Canal in the early 20th century that there was a large influx of Central American immigrants in the area (Martí 2006, 3). In addition, many Mexicans escaping from the Mexican Revolution in 1910 also started settling in San Francisco. Many of these immigrants worked in industries such as tanneries, textiles, breweries, refineries, industrial plants, and warehouses, many of which were especially strong and widespread in the northeastern region of the Mission. However, during this time, most of these immigrants settled in North Beach and near Rincon Hill, where were was a larger Latino population. It wasn’t until during World War II that they started moving into the Mission after being priced out of Rincon Hill and North Beach (Martí 2006, 5). Thus even during this time, there appears to be a trend of displacement as economic pressures pushed residents out of their established communities, even if it was not explicitly termed gentrification at that point.

Accordingly, this movement of Latinx people into the Mission also coincided with the widespread phenomenon of “white-flight” that occurred in many major U.S. cities during the 1940’s. Loans from the Federal Home Loan Authority to white WWII veterans facilitated the
movement of many of the working-class Irish and Italian families to the suburbs while "redlining" processes blocked people of color in entire neighborhoods from receiving similar benefits (Marti 2006, 7). Thus these flawed governmental policies not only prevented people of color from accumulating wealth and social mobility, but they also served to create enclaves of ethnic poverty, which would facilitate and drive the rhetoric around movements for urban renewal. However, this did not stop the strong Latinx population in the Mission from creating their own culture and identity within the community.

As more and more immigrants flowed into the Mission from countries such as Nicaragua and El Salvador during the 1960's and 1970's, the Latinx community was able to establish a strong cultural base in the area. Originally centered on 16th Street in the North Mission, the major commercial and culture center of the Latinx community was later established on Mission Street and 24th Street (Marti 2006, 5). Murals such as those by the Mujeres Muralistas on Balmy Alley, Latin rock music like that by Santana, writers like Oscar Zeta Acosta, and celebrations of festivals like Cinco de Mayo and Dia de los Muertos are all symbols of the distinct Latinx culture that appeared throughout the Mission during this time (Marti 2006, 6). Thus the Mission District not only acted as a safe space for immigrants and refugees from Central America, but it also served as a center for cultural and artistic production, allowing for the formation of solidarity and movements of resistance. Coupled with more immigrant services, local businesses, and community organizations such as the Mission Council on Redevelopment (MCOR) and the Mission Coalition Organization (MCO), these acts of resistance allowed the Latinx community in the area to forestall the early stages of gentrification between 1966-71 (Hartman 2002, 330).

However, as seen in the previous cases of displacement in the Mission and in other

---

2 Discriminatory practice in which people are denied services such as financial loans their based on race and ethnicity, regardless of their qualifications. Historically, federal and financial institutions would draw a red line on a map around neighborhoods deemed unsuitable for lending (Investopedia).
neighborhoods of San Francisco, displacement and gentrification would eventually prove inevitable.

During the dot-com boom of the 1990’s, middle-class white working professionals began moving back to the city of San Francisco due to its close proximity to Silicon Valley, and most of these new gentrifiers began settling in the SOMA and Mission Districts. As a result of the shortage of available housing units and the influx of capital into the area, many long time tenants were evicted through no-fault evictions such as the Ellis Act or Owner Move-In, displaced and priced out of their neighborhood. Local businesses were replaced by “trendy” restaurants, bars, and clubs while industrial buildings were illegally converted into the live-work loft units of the type that had previously been inhabited by artists moving into the area during the 1970’s, boasting the aesthetic that would be labeled as “industrial chic” or “internet funk” (Hartman 2002, 306). Furthermore, these illegal live-work loft units also allowed developers to bypass existing legislation on housing developments that required at least 10% of units being affordable housing units and necessitated certain amounts of school and childcare fees (Hartman 2002, 306).

In this way, the gentrification of the Mission District during the dot-com boom not only transformed the appearance of the neighborhood, with structures such as Bryant Square acting...
as symbols of the urban development, but it also affected the culture and types of resources provided to residents in the area. As Chester Hartman remarks, “When groups like this [grassroots and community organizations] are disrupted or forced to go out of business because no affordable alternative space is available, the collective resources to fight the very gentrification forcing them out are eliminated” (Hartman 2002, 332). It was within this environment of anxiety and fear of being pushed out of their communities that a strong anti-gentrification movement led by community organizers, artists, and local residents was formed.

Through the formation of various coalitions and anti-displacement projects, residents, local business owners, and community organizations in the area started to push for social and political change and an end to the process of urban development. One such group was the Coalition for Jobs, Art, and Housing (CJAH). Organized by a group of local artists, the coalition worked closely with the Board of Supervisors in the city of San Francisco in an attempt to close the loopholes in existing housing policies and slow down the live-work loft development in the Mission (Martí 2006, 9). One of their greatest efforts to halt the changes in the community included a call for change in housing legislation the city through Proposition L, which would treat lofts as the same as other housing units, prevent office projects more that 6000 sq ft in the Mission, and require designated below-market-rate spaces for nonprofits in the neighborhood (Hartman 2002, 308). Although both Proposition L and the competing measure Proposition K championed by developers to provide for more loopholes in housing development were defeated in the vote in November 2000, the city election the following month would soon shift the majority on the Board of Supervisors to the left, in favor of slowing down urban development in the city.
At the same time of this effort to halt gentrification through policy measures and political means, the Mission Anti-Displacement Coalition (MAC) was also rallying community members in a large social movement that involved many *caminatas*, or street protests. On a more radical side, the Mission Yuppie Eradication Project led by artist Kevin Keating was dedicated to flyering and poster ing around the neighborhood against loft development and called for the vandalism of “yuppie” cars and squatting in “trendy” restaurants (Hartman 2002, 331). In this way, the local residents of the Mission made clear of their message, “Aquí estamos y no nos vamos” (Marti 2006, 9)! And soon, the dot-com boom came to a bust in 2001.

Yet as historian Nancy Raquel Mirabal notes at the end of her Community Oral History Project on gentrification in the Mission, “... I realized that this oral history, this analysis, has no end, because gentrification and displacement have no end” (Mirabal 2009, 8). Despite the fact that dot-com boom had come to an end and gentrification in the area was slowed down, the process of urban development had already had a major impact in changing the face of the Mission District. Furthermore, the social and economic development in San Francisco between the 1990’s and early 2000’s made sure that housing prices would never go back down to previous levels.

Since the 1980’s the demographic of the Mission District has changed dramatically along the lines of race, educational attainment, median income, and household size. According to a recent case study of the Mission District by the Center of Community Innovation at UC Berkeley using Census data from 1980, 1990, and 2000 and American Community Survey (ACS) data from 2009-2013, the Latinx population in the Mission has decreased from 44% in 1980 to 38%
in 2013\textsuperscript{8}, while the White population has increased from 36\% to 43\%. During this same time period, the percentage of residents with college degrees increased significantly from 18\% to 52\%, while the percentage of residents with no high school degree dropped from 41\% to 17\%. Similarly, the median household income in the Mission also shot from $41,739 in 1980 to $76,762 in 2013, both surpassing and growing at a faster rate than the median household income in the city of San Francisco, which was reported to be $75,604 in 2013. Finally, there has also been a significant change in the types of households making up the Mission District, as the percentage of family households decreased from 52\% in 1980 to 38\% in 2013, while non-family households increased by 14\% during the same time frame (Cespedes et al. 2015, 2-3). All of these numbers reflect the changes that occurred in the Mission between 1980 and today, especially as a result of increasing gentrification during the dot-com boom of the late 1990’s, which transformed the character of the area, replacing many working-class ethnic families with more young middle-class white working professionals.

**Project Scope and Thesis Structure**

In my research project, I explore what exactly these numbers mean in terms of residents’\textsuperscript{9} experiences with the drastic spatial and demographic change that has occurred in the Mission, focusing specifically on the increasing gentrification that has occurred in the area during the past 15 years following the end of the first dot-com boom. *How do residents’ experiences with gentrification shape their sense of belonging in the Mission?* Based on my understanding of the demographic changes in the area and my familiarity with the anti-displacement movement in San

\textsuperscript{8} According to Census data from 1980, 1990, and 2000 and American Community Survey (ACS) data from 2009-2013, the percentage of the Latinx population in the Mission peaked at 50\% in 1990 and 2000 (Cespedes et al. 2015).

\textsuperscript{9} Throughout my thesis, I use the term “residents” to refer to both current and past residents in the Mission.
Francisco, I expected both long-time residents\textsuperscript{10} and relatively new residents\textsuperscript{11} to feel a greater sense of belonging in the area based on their experience with the social change of gentrification. Since there is an increasingly large number of young, white, and higher income individuals living in the Mission, I expected new residents with the same qualities to be driven towards the neighborhood and feel a sense of belonging in the area almost instantaneously. At the same time, I projected that long-time residents would also feel a greater sense of belonging in the area because of a growing sense of attachment to the neighborhood based on a sense of proprietorship that is strengthened by their involvement or awareness of the anti-displacement coalition movement.

In order to answer my research question and test my hypothesis, I examined the experiences of residents with varying levels of attachment to the Mission, including long-time residents who continue to live in the Mission, relatively new residents in the area, and residents who have since moved out of the neighborhood. Drawing on the stories that residents told about their experiences getting to know the neighborhood when they first move in, seeing the various types of change occurring around them, and negotiating their own sense of belonging amidst the change, I went back and connected these residents' experiences with the existing theories regarding the positive and negative effects of gentrification. I accessed just how closely residents' experiences with gentrification match up and are defined by the existing literature on the gentrification process. Finally, I analyzed the ways in which these residents' experiences

\textsuperscript{10} In my research, I identified “long-time residents” as those who have lived in the Mission for 10 years or more. At the beginning of my project, I imagined “long-time residents” to be typified as predominately low-income families of color. However, over the course of my field study, I realize that there are many long-time residents with various characteristics that don’t necessarily fit this image.

\textsuperscript{11} In my research, I use the term “new residents” to describe those who have lived in the Mission for less than 10 years. At the beginning of my project, I imagined “new residents” to be mainly wealthy young working professionals, most working in the tech industry. However, during my field study, I was unable to get in contact with many residents in tech; and also found other “new residents” who didn’t necessarily fit this image.
with gentrification shape their sense of belonging in the Mission, and assessed what this tells us about the different experiences with and multiple dimensions of local belonging.

Chapter 1 begins with a review of the existing literature on gentrification and local belonging, and then goes into a more detailed discussion of the methodology for my research project. From its initial conceptualization in 1964 to the latest stages of new-build and super-gentrification, much of the existing gentrification theory has explored both production-side and consumption-side explanations for the phenomenon, as well as the debates regarding whether gentrification can be considered a positive and negative process. Connecting this with what Danish sociologist Ann-Dorte Christensen (2009) identifies as a micro-level belonging that is focused on local communities, I argue for the importance of examining residents’ experiences with change in their neighborhood amidst all of the politics surrounding gentrification. Building upon the existing projects documenting increasing displacement in San Francisco and change in the Mission, I explain why I have chosen to utilize Nancy Raquel Mirabal’s (2009) “oral history” approach in my project through both formal and informal interview with Mission residents. Finally, I stress the importance of including the experiences of Mission residents with a variety of different backgrounds and levels of connection to the Mission in order to capture the diversity of experience with gentrification in the area.

Based on the oral history and biographical approach in my research, Chapter 2 draws on data from formal interviews with five Mission residents and short question and answer segments with people at two neighborhood kid parks to show how each resident in the Mission comes to find his/her place in the neighborhood in his/her own way. It begins with residents’ general impressions and understandings of the “culture of the Mission” prior to living in the area and

---

12 With this, I refer to the stereotypical understanding of the Mission as a diverse, artsy, and hip neighborhood. See Figure 3.
when they first move in. Through three specific case studies, it also examines the unique experiences in which residents come to get to know the community (including the neighborhood and the people already living there) and find their place in the area.

Chapter 3 provides examples from the data collected in which residents describe the change that has occurred in the Mission during their time living there and vocalize what that change means to them. Beginning with general observations on the physical, spatial, and demographic changes that have occurred with the gentrification of the Mission, residents go on to discuss their own personal experiences with gentrification. These unique experiences with gentrification range from positive descriptions of gentrification being great in raising the value of personal property to emotional recollections of either the residents’ own or their neighbors’ fight against eviction or discrimination in the neighborhood.

In Chapter 4, I draw on residents’ experiences from the formal and informal interviews to assess what it even means to belong in the Mission. I highlight the different ways that residents search for and define where they belong amidst all of the diversity and difference that exists in the neighborhood. As old communities dissolve in the neighborhood, new communities are built along different lines, and each resident has his/her own place in the area based on their personal ties. Anecdotes from the interviews also suggest that belonging in the Mission can be interpreted in different ways, such as through feelings of nostalgia or belonging through memory, which are not just tied to spatial belonging.

In Chapter 5, I return to the existing literature on gentrification and local belonging, assessing the theoretical implications of my research. The qualitative data gathered in my project not only support the existing quantitative data on change in the Mission, but also nuance the competing theories on gentrification as either a positive or negative process. By drawing on the
experiences of Mission residents from a variety of different racial and socioeconomic backgrounds and varying lengths of time living in the neighborhood, I bring in new empirical data on the meaning of change in the neighborhood for these residents. As such, I argue for a more complicated understanding of the multiple dimensions of change and community belonging in the Mission.

Finally, I conclude by reflecting back on my experience with and positionality within this research project. I complicate the early notions of gentrification and belonging that I had coming into the study and introduce ways to build upon my findings in future research. While not proposing a clear solution for how to solve the problems that have arisen as a result of gentrification, I end with the belief that the beginning to any discussion on ways to ameliorate the changes in the neighborhood requires first a clear understanding of residents’ unique experiences with change. Precisely because it is increasingly expensive to live in the San Francisco and particularly in the Mission, listening to the voices and histories of residents in the area who are experiencing the changes is especially important in the determination of the issues that really matter, such as affordable housing, historical preservation, and local community.
CHAPTER 1

Literature Review and Methodology

In this research project, I sought to gain a better understanding of the unique experiences of social change that have occurred in San Francisco over the past 15 years, as political and economic developments dramatically altered the landscapes and compositions of neighborhoods throughout the city. Within a study of urban development and population changes, the concept of gentrification plays an especially important role as a basis for understanding both the causes and effects of modern-day urban development, framing the discourse and narratives around this social change. Furthermore, the discussion of gentrification also has a major impact in shaping the future of urban housing policy. As such, an analysis of individual experiences with urban renewal and change would not be possible without an understanding of the history and developments in the concept of gentrification, theoretical explanations of the causes and consequences of this social and economic phenomenon, as well as arguments for and against the process.

Originally coined by the German urban sociologist Ruth Glass in 1964, the concept of gentrification referred to the movement wherein previously disinvested cities were rehabilitated by a group of middle class “pioneer gentrifiers”, displacing the working class residents who had previously lived there (Lees, Slater, and Wyly 2008: 10). This is the definition of classical gentrification, referring to the first stage of gentrification that occurred during the 1950s and 1960s, also commonly known as pioneer gentrification.

During this early period, Neil Smith defined gentrification as the “process by which working class residential neighborhoods are rehabilitated by middle class homebuyers, landlords, and professional developers. I make the theoretical distinction between gentrification and
redevelopment. Redevelopment involves not rehabilitation of old structures but the construction of new buildings on previously developed land” (Lees, Slater, and Wyly 2008: 9). Smith’s emphasis on the distinction between gentrification and redevelopment shows a specific understanding of gentrification during this time that highlights the more limited scope of the phenomenon since it was mainly pioneered by individuals with private capital for investment. Thus within this early definition of gentrification, the focus rested mainly on cases of direct displacement of native residents in these inner cities.

However, since the coining of the term in the 1960s, there have been major developments in the theory on gentrification, reflective of the repeated waves that have continued to shape the changing compositions and displacement in cities globally. In Phillip L. Clay’s 1979 stage model of gentrification, he predicted that the process of gentrification would occur in four stages, with the pioneer gentrification of the 1960s occurring in the first stage, more small-scale speculators with limited capital who start the displacement and neighborhood renaming process during the second stage, wide-spread media interest with increasing investment by developers and organizations of new communities against old ones in the third stage, and finally mature gentrification through large-scale private investments and even the replacement of the original artistic and professional class with more managerial and business class in the fourth stage (Clay 2010, 37-8). While Clay’s limited data from the 1970s focuses primarily on the discussion of the beginning stages of gentrification, further developments in the study of the gentrification process at the end of the 20th century allowed Jason Hackworth and Neil Smith to construct a revised model of gentrification in 2001, which takes into account the role of global economic forces as drivers of the second and third waves of gentrification occurring after the recession of the 1970s into the 1980s, and during the mid-1990s, respectively (Hackworth and Smith 2010, 67). Thus
gentrification changed from being seen as a mainly individualized social process albeit moved forward through the investment of developers, to being one that is embroiled in a larger web of global financial developments and economic changes. In this sense, gentrification can be seen as an extremely complex process, rightfully deemed as being an “economic, cultural, political, social, and institutional phenomenon,” leaving a legacy of social transformations in urban cities around the world (Lees, Slater, and Wyly 2008, 3).

Furthermore, contrary to Clay’s prediction that gentrification would eventually end at a stage of mature gentrification, modern developments with global capital markets and urban politics suggest that aside from the rise of a fourth wave of gentrification in the 21st century, the concept as a whole has also taken on new meanings, especially with the introduction of the notions of new-build gentrification and super-gentrification. While super-gentrification refers to the reinvestment of more capital and the gentrification of an already previously gentrified area, new-build gentrification extends the definition of the term to encompass the building of new structures such as luxury condos on reclaimed industrial land (Lees, Slater, and Wyly 2008, 130). The phenomenon of super-gentrification based on the reach of global capital into local communities is significant because it shows that gentrification is a continuous process that doesn’t just end at a state of maturity. Even when whole communities have been displaced and new residents have inhabited the area, a supply of private capital through global connections still has the power to displace the existing residents, resulting in cycles of gentrification that reproduce the consequences of social displacement.

This understanding of displacement as a significant quality of gentrification is also of great importance in the discussion of new-build gentrification. Within the debates, Davidson and Lees argue that it is still a process of gentrification precisely because it still causes indirect
displacement in adjacent neighborhoods and sociocultural displacement where community is taken over (Lees, Slater, and Wyly 2008, 140). Thus the concept of gentrification has evolved to refer to not just the rehabilitation of homes in the city center, but to focus more specifically on the consequences of displacement, regardless of whether it is direct or indirect. An understanding of super-gentrification and new-build gentrification is especially relevant to this research project precisely because San Francisco is a global city with many neighborhoods that have experienced multiple waves of change and development.

Acknowledging the fact that San Francisco has already entered a stage of fourth-wave, super-, and new-build gentrification, older production-side and consumption-side explanations may not seem as relevant in explaining the causes of continuous gentrification in the area. However, a basic understanding of these arguments is still extremely important because they help construct the opposing narrative that presents gentrification as not only the effect of a larger neoliberal economic movement, but also as a positive movement of urban revival.

The most prominent production-side explanation for the occurrence of gentrification is undoubtedly Neil Smith’s “Rent Gap” theory. Within the rent gap debates, Smith argues that gentrification is driven by the determination to close the “rent gap”, or the product of investment and disinvestment in the urban land and housing market, measured by the existing economic return of capital ground rent and the highest optimal return of potential ground rent (Smith 2010, 81). This explains the motivations of developers to invest in the city centers, seeing it as a form of major economic development, especially when rent levels in an area are deemed to be not meeting the maximum possible profit level.

On the consumer-explanation side, David Ley introduces the idea of human agency to the existing discourse on economic and political structures as a cause for gentrification. According to
Ley, "gentrification represented a new phase in urban development where consumption factors, taste, and a particular aesthetic outlook towards the city from an expanding middle class saw an ‘imagineering of an alternative urbanism to suburbanization’" (Lees, Slater, and Wyly 2008, 92). Applied to an analysis of first wave pioneer gentrification, Ley’s explanation highlights the attractiveness of the post-industrial city as a center of diversity, tolerance, and freedom, which together acted as driving forces for the creative and professional middle class to move to the city. While this argument might not be as applicable as an explanation for fourth-wave gentrification, which is driven much more by global economic markets and excess capital, it nonetheless highlights a positive image of the revitalized urban city. In this way, it introduces the rhetoric for the opposing narrative of the gentrification process, phrasing it in terms of “regeneration”, “renaissance”, and “urban revitalization” (Lees, Slater, and Wyly 2008, 122, 154). With this, the focus of the gentrification debates has also been shifted from an emphasis on the causality of the phenomenon to an evaluation of its consequences.

Within the debates over whether gentrification constitutes a positive or negative process in society, it is evident that there are two opposing narratives on this social phenomenon of urban development. Although both sides focus on the effects of the repopulation of urban city centers by middle-class families, there are two completely different visions of the process, suggestive of the competing perspectives by newcomers moving in and long-time residents already there. This is especially important in our study of how both new and old residents experience gentrification and social transformations that come with it. In order to understand the experiences of these two types of residents in a gentrifying area, we must first be aware of the background and the different ways that gentrification or urban revival are explained as positive or negative social processes, which have inevitably shaped their experiences.
Supporters of gentrification as a positive process have tended to explain it in two ways: (1) economically and politically, focused on the resulting benefits to existing communities, and (2) socially and culturally, focused on the vision of better living and lifestyles for the new residents. In his essay “Two Cheers for Gentrification”, J. P. Byrne presents the classic neoliberal argument that the movement of more affluent residents into the neighborhood would bring resources that could enhance the economic and political position of the neighborhood while ameliorating the problems of social isolation and lack of opportunity among the urban poor (Lees, Slater, and Wyly 2008, 195). Referring specifically to the concept of gentrification, Byrne argues that it can have positive benefits for not only the new residents moving into the neighborhood, but also for the entire community in the area.

Using a different line of reasoning, Jon Caulfield argues that “gentrification is seen to be a process which unites people in the central city, and creates opportunities for social interaction, tolerance, and cultural diversity” (Lees, Slater, and Wyly 2008, 209). Touching upon how gentrification can result in a positive experience of social mixing for both the old and new residents who come into contact with each other, Caulfield acknowledges how there is a real benefit for the new middle class residents who would like more “tolerant” communities. Thus as Ley and Butler suggest, it provides an alternative for the conservative suburban neighborhoods that these people would have resided in otherwise (Lees, Slater, and Wyly 2008, 210). Therefore, in these arguments for gentrification as a positive social development, the new urban city is envisioned as an open and diverse center, drawing in a specific resident or consumer.

In contrast, arguments regarding the process of gentrification as a negative process place much more emphasis on the ethnic, racial, and class reorganizations that occur as a result of the situation, moving the conversation in the direction of social action against this change. In his
study of gentrification in Chicago, John Betancur contends that the major contribution of
gentrification is its destruction of community. It is about “arson, abandonment, displacement,
’speculation and abuse’, ethnic minority tenant hardships, and class conflict… all of which are
woven into a mournful account of struggle, loss…” (Lees, Slater, and Wyly 2008, 215). By
zooming in on the real consequences of tenant struggles and community dissolution, scholars
like Betancur draw a clear line of distinction between the vision of diversity proposed by
supporters of gentrification and the actual reality of cultural annihilation within the city
neighborhoods. These narratives of struggle, loss, and hardship are also the driving forces behind
the social campaigns for urban housing reform against gentrification.

Recognizing the development of the concept of gentrification, the causes and effects of it,
as well as its changing meanings over time, the question arises as to whether it is still useful as a
theoretical framework for understanding the process of urban development, especially when
entire neighborhoods have been redefined and cities like San Francisco are experiencing super­
gentrification. I would argue that the answer is yes, even if just because of its power as an
ideologically political concept. Between all of the rhetoric around “urban revitalization” and
“back-to-the-city” movements, the concept of “gentrification” is useful in highlighting the
difference between expectations and realities, between assumed needs and living essentials for
the urban poor.

The political nature of the concept of gentrification also lends itself to being an important
tool in the fight against urban displacement in city politics. According to David Harvey,
“Gentrification’ mobilizes, organizes, and catalyzes social movements that can sometimes
succeed in creating small-scale utopian spaces of hope” (Lees, Slater, and Wyly 2008, 240).
Thus for communities facing gentrification, an understanding of the shared experiences of
cultural dissolution as a result of the social change acts as a force that ties the remaining members of the old community together. At the end of a case study on the gentrification that occurred in the Mission District of San Francisco as a result of the dot-com boom and bust during the 1990s, Lees, Slater, and Wyly concluded with an understanding that displacement could be challenged (Lees, Slater, and Wyly 2008, 263). While this case study wrongly assumed that gentrification in the Mission District had come to an end, recognition of the usefulness of the concept of gentrification as a framework for the mobilization against displacement will be extremely useful in future fights for housing.

Furthermore, the existing theories on gentrification also act as a unique frame for my investigation of new and old residents’ lived experiences with the urban development process because it provides the background for understanding the language and rhetoric that are used by scholars, activists, developers, and other players in the process to defend or oppose the process of gentrification. While the existing literature discusses the reasoning that was used to explain the cause for gentrification on both the production side and consumer side, and it presents the scholarly debates over whether gentrification should be understood as a positive or negative phenomenon, my projects seeks to understand how residents themselves experience this social process within the opposing narratives framed as either gentrification and urban revival. Do residents use the same language to discuss the change in their neighborhood and what it means to them?

To assess the ways in which residents’ experience with gentrification shapes their sense of belonging in the Mission, I draw upon theories on community belonging, which Danish sociologist Ann-Dorte Christensen (2009) classifies as being on the micro-level. In particular, I focus on the ideas that Jørgensen, Fallov, and Knudsen (2011) identify as (1) “the sub-cultural
sense of belonging” (Foucault, 1986, Young and Willmott 1957, Jørgensen and Mølholm, 2007, Sernhede, 2007, Mazanti 2004), (2) “elective belonging” (Savage, Bagnall and Longhurst, 2005), and (3) “the sacred sense of belonging” (Game, 2001).

In a theoretical discussion of local community, mobility, and belonging, Jørgensen, Fallov, and Knudsen (2011) describe the “subcultural sense of belonging” (Foucault, 1986, Young and Willmott 1957, Jørgensen and Mølholm, 2007, Sernhede, 2007, Mazanti 2004) as one that is reflexive, where residents are interested in actively seeking out a local community in their neighborhood. Within this understanding of local belonging, residents in low-income and marginalized areas are seen to be a part of a community that is based on their locality and connection to one another in opposition to other communities with different lived experiences outside of the area. In a way, the long-time residents in the Mission who are connected by shared experiences living in a culturally diverse working-class area can be seen to exhibit this form of local belonging.

In contrast, Savage, Bagnall and Longhurst’s (2005) idea of “elective belonging” can be much more directly connected with the experiences of those relatively new residents in the Mission who have a greater sense of mobility and socioeconomic capital. While Jørgensen, Fallov, and Knudsen (2011) also identify this as a reflexive type of belonging, it is defined more by residents’ active efforts to find and become part of a place. As Savage, Bagnall and Longhurst explain:

“People who come to live in an area with no prior ties to it, but who can link their residence to their biographical life history, are able to see themselves as belonging to the area. This kind of elective belonging is critically dependent on people’s relational sense of place, their ability to relate to their area of residence against other possible areas, so
that the meaning of place is critically judged in terms of its relational meanings” (Savage, Bagnall and Longhurst 2005, 29).

Thus this can be considered a more middle-class understanding of local belonging, where residents who choose to situate themselves within a place make sense of their own identities within the culture of the area.

Finally, Ann Game’s (2001) theory of what Jørgensen, Fallov, and Knudsen (2011) identify as a “sacred sense of belonging” introduces the idea that a sense of local belonging can transcend the limits of place and time. Writing on the subject of sacred time, Ann Game argues that it is a mistake to think of local belonging as defined by just a specific place and time, or even the nostalgic memory of the past; instead she argues that people are able to experience a sense of belonging preciously when they stop searching for a distant past and regain their sense of self-identity (Game 2001, 226).

So how can we connect these understandings of local belonging to the lives of residents experiencing the changes with gentrification in the Mission? Are residents’ sense of belonging based solely on the length of time they have lived in the area and based on their ability to connect with what they see as an ideological culture of the neighborhood? Does Ann Game’s theory on local belonging suggest that residents who have moved away from the Mission are still able to experience a sense of belonging because they have lived through so much in the area?

**Methodology**

Many existing studies on gentrification and urban development in the Mission District of San Francisco have provided ample quantitative data documenting the transformation in the area over time. Drawing on census data, archival research of planning documents and news articles,
and interviews with six community stakeholders in the neighborhood, the study by UC Berkeley’s Urban Displacement Project published in June 2015 outlined the demographic, housing, and commercial changes in the area between 1980 and 2013. According to the study, there has been a significant decrease in the Latino and less educated populations in the Mission District over the past thirty years, while there has also been a significant increase in the White population as well as populations with higher educational attainment and higher median incomes, consistent with our knowledge of general gentrification patterns (Cespedes et al. 2015, 5). By focusing on more quantitative data regarding the process of gentrification in that area of San Francisco, the study also highlights the different housing policies such as evictions and buyouts, which have facilitated the displacement and gentrification in the area.

Recently, the Anti-Eviction Mapping Project and the San Francisco Chronicle’s documentary and story-telling project *A Changing Mission* have taken a more qualitative approach in documenting the experiences of residents facing gentrification. Over the past two years, the Anti-Eviction Mapping Project has worked extensively to record and map the lived experiences and oral histories of tenants who have been displaced throughout San Francisco. In 2015, the San Francisco Chronicle came out with their *A Changing Mission* documentary, which includes interviews with many homeowners, tenants, and in particular, business owners along 24th Street of the Mission, showing how residents experiences with gentrification is complicated by their own efforts to maintain their local businesses and deal with the large amounts of capital entering the neighborhood. Though with different objectives, both of these studies stress the importance of hearing the voices of residents in the Mission as they directly experience the changes in their neighborhood.
In my research project, I follow a similar approach in focusing on the “oral history” of residents from a variety of different backgrounds and with various different connections to the Mission, as they see the change occurring in the area. In her Community Oral History Project on the Mission during the 1990’s to early 2000’s, Nancy Raquel Mirabal points to the value of oral history, citing Alessandro Portelli, “oral sources ‘tell us not just what people did, but what they wanted to do, what they believed they were doing, and what they now they think they did.’ Oral sources and interviews provide a discursive site where subjects can hope, imagine, consider, emote, and even regret” (Mirabal 2009, 11). By exploring these stories of residents experiencing the social changes with urban development in the Mission District, we are able to see not only what they think about the process but also the ways that they have adapted to, resisted, and situated themselves within the change.

While my project is centered on the process of gentrification and urban development, my main concern is with learning how residents see themselves fitting in over the years. As such, I don’t explicitly use the term “gentrification” in any of my interviews in order to allow interviewees to feel more comfortable sharing their experience and their impression of the community. Ben Muessig provides a clear and well thought out explanation for this method of questioning in his interview about the A Changing Mission project: “We wanted to avoid even the use of the word, ‘gentrification,’... The nature of the word creates antagonists, because people ascribe their own meaning to it. We wanted people to come into this with as fresh perspective as they could” (Latimore 2015). Likewise, I wanted to move away from an image of Mission residents having clearly defined roles as either supporters or opponents of the process of gentrification. There is more to these residents and their experiences living in the neighborhood than just their position on the politics of gentrification. While not discounting the importance of
the political movement for more tenants’ protections and the maintenance of local businesses in the area, I am particularly interested in the ways that Mission residents think about the change in their neighborhood and the ways it affects them on a daily basis.

One of the main focuses in my study is in capturing the voices of Mission residents from a variety of different backgrounds, whether they have lived in the neighborhood for over 10 years, have recently moved in during the past 5 years, or have moved out of the neighborhood for different reasons. This approach is also largely inspired by the San Francisco Chronicle’s A Changing Mission project, which tells the story of both older working-class residents and affluent newcomers. In an interview about the project, business editor Ben Muessig explained, “No one was cast as an antagonists. Everyone is entitled to their claim to the community” (Latimore 2015). From this study, I thought it would be valuable to interview both longtime residents and relatively newer residents in the Mission for my project because it would allow us to not only see the ways in which these long-time residents in the Mission have been able to remain within the community despite the changes around them, but also see how newer residents have come to call this area their home too.

While I initially entered the study hoping to interview two long-time Mission residents and two relatively new residents in the area, the limited time that I was able to do ethnographic research and interviews in the area resulted in interviews with residents with a range of different connections to the Mission. Since I was only physically in the Mission to conduct interviews for four weeks between December 2015 and January 2016, there were some complications in finding and contacting residents within these strict definitions as either a “long-time resident” or “new resident” who were willing to accept an interview for my project. However, the diverse group of

---

13 In my thesis, I use this to describe residents who have lived in the Mission for over 10 years.
14 I use this to describe residents who have lived in the area for less than 5 years.
residents that I was able to interview ended up benefiting my study in highlighting the unique experiences of each individual resident amidst the changes that come with gentrification.

In the end, I conducted formal interviews with five residents\textsuperscript{15} from the Mission, who I will describe in greater detail as follows. Some of these interviewees continue to live in the Mission today while others have since moved out of the neighborhood. While some of these residents are prominent public figures in the neighborhood, others are not. All of their names have been changed to protect the identity of these individuals.

1. \textit{Alejandra}

Alejandra is middle-aged Latinx woman that I interviewed at Café La Boheme\textsuperscript{16} in the Mission on December 29, 2015. The first thing that I noticed was the way that she was dressed, which she later referred to as a more “bohemian” style, and the “\texthearts; for the Mission” sticker that she had on her phone case. She identifies herself as an expat Mexican national from her experience moving between the United States, Mexico, and Uruguay while growing up. She has been living in the Mission since 2008, when she first moved in with her husband, who has lived in San Francisco for over 20 years and has a rent-controlled unit in the neighborhood. While she has a law degree from Stanford and has worked extensively as a legal consultant in both Mexico and the United States, the Great Recession left her unable to find a job in 2008. As she was also new to the Mission at that time, this moved her to talk to many of her neighbors and collect stories of residents’ experiences living in this traditionally working-class neighborhood.

\textsuperscript{15} Four of these interviews were conducted in person in the Mission and one was conducted over email because the interviewee has recently relocated to Texas.
\textsuperscript{16} This café was suggested by Alejandra because it is where a lot of artists and activists tend to meet up. She also mentioned that it is a mom and pop shop and one of the owners had just passed away recently.
In our interview Alejandra expressed how she is very aware of the differences between herself and the homeboys and homegirls that she talks to because she has such a different experience from them, growing up in a different place and having a different educational background. Yet at the same time, she is also able to make use of her Spanish language skills and connect with her neighbors and understand their experiences. She and her husband, who is also a historian in San Francisco, are strong community activists in the Mission. They’ve also successfully fought off their own eviction in September 2015.

2. **Tom**

Tom is white senior citizen who has lived in the Mission since 1970. He first moved in with a group of people living communally for 25 years, and currently remains in a rent-controlled unit in the neighborhood. He is in charge of running a local community garden and works with a group of volunteers to pass out free local produce at Parque Niños Unidos each Sunday. I interviewed him while he was working at the All in Common Garden on January 12, 2016.

He originally came up with this idea of a free produce stand in the park in 2008 when there was a lot of interest in local food and eating healthy. He started the idea as a way to just grow food and share it with his neighbors, and hopefully inspire others to do the same. During our interview, he stressed the importance of having local and organic produce available to low-income people. While the stand has gone through ups and downs, once even having their own communal farm in the city, it still has a large community of volunteers (including many Spanish-speaking and Chinese women) helping out passing food each weekend. Tom sees this as not only a weekly event where food is being given out, but also a space where people in the Mission can come together.
and build a sense of community in the neighborhood. It is a way to share some positivity and compassion amidst all of the struggles that people go through in the area.

3. Marcel

Marcel is a senior Filipino citizen who is very active in the tenants’ rights movement in San Francisco. I had previously seen him before at a rally against Airbnb that I had attended during my first summer interning at Asian Americans Advancing Justice- Asian Law Caucus. I officially met him this time for my research at an Eviction Free SF meeting in the Mission. When I proposed the idea of interviewing him for my project, he willingly agreed and even suggested that perhaps we could do it that night, despite it being already after 7 pm and he mentioned having to wake up early for his job at a school in San Francisco. We later rescheduled the interview for January 8, 2016, two days later. After meeting me at the BART station, he took me on a tour of the Mission and the interview happened at his house, which is technically considered part of the Duboce Triangle area of San Francisco, but lies just on the edge of the Mission.

Marcel has lived in San Francisco for all his life, moving between many different neighborhoods in the city. He has resided in his current apartment since 1977. Our interview lasted for over 2 hours as Marcel told me all about his childhood and the different events that occurred in his life leading up to the current moment. He explained how he still continues to wear a fluorescent orange safety vest everywhere he goes at night after encountering a hate crime where he was hit by a car in 1980. He told me about the time when he was almost homeless as a starving artist living in a storage room in a dance studio. Finally, he expressed gratitude for having encountered the man who first inhabited his unit and sharing the unit with him.
Then he also talked about the time when he first received his eviction notice in 2013. Thinking that he had to move immediately, he started giving away all of his belongings. However, he soon found out about different community organizations such as Eviction Free San Francisco and the San Francisco Tenants Union, who eventually helped him successfully fight off his eviction at the end of 2014. Even after being granted the right to stay in his unit, he still hasn’t unpacked many of his belongings for fear that he will have to move once again. Since then, Marcel has been deeply involved in the tenants’ rights movement and continues to participate in many anti-displacement actions. Marcel’s greatest passions are in music and dance\textsuperscript{17}; and at each action, he is out with his drums, chanting to the rhythm.

4. Lisa

Lisa is a middle-aged white woman who lived in the Mission for over 20 years before accepting a buy-out and moving out of the neighborhood in 2013. I interviewed her at her new apartment in Emeryville on January 9, 2016 as part of the Narratives of Displacement Project\textsuperscript{18}. Lisa’s story is particularly interesting because she discusses how she never intended to move into the Mission when she first came to the Bay Area from the East Coast. She initially described it as “so skanky” and “kind of gross”. However, she also went on to talk about how she felt at home in the neighborhood almost immediately. While at times it was rough living in the Mission, she also described the ways that she was able to connect with people in the neighborhood and form a community around her neighbors.

\textsuperscript{17} After our interview, Marcel even offers to give me a free drumming and dance lesson.

\textsuperscript{18} I was able to briefly collaborate with the Anti-Eviction Mapping Project for my thesis and help them conduct an interview that would also be included on their online map.
While she saw many of the changes with gentrification happening in the Mission over the years, she embraced all of the changes and didn’t think too much of them until she faced her own eviction in 2013. She said that her experience facing the eviction was one of the hardest and worst times of her life but also the best because of the results that came out of it. While there are many things that she misses about the Mission, there are also many things that she doesn’t miss; and she is still able to go back often. Lisa currently lives in a condo in Emeryville that is much newer and has better amenities than the places that she was in when she was in the Mission. While she also studied sociology with a social work minor and worked in non-profits for most of her life, she landed a job as an executive assistant at Salesforce after her move to her new home. As such, she is very aware of her experiences seeing and being on both sides of the gentrification debates.

5. Katherine

I got in contact with Katherine through a connection here at Swarthmore and the interview occurred over email. Katherine and her husband are young white working professionals who lived in the Mission from October 2009 to January 2015. They first moved into San Francisco in 2008 for postdoctoral positions at the University of California, San Francisco, and both currently work as Assistant Professors at the Texas A&M Health Science Center. While they rented an apartment in Potrero Hill for some time, they eventually decided to move into the Mission because they were spending a lot of time there and most of their friends also lived there.

They bought a house through a tencancy-in-common option, which allows multiple owners to split a single building. It worked out really well for Katherine and her
husband because it allowed them to own their own place at a much more affordable price. They also really enjoyed living in the neighborhood because of the diversity in the area. However, Katherine also describes how the increasing gentrification of the area resulted in them soon not even being able to go out often in their own neighborhood.

Katherine and her husband eventually moved out because of their accepting of new professional positions in Texas, but she says that they still wanted to maintain the character of the Mission like the way they found it. Thus instead of renting out their unit at market value, they decided to sell it to a professional skateboarder and his sister.

Figure 4(a) and 4(b). Parque Niños Unidos, near 24th Street (Winnie Vien)
In addition to formal interviews with these five residents in the Mission, I also conducted short question and answer sessions, or informal interviews, with people at two neighborhood kid parks: Parque Niños Unidos and Mission Pool and Playground, on January 2, 2016 and January 3, 2016, respectively. Seeing the large number of people at each park, I saw it as an ideal location to talk to Mission residents (and some residents from other parts of San Francisco) from various different backgrounds as they all share the same communal space with their children. These informal interviews provided more perspectives regarding the change in the neighborhood and how it affects daily interactions, such as those at the park. The idea for these interviews also resulted from a lack of events at which I could do participant observations during the time I was in the area.

Due to the fact that I was back during the holiday season, many community events such as local farmer’s markets and community meetings were not occurring, thus leaving me in search
of other venues for observation. However, I was able to observe the free produce stand run by Tom in action during the last Sunday that I was in the neighborhood. As such, I was able to witness the community bonding that occurred around this event where food, books, and other miscellaneous items were shared. I was able to see families, seniors, children, and young professionals all in one place interacting with each other despite the dividing effects of gentrification in the area.

Finally, to further support my research on gather more qualitative data on the experiences of relatively newer residents in the Mission, or those with more socioeconomic capital, I also identified multiple Quora\textsuperscript{19} forum and blog posts where residents share their experience living in the Mission. As such, I hoped to engage a larger population and demographic of people in my study to understand the varied experiences with gentrification and belonging in the Mission.

\textsuperscript{19} Quora is an online forum site where people post questions and answers to variety of miscellaneous and often more creative questions. Along with answers to questions, people also identify a quality about themselves that explains their connection to the question (i.e. if the question is about life in the Mission, the quality might be “Mission resident for 20 years”). I have noticed a large number of tech workers and young professionals on the site.
A Diverse and Multicultural Space: Finding One’s Place in the Mission

When I moved to this neighborhood 20 years ago, I chose it because it was cheap, convenient for someone without a car, and because it wasn’t one of the three neighborhoods I knew I didn’t want to live in. I’d looked around the city and realized that I didn’t want to live in North Beach (drunken frat boys), or the Marina (drunken frat boys and drunken sorority girls) or Noe Valley (stroller brigade). I couldn’t afford to live up in Pacific Heights (and couldn’t cope with the snobbery).

So in the end, The Mission was the answer.

And I found I loved it!

It was an entirely different culture for me - and one that was strong, vibrant and had a deep history and set of values. It was fun and funky and foreign and incredibly cool.

-Chris Tacy, “Don’t Be a Fucking Douchebag Part Three” (2013)

The Mission District of San Francisco has always been a place for newcomers, formerly home to many Irish and Italians in the early 20th century, taking in a large Latino population during the 1960’s and 1970’s, housing many artists during the end of the 20th century, and finally witnessing a great influx of tech workers during the turn of the century. As a result of this unique history, the Mission is known for its distinct character that is at once welcoming, multicultural, and socio-economically diverse. In this chapter, I draw upon five in-depth interviews with current and past residents in Mission, short question and answer segments conducted at two kid parks in the neighborhood, and various online forum and blog posts to tell the story of long-time and newer residents initial encounters with the Mission, the ways they interact with the culture, and how they come to see themselves as part of the neighborhood.
Understanding the culture of the neighborhood

This chapter begins with an excerpt from Chris Tacy’s blog post titled “Don’t Be A Fucking Douchebag Part Three,” where he addresses the entrepreneurial and startup community.
in San Francisco, admonishing the negative impact that it has had in altering the culture of San Francisco and the Mission, as this group of people has become wrapped up in arrogance, entitlement, and greed, becoming what he labels “fucking douchebags”. As a large member of the tech and startup community for over twenty years and a resident of the Mission since 1992, this series is part of his attempt to help maintain the character of the Mission like what it was when he moved in. Discussing his experience living in San Francisco, Tacy says that he was original drawn to the city because “it was a massive melting pot of values, ethnicities, world views, ages, and economic classes,” and he ended up loving the Mission because “it was an entirely different culture… one that was strong, vibrant and had a deep history and set of values. It was fun and funky and foreign and incredibly cool” (Tacy 2013). The “strong”, “vibrant”, and “funky” culture can be understood as a culmination of the variety of different characters, perspectives, and opinions that continue shaping the neighborhood. Tacy’s description of the city and neighborhood that he moved into highlights a distinct characteristic that is so important in an understanding of the Mission: diversity and multiculturalism.

In many of the interviews with residents of the Mission and during short question and answer sessions at both Parque Niños Unidos and the Mission Pool and Playground, “diversity” and the “culture” are described as some of the top qualities that people like about the Mission. In these answers, diversity is described in many ways, including both ethnic and socioeconomic diversity. When ethnic diversity is described, there is oftentimes reference to the large Latino population that has lived in the neighborhood for decades. One man interviewed at the Mission Pool and Playground who is not a resident but often frequents the neighborhood and is looking forward to buying a house there mentions that he feels connected to the large Hispanic community because of his own African American background. Thinking back to when she first
moved into the neighborhood, another interviewee, Lisa, remarked on her amazement at how it was “so… multicultural, like it’s… like I could learn Spanish there” (Interview with Lisa). Along with the discussion of the Latino community, there is also a frequent mention of “families” in the neighborhood and appreciation for how “family oriented” it is. In this way, multiculturalism, socioeconomic diversity, and a traditionally strong family-oriented culture can be understood as defining characteristics of the neighborhood.

Despite the fact that residents mentioned these qualities of the neighborhood in both their descriptions of what drew them to the area and what they found upon moving in, it is also important to qualify these statements and assess what this type of diversity actually looked like. One way to do this is by looking at descriptions of the socioeconomic diversity in the neighborhood. One man interviewed at Parque Niños Unidos provides a more nuanced understanding in assessing that while the neighborhood is indeed socioeconomically diverse, it is hard to have a middle class there, which is troubling especially when coupled with the increasing cultural tension in the area from the diverse population. As Jim Nguyen20 aptly states in his Quora post responding on his experience living in the Mission, “For me, the Mission was many things; the gigantic gap between the rich and poor is defined in this tiny region.” Thus despite the fact that cultural and socioeconomic diversity are often important factors that initially draw residents into the Mission or pleasantly surprise them upon arrival, a more nuanced understanding of what the diversity actually means shows how it can also result in major struggles and conflicts within the neighborhood, especially as it changes with time.

Aside from the diverse and vibrant culture of the Mission, another distinguishing characteristic of the neighborhood for many of the residents interviewed was its ability to maintain this distinct and interesting character while still being affordable during most of their

---

20 Identifies himself as “yet another hacker in the city” (Nguyen, Quora Forum Post 2015)
time living there. As Chris Tacy asserts first and foremost in his explanation of his decision to live in the Mission over twenty years ago, “I chose it because it was cheap” (Tacy 2013). Similarly, Katherine described affordability as an important factor in her and her husband’s decision to buy an apartment unit in the Mission in 2009 through a tenancy-in-common (TIC) option where multiple owners split a building and share a mortgage: “It was a bit unusual but it worked out great for us— it allowed us to purchase real estate in SF at a much more affordable price” (Interview with Katherine). After renting an apartment in Potrero Hill and spending a lot of time in the Mission, the TIC turned out to be an affordable option for Katherine and her husband to not only buy a property in San Francisco but also spend more time in a neighborhood that they were already familiar with and enjoyed. Thus affordability can be seen as a critical factor in drawing people into the Mission, especially in the past when it was much cheaper like in the case of Tacy, or when there were other buying options, like with Katherine.

Yet at the same time, this history of the Mission being affordable is also what has kept many of the interviewed residents in their place in the neighborhood. Both Tom and Alejandra stressed the importance of remaining in a rent-controlled unit. In Lisa’s interview, she continuously reminisced over just how cheap her rent was, where she was initially able to jump on an inexpensive lease with multiple people and was eventually even able to afford staying in the unit by herself. Thus despite the changes in the Mission and the increasing prices and rents in the neighborhood, many of the residents interviewed are still most connected to the Mission that was known to be affordable, because that was the Mission that they found when they first moved in.

Along with this image of the Mission being affordable is also the very real image of it being intense, raw, and down-and-dirty. As Katherine remembered, the neighborhood was still
quite “gritty” when she first moved in in 2009. “Garbage and homeless people were very visible and there were many empty storefronts and abandoned lots on the block surrounding our apartment” (Interview with Katherine). This awareness of the neighborhood surroundings highlights the significant difference between just frequenting an area and actually living there and calling the place home. All of the sudden, the negative aspects of the neighborhood can have a much greater impact of the individual. Talking about her experience living in her last place in the Mission for seventeen years, Lisa compared it to a battle, calling the neighborhood a “battleground”:

My car got broken into a few times, but I never had any direct violence on me, and if I had, it might have been a different story. But it was all around me. There were definitely murders, gang killings; it was… intense to live there. It's like you kind of had to put your armor on. But… our block was pretty remarkable.” (Interview with Lisa)

Thus as these residents show, the Mission is not perfect, it didn’t necessarily look great when they moved in, and it was not always easy living there. However, because they had chosen to live in that neighborhood, they had to learn to deal with the problems that arose.

Despite the fact that the Mission is known for its unique culture and personality, an in-depth analysis shows that it is actually much more complicated than what it is known for, and even its positive qualities can have a more nuanced understanding. Socioeconomic diversity can be seen as a problem if it turns out to be just a dichotomy between the rich and the poor. Affordability can also mean more negative living situations. What a resident expects to find in the neighborhood and what it actually turns out to be can be completely different. In this sense, one’s sense of belonging in the neighborhood involves a process of getting to know the place, learning from the community, and seeing where he/she fits in.
Getting to know the community and finding one’s place

In the following section, I provide three cases to show how each resident has a unique process of getting to know the neighborhood and becoming connected to it. While the three residents come from different backgrounds and have different impressions of the neighborhood when first moving in, they all eventually come to see the Mission as their home. This all occurs through different methods of getting to know the neighborhood and seeing how they fit in, whether it be through learning more about the history of the place, interacting more with neighbors, or taking part in social movements within the community.

Case 1: Chris Tacy

*I learned about the history. I learned about the different ethnicities and nationalities that had made up the waves of immigration to the neighborhood. I learned passable menu Spanish. I discovered the hidden history of streets like Bartlett and Capp and Shotwell.*

*I didn’t want to live anywhere else in the city and thought I’d live here as long as I stayed in San Francisco.*  
(Tacy 2013)

As the quote from his blog at the beginning of this chapter mentions, some of the main reasons that Tacy originally chose to move into the Mission in 1992 were affordability and convenience. However, he also places much emphasis on the fact that the Mission was not one of the neighborhoods with the type of culture that he did not want to deal with, namely “snobbery” and “drunken frat boys and drunken sorority girls”. Despite the fact that he didn’t have a specific image of what the Mission looked like or what he expected to find from it, he was interested because it was different. Perhaps it was less snobbish, less expensive, and more down-to-earth. And he soon found that he loved it there.
Chris’s experience moving into and living in the Mission can be defined by a process of “learning” and “discovery”. He moved into the Mission not expecting much but he found all of the different things making up the neighborhood and he ended up learning a lot. In this process of learning, he focused mainly on the “history” of the place: the history of the people of different ethnicities and nationalities living in the area and how they ended up moving there, the history of the different streets in the neighborhood and what they meant to the people living there. This emphasis on learning the history of an area highlights how it not only allows him to familiarize himself with the area, but also understand what the neighborhood and community means to the people living there. Furthermore, his interest in finding out about the history and learning Spanish also allows him to better communicate with other residents and business owners. In this way, his process of coming to see the Mission as a place that he wouldn’t ever want to leave stems directly from his interest and efforts to integrate into the community through a sense of openness and learning.

Case 2: Lisa

L: I thought I’d never live in the Mission. I was like that place is so skanky... I thought it was kind of gross.

[...]

W: ... so you mentioned before that you had never thought that you would live in the Mission before moving there... when did it start to feel like home to you?

L: Kind of immediately.

W: Really?

L: It was weird. Yea. I had this thing in my brain like ughh I’m not gonna like it there... I had a dogs, so I walked around a lot, so I would walk around and see what stores were there in the nooks and crannies. I know the Mission so ridiculously well, and just community. Seeing people regularly, going into shops. Like Phil, Philz Coffee, you know? I know him really well, cause he
was just a corner store. He was just on Folsom and 24th. There were 3 corner stores that sold cigarettes, alcohol... and there was always one place that was chicken and it was revolving... and Phil. He was like local corner store guy who had a cool sense of humor. My housemate would ask him for stock tips and stuff. And he studied coffee. And I love his story. His story is so cool. He just morphed it into this living, breathing cafe, and it became this little empire. I love him! He's awesome! So I don't know, just things like that. Feeling part of the community and having more and more friends move in eventually, and I was feeling really happy about that cause I was there a long time... my place was so affordable, I couldn't even think about moving. So I think it was a combination of just really exploring the neighborhood, taking advantage of what there is, the festivals and the food and knowing the people. Even the people not just on my block, the people in the surrounding area, and just really understanding what a special kind of community it was.

(Interview with Lisa)

Unlike Chris, who purposely chose to live in the Mission, Lisa’s story tells of a unique experience in which she moved in, came to see the neighborhood in a different light, and eventually found her home in the area for almost 25 years. Prior to moving in, she already thought that she would not like living in the neighborhood because of how “skanky” and “gross” it seemed. Whether these descriptions of the neighborhood were based on her observations from frequenting the neighborhood or what she had seen or heard about it from others, these preconceived notions of what the neighborhood would be like highlight the disconnection that she originally felt with the area. These feelings of disgust placed her in the role of an outsider looking into the neighborhood, showing how she distanced herself from the area. Thus her integration into the area initially required a much greater understanding of what the neighborhood was about and the people who lived around her.

The fact that Lisa felt at home in the Mission “kind of immediately” points to the ease at which she was able to feel connected to the place. This connection can first be understood as the result of her efforts to explore and learn more about the different stores, parks, and murals that make up the landscape of the neighborhood. By walking around all over the neighborhood and looking at what was in the “nooks and crannies”, she was able to uncover different parts of the
neighborhood that are behind the first immediate image of it being “skanky” and “gross”.

Furthermore, by attending various festivals and events in the area such as Día de los Muertos and Carnaval, she was also able see the neighborhood come to life, getting a real sense of the culture of the neighborhood and the spirit of the community.

More importantly, Lisa’s sense of belonging in the community also stemmed from the kind of welcome that she received and the personal connections that she was able to develop with neighbors and members of the community. Just by frequenting the stores, restaurants, and parks in the neighborhood, she was able to see the same people frequently, talk to them, and become good friends with them. Her familiarity with Phil from Philz Coffee (see Figure 7) is an example the personal relationships that she was able to form with people in the neighborhood just through day-to-day interactions. Living in the Mission for almost 25 years, she was able to become close to a lot of the people around her and witness the changes in everyone’s lives, such as how Philz Coffee developed from merely a corner store in the Mission to now a major coffee shop chain across the U.S. In this sense, she came to know the story of the neighborhood and the people there, and became more and more connected with it over time.

Figure 7. The first Philz Coffee store, on 24th Street in the Mission neighborhood (Winnie Vien)
This sense of connection can also be tied to the idea of shared experience. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, Lisa had referred to the Mission as a “battleground”, repeatedly stressing how “it was so harsh sometimes, like people don’t even get it ... like what a battle it was to live through some of it” (Interview with Lisa). Yet she at the same time, she also talked about the ways that she and her neighbors were able to come together in the face of struggles, by doing things such as coming up with a block list to inform each other of things happening on their block in the neighborhood. Furthermore, they were also able to take part in creating a sense of community by making Halloween an all block event and destination place for children, “Trick or Treat,” because they lived on Treat Street. Thus she was able to not only develop strong relationships with her neighbors but also contribute and give back to the community.

Lisa’s experience highlights how the development of one’s sense of belonging in the neighborhood is indeed a process. It required her to look past the negative image that she had of the Mission and discover the different spaces, cultures, and people that give the neighborhood its character. In the process, she was able to form connections with not just her close neighbors but also other members of the community whom she became familiar with. Over time, she was able to not only attend community events, but also take part in creating them if she wanted to, thus finding her place in the community. In this way, belonging can be understood as a process of meaning making, one that takes time.

Case 3: Alejandra

A: ... I arrived into San Francisco in 2007, and then in 2008, in the middle of what is now called the Great Recession... I couldn't find a job... But I moved into this neighborhood. Because we had cheap rent, I guess we could like finagle a living. I had odd jobs. And... one of the most interesting things for me as a Mexican national... you could even see me as an expat Mexican national in the U.S., which has been a lot of my experience; I started wondering about the
experience of my neighbors... When you’re in the U.S., you get lumped into categories. I was suddenly Latina or Hispanic... But I saw the differences between myself and day laborers standing on the corner of Cesar Chavez St., and homeboys and homegirls on the corners of the Mission. So as part of my new bohemian lifestyle, you could say, I started talking to people on the corners of the street.

W: ... you mentioned the difference between you and them... was that kind of what got you interested in learning more about their experiences?

A: Yea. I have an essay... called "The Geography of the Unseen," in Rebecca Solnit's book Infinite City: an Atlas of San Francisco, in which I talk a little bit more about that experience. But it was driven by understanding class differences, age differences, vs. cultural differences also, and just distance, like how one geographic space can... And it was really motivated also by the fact that I, for the first time in my life... as I mentioned, I moved around a bit, and after settling with Connor and getting married, it was the first time I... was settling roots in some place. So it became very, very important for me to understand where I was. And that was what motivated my writing, but what happened simultaneously and after, was this barrage of gentrification. So even though I didn’t want, I wasn’t intending to write about gentrification and housing... and ultimately becoming a person who needed to protect their own housing... I started looking into other people’s stories. But one of the most important things for me in looking into other people’s stories was to make sure that... I wanted to be very careful about not having just an outsider angle.

(Interview with Alejandra)

Once again, Alejandra’s experience moving into the Mission is quite different from that of Chris’s and Lisa’s. First and foremost, she moved into the neighborhood in 2008, while both Chris and Lisa had already lived in the Mission for over 15 years by that time. Due to the fact that it was during the recession and her husband was already living in a rent-controlled apartment in the neighborhood during that time, it just made sense that she would move in. Thus her decision to move into the Mission was not necessarily shaped by a specific interest in the neighborhood. However, since she had grown up almost as an expat, moving around quite a bit because of her father’s job, and this was the first time that she was “settling roots” in place, it also sparked a much greater desire to learn more about the place and the people there.

Throughout Alejandra’s story, there is great emphasis on the sense awareness in learning and
interacting with others, highlighting how her sense of belonging in the neighborhood is complicated by differences in class, culture, and experiences.

Race, ethnicity, and culture are extremely important in an understanding of Alejandra’s experience living in the Mission. Due to her Mexican background, she said that she was automatically lumped into the “Latina or Hispanic” category in the U.S. However, since she grew up moving between Mexico, the U.S., and other parts of Latin America, she saw her own identity as much closer to that of an “expat Mexican national”. These differences in the racial/ethnic category that she was placed in and the ways in which she identifies herself mean many different things within the context of the Mission being known as a neighborhood with a historically large Latino population. While outsiders might see her fitting in perfectly in the Mission as just another Latina, Alejandra is quick to identify the differences in experience that separate her and other Latinos and Chicanos in the neighborhood. As a newcomer, this awareness of difference is especially impactful in shaping her efforts to interact with and understand the experiences of older residents in the Mission. And her Spanish language skills certainly help in her communication with other members of the community.

Speaking on the different living experiences between other members of the Latino community in the Mission and herself, Alejandra identified class as an important factor to consider. Despite the fact that she moved into the Mission during the Great Recession when she couldn’t find a job and she values living in a rent-controlled apartment like many other residents in the area, especially during current times of sky-rocket rents in the San Francisco Bay Area, Alejandra was very clear in pointing out the differences in social and cultural capital that that separate her and the laborers or the homeboys/homegirls in the Mission. With abundant educational experiences and a graduate degree from Stanford, she does not have to do the same
type of work as laborers lining up on the streets. Dressed in more “bohemian” attire, she is not
viewed and judged in the same way as young Latino men in sports shirts. Growing up as an
expat constantly moving between Mexico and the U.S., she didn’t have to face the struggles of
low-income minorities in the area. She remarked, “I’m not a homegirl, you know. Sometimes I’m
very honored when after a couple of relationships, some of the Mission people might call me a
homegirl, for example. Honor, you know… within the Latino culture, and within the
homeboy/homegirl culture of the Mission, people really know each other. It’s not like I can fake
my way in” (Interview with Alejandra). Thus Alejandra’s awareness of these differences comes
from a place of respect and genuine interest, pushing her to develop a deeper understanding of
the experiences of these people.

Perhaps because of her academic background, aside from just talking to people in the
community and listening to what they have to say about their experiences living in the Mission,
Alejandra’s involvement in the community has manifested itself in a book project sharing these
stories of community members and in her role as a community advocate and activist in the
neighborhood. Despite the fact that she is very cognizant of the differences in her experiences
and those of many other Mission residents, she also places great emphasis on being “very careful
about not having just an outsider angle” in her writing in order to tell the most genuine and
meaningful stories of these individuals (Interview with Alejandra). In addition, her place as a
community advocate and activist in the community has also been largely shaped by her
experiences living in the area, not only in seeing the struggles of her neighbors such as in the
death of Alex Nieto, but also in her own experience facing eviction from her apartment. In this

---

21 Alex Nieto was a 28 year old Latinx young man who was killed by four SF policemen in Bernal Heights on
March 21, 2014. He was sitting in Bernal Heights Park eating a burrito while wearing a new 49ers jacket and taser
for his job as a nightclub bouncer, when two young white men walking their dog called the cops on him,
misidentifying the taser as a gun. When the police arrived, they mistook the red laser of the taser as that of a gun and
way, she was able to find her own role in the Mission through a dual process of not only getting to know the people in the community but also using her skills and resources to move the community in the face of struggles.

These three cases highlight how each resident in the Mission has a unique experience getting to know the neighborhood that they enter, building relationships with the people that they meet, and finding where they fit in as part of the community. Their senses of belonging are connected to their attachment to the place through time as well as their relationship with neighbors, friends, and the larger local community. In the next chapter, I will explore what the recent wave of gentrification in the Mission means to these residents and how they come to experience these changes.

claimed they shot him out of self-defense. A total of over 50 shots were fired at him both while he was up and on the ground. By the time the ambulance came, Nieto was dead. The police officers involved in Nieto’s death never faced any criminal charges. On March 1, 2016, a civil trial that Nieto’s family launched against the police officers for excessive force began. However, in the end the officers were ruled to have not used excessive force (Solnit 2016).
CHAPTER 3

Gentrification in the Mission: What Does it Mean to You?

And at the top of it all, is Sutro Tower; the City's Eiffel Tower (although a bit shorter), which is often blanketed by fog, but is always seen at any point in the Mission. But Sutro Tower reminds me more of the Tower of Sauron--watching all of us, intently, aware of all our deep secrets.

~Jim Nguyen, Quora post (2015)

Gentrification in the Mission District of San Francisco is not a new phenomena, as multiple waves of gentrifiers have made their way into the city starting with the dot-com boom at the end of the 20th century. But what does gentrification mean to the residents living in the neighborhood and how do they experience these changes over time? In this chapter, I argue that gentrification can mean many things, resulting in a change in the landscape, population, and culture of the neighborhood in ways both good and bad, depending on who is telling the story. On top of a general understanding of what gentrification looks like, each resident in the Mission also is also shaped by gentrification in a different way, depending on his/her background and experience with the changes.

What does gentrification look like?

In descriptions of gentrification, where traditionally more wealthy individuals move into the neighborhood, what typically comes to mind first-and-foremost is a change in landscape. This generally includes a renovation of buildings on the streets, the opening of new restaurants and coffee shops, and an infiltration of different types of shops that appeal to middle and upper class interests. In his Quora response on what it’s like to live in the Mission District of San Francisco, hacker Jim Nguyen gives a detailed depiction of what the area looks like in 2015:
On the west side of the Mission, you'll have all the gentrified, coffee drinking hipsters, with some families who spilt over from Noe Valley, bringing over their kids in Audi's and Tesla Model S's, to the trendiest restaurants in the area. Dolores Park is their playground, and Valencia St. sparkles and shines compared to the parallel Mission St., which is dull, dingy, and smells like urine. Corporate buses run up and down every major street along the Mission as well (Nguyen, Quora Forum Post 2015).

This description highlights the paradoxical and complete difference in landscape between Valencia Street and the parallel Mission Street, which is just a block over. While Valencia Street has been extremely gentrified over the past decade and now houses many of the trendiest bars and restaurants in the neighborhood, Mission Street can still be described as “dull, dingy, and smells like urine.” Observations from my fieldwork in the area also highlight the contrasting demographics of people walking down each street, with Valencia Street seeing a much younger and whiter population while Mission Street gets much more foot traffic by a more diverse and multicultural group of people that includes seniors, parents, and children, conversing in different languages like Spanish and Chinese. A walk from one street to the other appears like the entrance into a completely different neighborhood, evidence of the gentrification that has occurred in the area.

However, another interviewee, Tom (who has lived in the Mission since 1974), lamented how many other parts of the neighborhood, including even Mission Street, are starting to change:

Mission St used to be very funky, but now that's even getting developed, because they just put in these luxury condos and a new movie theater, and there's more restaurants opening on Mission St. And then 24th St. was always very... funky and... largely Latino businesses, markets and stuff... and that's actually changing too. And there used to be a
lot more empty lots, like empty gas stations; and all the gas station lots are now being
developed. Like if you go on South Van Ness, there's some new very modern… they
don't really fit in the Mission, like they look kind of like downtown buildings. And…
yea, so that's an indication of what's going on. And then of course the rents are out of
control. (Interview with Tom)

This description of the altered landscape in the Mission draws light to two main points of
difference that have come with gentrification: 1) buildings that don’t fit in aesthetically with the
rest of the block, and 2) condos and businesses that attract a specific target population based on
class and capital, which also implies a change in the culture of the neighborhood.

Figure 8. New luxury condos next to the New Mission Theater (Winnie Vien)
Speaking of one of the new luxury condos recently built on Mission Street as part of the renovation and reopening of the New Mission Theater by Alamo Drafthouse Cinema, Jennifer Feiber from the SF Tenants Union called it “the new eyesore building,” referring to the geometric design with bright orange and yellow side paneling on the front of the building (see Figure 7) (Q&A with Jennifer). Thus gentrification in the Mission can first be described as a visual and spatial change in the neighborhood, which includes modernization, but also disengagement with existing community spaces.

That is not to say that there are no positive qualities in the neighborhood space altered by the forces of gentrification, as it can now also be seen as safer and more aesthetically pleasing. During a short question and answer session at Parque Niños Unidos, a young Latino man with his son discussed his own impression of the change that occurred in the neighborhood over the past decade. Although he personally grew up in Oakland, his parents and brother currently live in the Mission and he often goes to visit them. Compared to what the neighborhood looked like in the past, he remarked that it is calmer now, “better”– he used to see a lot of violence there. When asked about the community in the area, he said that there is more community and people communicate with each other more– “people actually bring their kids here [to the park]” (Parque Niños Unidos Q&A 1.2.16). With these comments, he refers to the safer environment that has accompanied the changes in the neighborhood as a result of gentrification. This safer environment can be understood as a positive change in encouraging greater communication between people within public spaces such as parks in the neighborhood. In reference to kid parks in particular, this also supports the traditional image of the Mission being a family oriented neighborhood.

Aside from a question of safety, interviews with residents in the Mission also highlight
how some of the changes in the landscape of the neighborhood have made it more visually pleasing. As long-time SF senior resident Marcel led me to his apartment for our interview, he suggested taking the “scenic route” down Valencia Street, and commented on how we were even able to walk down that street nowadays without having to duck from gunshots. He was honest in describing what he thought about the changes in the landscape: “Visually, aesthetically, what they've done with this environment, I appreciate. They've taken vacant lots, vacant parking lots, vacant gas stations, run down buildings...” (Interview with Marcel). He recognizes the positive changes that have occurred as result of gentrification. Yet at the same time, he is also extremely cognizant of how gentrification has altered the population making up the community.

As new people move into the neighborhood and the cost of living increases, many low-time residents and businesses are forced out. As we walk down Valencia Street, Marcel pointed out all of the new stores on the block and mentioned how they used to be mom-and-pop shops, vintage stores, and dance halls that he would frequent in old days. He does not like how people have been priced out of the neighborhood: “...that part I'm sad. I'm sad because living here since 1977. When I walked out the door, I had a neighbor. I had a neighbor, Winnie... Until he sold it to a speculator, I had a neighbor that I could hang out with... We would hang out, like Sanford and Son” (Interview with Marcel). In this description, Marcel shows how the physical changes in the area as a result of gentrification don’t just refer to a changing demographic along the lines of race and class. Perhaps more importantly, they result in the breaking of personal relationships that have formed between residents, their neighbors, and members of the community—ties that

---

22 Sanford and Son was an American sitcom that first aired in 1972. It told the story of Fred Sanford and his son Lamont. Sanford was a junk collector and ran a business inside his home. Although his house was run-down, it was comfortable enough for the two of them, though his son would often threaten to leave because he was not satisfied with the business (tv.com).
have been seen in the previous chapter to be so important in establishing one’s connection to a place.

On a larger local scale, the change in the people living in the neighborhood can also be seen to result in a change in the culture of the community. On a Quora forum post about her experience living in the Mission, Leena Prasad laments the “slow erosion of the artistic soul of the Mission” during the ten years that she lived there from 2003 to 2013. While many artistic spaces such as the Radio Habana Social Club and Clarion Alley with its murals still exist today, she is worried about what the artistic landscape of the neighborhood will look like in the future, as artists are displaced and various forms of urban art like sidewalk stencils disappear. The importance placed on the artistic culture of the Mission is especially meaningful with an understanding of how art has played a major role in the documentation of the history and experiences of members of the community in the area.

Due to the fact that the Mission has historically been a neighborhood with a large Latino community, the displacement of many Latino families from the area has also raised concerns over the loss of the “ethnic flavor” that is characteristic of the Mission. In response to a question on how the neighborhood changed during the time that she and her husband lived there, Katherine said, “The things we loved about the neighborhood (its diversity, Latin flavor, quirky and affordable local restaurants/stores) were almost entirely lost” by the time they moved out in early 2015 (Interview with Katherine). Similarly, while describing how many Latino businesses are the first to be priced out of the neighborhood, Alejandra also pointed to how it results in the loss of “ethnic flavor” in the area. In reference to the displacement of Latino residents, she concluded, “So it ends up being less of a sanctuary space for immigrant communities and generational Latinos, like it used to be” (Interview with Alejandra). Both Katherine and
Alejandra’s comments on the changing culture of the Mission as a result of gentrification highlight the effect that it has on not only those that are displaced from the neighborhood, but also those that remain living there but see the community that they had enjoyed being taken apart. This also demonstrates how the cultural change in the Mission can redefine what it means to come from and live in the neighborhood in the future.

With artists and low-income minority residents leaving the neighborhood and more wealthy folks moving in, gentrification can also be understood as a recreation of the character of the neighborhood by a population that is less culturally and socioeconomically diverse. While Lisa embraced and welcomed the first wave of newcomers who moved into the neighborhood back in the late 1990’s and early 2000’s, she described the more recent wave of gentrification as a whole different monster:

I'm the kind of person that can adapt to changes. I'm not... it's not like I can't. And I'm older, but I also appreciate younger people. But there's just this flavor of homogeny. It's just like, so you want to come to this place because you like that it has a lot of multicultural aspects to it, and yet really what you're doing is homogenizing it, even if you're a person of color. It's more like class you know... (Interview with Lisa)

Lisa’s emphasis on class stresses the difference between the people moving out of the neighborhood and the people moving in. When individuals with higher incomes and various forms of cultural capital move into the neighborhood and many of the businesses change to cater to this group people, the area also starts to attract a similar demographic, making older residents without the same background less able to enjoy the neighborhood in the same way. By describing how newcomers are “homogenizing” the neighborhood, Lisa also suggests that there
is now less of an interest for people moving in to interact with and learn more about the existing community in the Mission.

Chris Tacy perfectly describes how this new wave of gentrification has completely transformed the Mission that he found and came to know over the past 20+ years:

The Mission these days is over-run with the exact same frat boys and sorority girls and mommy bloggers and snobbish rich kids that I moved here to avoid. More than that, however, The Mission is now infested with startup douchebags. You can’t go a fucking block without hearing about someone’s “funding party” or someone else’s “vesting schedule” or overhear a fucking verbal vomit love letter to Pando Daily. (Tacy 2013)

The landscape has changed, the people have changed, and the culture of the neighborhood has changed. Tacy’s disgust for the attitude and actions of the new people moving into the neighborhood despite his similar background as a member of the tech and startup community is telling of how other residents even more different from these new residents may feel about the changes in this place that they call home. Tacy’s anger towards these newcomers is an example of how he, too, has been affected by gentrification, though in a different way. While he is able to continue living in the Mission because he has the social and economic capital to do so, the increasing gentrification of the area has not only altered the character of the neighborhood that he had enjoyed, but also affected personal connections with the existing community.

What is your own experience with gentrification?

While many residents in the Mission are able to describe the overall changes that have occurred in the area as a result of the gentrification of the neighborhood, each individual’s understanding of what gentrification means is also greatly influenced by his/her own experiences.
and how he/she has been affected by the changes. As Leena Prasad puts it in her Quora response, “The changes that have been happening in the neighborhood affect the lives of everyone there, of course, but the impacts are complex and depend on the social and financial resources of each particular resident” (Prasad 2015). One’s social and financial resources are extremely important in his/her experience of gentrification because they determine whether residents are able to utilize the new spaces and services in the community, whether they are able to connect with the people moving into the neighborhood, and whether they are eventually able to stay and continue living in the area.

With sufficient social and financial resources, one is able to enjoy the changes in the area. When asked what she thinks about the changes that have occurred in the Mission during the five years she has lived there, one woman with two children playing at Parque Niños Unidos exclaimed, “Gentrification is great!” She then went on to explain how since she owns a condo in the area, the gentrification of the neighborhood has improved the price of her unit. She also appreciates how many of the old empty storefronts have been converted into coffee shops. Another woman from Potrero Hill, who was playing with her daughter at the same park, was more cautious when asked about her impression of the changes in the neighborhood: “You mean gentrification? The neighborhood is losing some of its charm, but we enjoy it because we have socioeconomic capital. I can imagine it’s hard for people who can’t enjoy it” (Parque Niños Unidos Q&A 1.2.16). Thus while residents and visitors of the Mission may recognize the different effects of gentrification on the neighborhood and on the people living there, their understanding of what gentrification means is shaped first and foremost by their own personal experiences with the change.
Lisa’s account of her experience with the changes in the Mission highlights the process in which she was slowly able to develop a deeper understanding of and form an opinion on the effects of gentrification. In comparison to the current wave of newcomers in neighborhood who she claims are like “we’re gonna take our homogeny and rub it all over you,” Lisa described a very positive experience with the first group of tech people who moved into the Mission during the dot-com boom in late 1990’s and early 2000’s. Despite the fact that she saw many of her friends getting displaced as a result of the gentrification during this time, she appreciated the newcomers’ interests in getting to know the community; and her own interest in learning more about tech despite not learning computers while growing up allowed her to become friends with many of the people moving in. As she described it:

I kind of was like, I like these people, and I’m not getting evicted! And it’s really all about me not getting evicted, right? Cause if I was evicted, I would have probably left the city… So I’m like okay, I’m not getting evicted. I’m still here! I’m not leaving! My rent is good. And then the bust happened and then the next dot-com happened. And I’m like, still here! I’m not getting evicted. Like you know, just kind of adjust. Cause this is where I live, you know… but it was still pretty interesting like 10 years ago. I really loved it, even 5 years ago. But I think this thing that’s happening now, maybe it’s because I got kicked out [laugh] you know, and I think this one that’s happening, it’s really changing.

(Interview with Lisa)

Lisa’s view on gentrification in the Mission is shaped largely by the ways that it has directly affected and not affected her life during different points in time. Due to the fact that she was not evicted from her apartment during much of the time when gentrification was taking place in the Mission, she didn’t necessarily have a strong opinion on what the changes meant for
the community. Instead, she was able to focus on just adjusting to the changes and forming
communication with the newcomers. However, her own experience of being evicted from her unit,
dealing with the threats of the property management company that her landlord sold the building
to, and eventually moving out of the Mission after receiving a buyout, allowed her to think more
depth about what gentrification actually meant for the people struggling to stay in the
neighborhood. While she recognizes that her view on the gentrification process that is occurring
in the Mission now might be shaped by her experience of being kicked out of her unit, it is also
this experience that allows her to point out the differences between the changes in the
neighborhood now and those that occurred over fifteen years ago. While she was able to see a
genuine interest in the neighborhood by the first wave of tech people who moved in, the
treatment that she receives from the new people moving in now leads her to conclude that all
they want to do is homogenize the place; the community is actually changing.

Similarly, senior resident Marcel also didn't think much about the process of
gentrification until he received an eviction notice from the speculator, Pineapple Boy LLC.
While he did notice many of his neighbors moving out of the neighborhood during the time that
he stayed in his apartment, getting evicted from the place that he had lived in for over 35 years
was a whole different experience. It was only when he received his eviction notice that he
realized just how expensive it now cost to live in the city, with the rent for his unit being raised
up to $5000 per month from the $565 that he was used to paying. With the 30-day notice of
eviction, he thought that he had no other choice but to get out, and he immediately started giving
away many of the things in his unit: television sets, furniture, turntables, CD players, boom
boxes, bicycles, tuxedos, CDs, DVDs, drums, keyboards—things that were so near and dear to
his heart. Initially unaware of tenants rights laws and organizations, he felt like a “lone ranger,”
with no power to fight his situation (Interview with Marcel). This experience showed him the extent to which the process of gentrification can destabilize the community and affect the well-being of residents in the area, leaving those without the resources feeling helpless when forced to leave their homes. He has been so greatly affected by his eviction experience that even a year after winning the right to remain living in his unit, he still hasn’t unpacked many of his belongings for fear that he will be forced to move again. His experience fighting his own eviction with the help of housing rights organizations in area has also continued to inform his participation in tenants rights issues across San Francisco.

While Lisa and Marcel have shown how residents’ experiences with gentrification in the Mission can be connected with their ability to remain in their homes, it can also be shaped by the ways that they are able to move around in the new spaces within the neighborhood. During our interview, Alejandra was insistent that I learn about the story of Yaron Milgrom and the incident where his restaurant refused service to a beloved homegirl, Sandy Cuadra, and her family. Alejandra described how despite being a long-time Mission resident and Department of Public Works worker in San Francisco, Cuadra loved going to the new places in the Mission. However, when Milgrom’s restaurant refused to seat her party inside, it was like “they were no longer accepted” and this created a lot of press, eventually leading Milgrom to shut down one of his restaurants (Interview with Alejandra). Alejandra described the irony of the situation:

Local's Eatery is one of the places and there was another place, I can't remember what it's called. The name had "local" in it, Mission Local... these little businesses which were dissonant to the local people, to the locals' culture, and ironically, they were calling themselves Local's Eatery, local this, local that. (Interview with Alejandra)
This case of Sandy Cuadra at Local’s Corner highlights how one’s ability to enjoy the new services in a gentrified space is based on not only their own socioeconomic capital, but also the acceptance or lack thereof that they receive from people with the power and the resources in the transformed area. Even though residents of the Mission might be open to changes in the neighborhood, their rejection from certain spaces and services undoubtedly result in a negative experience with the gentrification process. These negative feelings are compounded when the new spaces in the neighborhood present themselves as a part of the local community, but instead end up drawing a line between the new and the old, the rich and the poor, those in power and those who end up feeling helpless.

Katherine shows how residents’ understanding of gentrification can get even more complicated when even those with relatively more social and economic capital end up not being able to afford many of the things in the neighborhood. Here, she provides a great example of the change in the way that she and her husband were able to move around in the neighborhood during their time living there:

We were small investors in a restaurant on our corner called Hog and Rocks. It was opened as a neighborhood joint-- the original menu had wings, meatballs, fish and chips, and cocktails were $7/8. We went there to watch sporting events and knew the bartenders. By the time we moved, we couldn’t even eat there anymore because the prices were so high. Now the menu is bone marrow ($18) and steak tartare ($16). Even the burger costs $18. Cocktails are $12. It’s a perfect metaphor for how the Mission has changed. Fancier, more expensive and less personal. (Interview with Katherine)

Despite the fact that Katherine and her husband owned an apartment in the Mission and were small investors in a restaurant, even they got to a point where they could barely afford to go out
in their own neighborhood. And while they were able to continue living in the neighborhood, only eventually relocating to Texas for work reasons, they witnessed almost all of their friends moving to other parts of the Bay Area. Their own inability to frequent many of the new restaurants and shops in the area pointed to the loss of the sense of community in the Mission, which Katherine now compares to other SF tourist attractions like Union Square and the Marina, catering to the new influx of tech workers and visitors from other areas. Katherine and her husband’s experiences with gentrification suggest that residents’ opinions on the changes in the community are shaped by more than just their socioeconomic capital. It is not always that the “displaced” have a negative impression on gentrification and the “gentrifiers” have a positive feeling towards it. The situation is more complicated than that.

In the next chapter, I focus on how residents’ sense of belonging in the Mission is shaped by their own personal experiences with the change. How are their experiences with change similar or different from how they continue to see themselves fitting in within the community? How has the meaning of community to them changed? Is it only just that people who are displaced feel like they no longer belong while people who have moved in more recently and who continue to remain in the neighborhood have a strong sense of belonging? I would argue that the answers to these questions are much more complex and require a deeper understanding of people’s experiences seeing the changes in the neighborhood, the way they deal with evictions and the perceived erosion of their community, as well as the ways in which they continue to think about themselves in connection to the place regardless of whether they still remain in the neighborhood or have since moved out.
CHAPTER 4

Changing Communities: What does it mean to Belong in the Mission?

Even before Eviction Free San Francisco, I said to myself, Winnie, I said, "When I grow up, I'm mayor! For every square foot there is of concrete, I'm gonna balance it out with a square foot of nature. Doesn't matter how high, how tall the building is. Equal amount of nature. So as to counterbalance this strangling of concrete jungle. So that's the fantasy I had. And here I am, working with Eviction Free San Francisco. You know, it's interesting.

-Marcel, Interview with Marcel (2016)

Over the course of increasing gentrification in the Mission during the past 15 years, many long-time residents have been priced out of the neighborhood, some have been able to remain in their homes, and many new residents have moved into the neighborhood. As we saw in the last chapter, many residents of the Mission (both long-time residents and residents who have moved in more recently) have seen the different effects of gentrification in their neighborhood and each has experienced the changes in his/her own way. While it might be common to assume that residents who have had a negative experience with gentrification would feel like they no longer belong in the neighborhood and residents who benefit from the changes would get a boost in their sense of belonging, I hope to show in this chapter the greater complexities in how residents' experiences with gentrification affect their sense of belonging. I suggest that a resident's physical belonging in the neighborhood by the act of living there doesn't necessarily translate into a feeling of belonging in the community in the area. Furthermore, residents must find a way to come to terms with what it means to belong in the "community" in the Mission when communities are continuously shifting. Finally, perhaps there are also other ways in which residents that have moved out of the neighborhood are still able to feel like they belong based on their sense of connection to the space and community.
Belonging within a sea of difference

As gentrification alters the demographics of the people living in the Mission, there appears to be an overall increase in a sense of awareness over differences between newer and older residents, whether it is along the lines of race, class, or culture. While Lisa mentioned that the group of tech workers who moved into the Mission during the first dot-com boom of the late 1990’s appeared to show more interest in interacting with and learning from long-time residents, many of the discussions on “community” in the Mission today that I gathered for my research reveal an oppositional relationship between new and old residents. On a most basic and simplified level, this view of the Mission as composed by “us” vs. “them” pushes residents to think about their sense of belonging within the context of the changing community.

As a resident and community advocate who has been extremely interested in learning about the experiences of her neighbors from when she first moved into the Mission in 2008, Alejandra tells the story of how many long-time residents in the Mission came to see themselves as not belonging in the neighborhood anymore. In her essay “The Geography of the Unseen,” Alejandra draws on an idea that she says she got from a science fiction author to explain how two opposing populations are able to live side by side and yet never see each other. She refers to this as a process where residents see and then unsee each other:

…so I think the homeboys on the corners can unsee, you know, the techies, as much as the techies might unsee them, both as a question of segregation and something like that. Where they see and then unsee each other. And so they might be living side by side, but they don’t interact. And there are conflicts. (Interview with Alejandra)

By seeing and then unseeing each other, residents establish the other group as different from themselves, not worthy of interaction, and thus unimportant. In this way, both groups are still
able to maintain their sense of belonging and connection to the place, regardless of the actual people coexisting in the same space. However, when there are conflicts, then there is a whole new situation where residents start to question their own belonging within the community.

Some of the conflicts that Alejandra referred to during our interview include the discriminatory treatment towards long-time residents by newer residents and businesses. This is the story of Sandy Cuadra, the homegirl and DPW worker, who was refused seating at Local’s Corner. It is the story of another homeboy whose family has lived in the Mission for generations since moving from Nicaragua in the 1930’s. While he used to walk down the streets and be seen by the familiar faces of friends, grandmas, etc. who he grew up with, he is now “seen in a discriminatory way, through a racist lens, like oh homeboy, Latino, homeboy dangerous” (Interview with Alejandra). It is the story of Alex Nieto, a young Latino and security guard, who was killed by a police officer in 2014 while wearing a red 49ers jacket and wearing a licensed taser at his hip for his job. Speaking of Alex Nieto’s death, Alejandra remarked that that was “when the people who are native to the place, especially the... like the Chicano or generational Latinos, feel out of place. They no longer feel like they belong here” (Interview with Alejandra). Similar to the case of Sandy Cuadra, “They were no longer accepted” (Interview with Alejandra).

In these situations where long-time residents are policed by newer residents based solely on their appearances, there is not only an awareness of difference between two opposing groups, but also an inherent power dynamic that is tied to forces of the law. As a result, many older residents are led to believe that they no longer belong in the Mission because of the negative interactions that occur with the new people in the area. They are not accepted by this group that
wields more power based on socioeconomic resources; and despite being their home, the Mission no longer serves as a safe space that protects them from law enforcement.

While Alejandra reveals how many long-time residents came to see themselves as not belonging within the new environment of the Mission, a few recent Quora forum posts also show the disconnect between new residents and the local community within the area. In response to the question “What’s it like living in the Mission District in San Francisco?” Jim Nguyen starts his post with, “I’m a short Asian guy. The locals probably have had enough of Asians overpopulating the city, and probably the rest of the Bay Area. Maybe because I'm a doppelgänger of every other Asian guy, I don't get many glances” (Nguyen, Quora Forum Post 2015). In his description of himself in support of his answer, he also points out how he is “yet another hacker in the city.” Thus Jim shows a keen awareness of the differences between him and “the locals,” namely along the lines of race and occupation. This awareness of difference is further reflected in his assumption on how the locals might feel about him despite the fact that he doesn’t get much attention from them. By drawing a line between himself and “the locals,” Jim suggests that he feels a lack of belonging within the local community of the Mission, despite maintaining a sense of physical belonging in the place.

An anonymous Quora user responds to this same question with a similar account of his experience of alienation within the Mission community:

*I'm a tall white guy. I think the locals here would be burning effigies of me in some alternate universe. I'm the symbol of death. I'm the symbol of change.*

*It's not something any person wants to be associated with; it's assigned to me when I walk down the street, when I get on Bart, when I'm at the store.*

*The ire is real; it's palatable. Every long stare. Every quick glance. I'm stealing the local's way of life.*
They're stealing parts of me. Picking me apart like the pigeons that patrol every street and rooftop.

I'll be pecked to death and reborn a native.

I unno is that too serious? What I mean is, white people like me are gentrifying that neighborhood at an unprecedented speed. It ain't good.

Like Jim, he starts off by differentiating himself with “the locals” along the lines of race, and then extends it to a description of how he is viewed by the locals as a symbol of change and gentrification in the area. By highlighting the types of looks that he gets from the locals everywhere he goes, whether it be a “long stare” or “quick glance,” he provides a mirror to Alejandra’s description of the ways that locals are viewed in discriminatory ways by newcomers, thus showing a sense of mutual differentiation that exists between locals and gentrifiers. While he doesn’t mention any attempts to interact and connect with locals on a more personal level, his description of the wary gaze where he feels like he is being “pick[ed] apart” and “pecked to death” points to his lack of integration and disconnect with long-time residents in the area. Thus while he is able to remain in the physical space of the neighborhood and he might belong within a network of closely-connected newcomers in the area (this is not mentioned), he is unable to feel like he belongs within the community of “locals” in the area.

For some other residents, an awareness of their own roles as part of the problem with gentrification leads them to make greater efforts to maintain the culture of the neighborhood as they found it, and thus reestablish their sense of belonging in the neighborhood. For Katherine and her husband, this comes in the form of selling their unit to a professional skateboarder and his sister instead of renting it out at a market value of $4000+, an idea that they felt uncomfortable with. This was their “way of trying to leave the Mission a little bit more like the way we [they] found it” (Interview with Katherine). Katherine’s story is unique because despite
seeing almost all of her friends and neighbors priced out of the Mission, she and her husband were still able to continue living there because of their roles as homeowners. They were able to maintain a sense of belonging in the neighborhood because of their ownership of property, and only eventually moved out because of a necessary relocation for their jobs, not because they were displaced or priced out. Yet their decision to eventually sell their unit to a family that they felt fit in with the culture of the Mission rather than rent it out shows their understanding of their own roles within the neighborhood and their connection with the community. Despite being relatively newer residents in the Mission, they were initially drawn to and felt connected with the local culture in the area. While they wielded more privilege and economic power as homeowners in the area, they also empathized with the experience of seeing the cost of living rise in the neighborhood and not being able to frequent many of the newer businesses in the area. Thus even upon leaving the area, they compromised their roles as residents who were invested in the community.

Chris Tacy is also especially adamant about this issue of mutual understanding amidst community differences, using his blog posts “Don’t Be a Fucking Douchebag” Parts 1, 2, and 3 to reconcile his own sense of belonging within the context of increasing gentrification in the Mission. Recognizing the inconsiderate, disrespectful, and insensitive actions of many tech people in the Mission today, and understanding his own identity as a member of the startup community, Tacy stresses the importance of his efforts to continue interacting with and maintaining a positive relationship with the local community: “As it is, I’ve had to start working hard to dress, look and act like I do not work in tech or startups when I’m out and about in the ‘hood. This way people still smile at me in the bodega, I still get to exchange jokes with folks waiting in line. I get to be treated like a human - not a fucking asshole” (Tacy 2013). This
highlights how much he values the connections that he is able to form with members of the local community despite being considered part of a social and economic group that is extremely different. In a way, it also reveals how the sense of ownership in a neighborhood can shift with increasing gentrification. While Tacy was probably considered a gentrifier in the Mission when he first moved in 20+ years ago, the time he has spent in the area allows him to feel a sense of connection to the area that is much closer to those of other long-time residents rather than new residents with a similar social and economic background (though his experience must still be taken with consideration of the privilege and power that he holds as a higher class white male).

Thus Tacy provides a counter narrative to the story told by the anonymous Quora user that I previously discussed, with an important lesson wrapped up in his final statement. He is “treated like a human – not a fucking” because he recognizes how he might be seen as different from members of the local community, so he makes a concerted effort to not dress, act, and look like other tech workers. The focus here is not so much on appearance, but on his actions, where he actually takes time to interact with, talk to, and laugh with members of the local community despite their differences. As a result, his actions are reciprocated and he is able to feel a sense of belonging in the community— one that is not divided between locals and tech workers, but rather connected through communication and understanding.

Dissolving communities, building new communities

Throughout my thesis, the word “community” has been used to describe the Latino community that has historically made up such a large part of the Mission population, the tech community that has increasingly gentrified the neighborhood starting with the dot-com boom at the end of the 1990’s, and the local neighborhood community that many residents found when
they first moved in, as well as the culture that comes with it. But what does “community” in the Mission really mean to the residents who have lived there for a large part of their lives and to those who have moved in more recently within the past decade? Is there a larger, theoretical “community of the Mission” that we can speak of, or do residents think of communities as more personal groups or networks of people that they might or might not belong in? In this section, I discuss how many residents in the Mission came to understand what “community” means and suggest that the formation of new, stronger communities can serve as a way to reinforce residents’ sense of belonging amidst the changes in the neighborhood.

When asked about the sense of community in the Mission today, many of the residents who were interviewed refer to the erosion of a larger local community. In particular, both Lisa and a young white resident who has lived in the Mission for over nine years pointed to a difference in the sense of community within different parts of the district. While Lisa commented that she thinks the part of the Mission where she lived before moving still has a strong sense of community, she also added, “I wouldn’t say like above Mission has it the same as below Mission” (Interview with Lisa). Similarly, the young white resident who was interviewed at the Mission Pool and Playground on Valencia Street and 19th Street responded that he didn’t think there was a strong sense of community in the Mission, “at least not in this area, maybe more on the east side” (Mission Pool and Playground Q&A 1.3.16). In this way, they map out a geographical divide within the Mission, which also coincides with the levels of gentrification in the neighborhood. Above Mission, or the west side of the Mission District, has been much more heavily gentrified than below Mission, or the east side. While Valencia Street and Dolores Park receive a much larger tourist population, 24th Street still retains a large number of Latino businesses. Thus as a result of gentrification, there doesn’t appear to be an overarching sense of
“community” that exists within the whole district. Instead, it is understood that different communities exist within different parts of the neighborhood along various lines of interest, and each resident’s interpretation of “community” is based on his/her own personal network and connections.

For Alejandra, a discussion of “community” refers to the Latino community that she has become increasingly involved in ever since she first moved into the neighborhood and started talking with her neighbors. Lamenting how many Latino families and businesses have been priced out of the Mission as a result of gentrification, Alejandra also acknowledges how a heightened awareness of the changes in the neighborhood has made it easier for tenants to access assistance to at least fight against evictions. In this way, the greater sense of awareness has also strengthened the community and “made it more resilient” (Interview with Alejandra). In addition, the formation of the Calle 24 business organization and its movement to get a historical denomination, similar to that of Fisherman’s Wharf or North Beach, for 24th Street to be recognized as a Latino business area highlights the unity of this community in fighting for their place within the Mission amidst all of the changes in the area (Interview with Alejandra). For Alejandra and other Mission residents who are dedicated in an effort to preserve the traditional and ethnic culture of the area, participation within the actions of this community allows them to further reinforce their own place within the neighborhood. Thus despite being a relatively new resident in the Mission, Alejandra’s role within this close network allows her maintain a sense of belonging within this group that is considered so integral to the history and culture of the neighborhood.

Similarly, Marcel grounds himself within a larger community of tenants and activists who are part of an anti-displacement coalition in San Francisco. Despite the fact that Marcel says
he doesn’t think there is a strong sense of community in his neighborhood and only mentions personal connections with a few of his neighbors, he is extremely passionate about his involvement in tenants rights organizing and it can all be traced back to his first encounter with these organizations when fighting his own eviction. This was the moment when he found out that he was no longer a “lone ranger”. During our interview, he played on his drums and chanted like he would at every event that he has attended since first being invited to give a speech on his eviction:

What do we want?! Ellis Act out, tenants' rights in! Say what?! Ellis Act out, tenants' rights... what's another one we could say? ...okay, Ellis Act out, seniors in! Ellis Act out, seniors... what's another one? Ellis Act out, disabled in! Ellis Act out, disabled in! What's another one? Ellis Act out, teachers in! Ellis Act out, educators in! Right? (Interview with Marcel)

Ever since he and his neighbors first reached out to the Tenants’ Union for support when they received their eviction notice, Marcel has become involved in many other tenants’ rights groups, including Eviction Free SF, Tenants Together, and the Anti-Eviction Mapping Project. He is proud of his efforts and actions, excitedly showing me all of the newspaper clippings and pictures that document his participation. For Marcel, his sense of belonging is tied to his own personal unit, and he has been able to continue living there largely because of the efforts of the anti-displacement organizing community that he connected himself with, and that helped force the speculator to drop the eviction and thus allow a community land trust to take ownership of the unit. Thus despite not considering himself a part of an immediate neighborhood community, Marcel says that he doesn’t see himself going anywhere and that he will continue to be part of Eviction Free SF until everyone has been granted a space to live in (Interview with Marcel).
As we’ve already seen with both Alejandra and Marcel, residents’ sense of community within the Mission is connected largely with their own personal networks, and Tom’s story is no exception, placing emphasis on the mutually supportive community that he is most involved with. When asked if he thinks that there is a strong sense of community in the Mission, Tom hesitated for a moment and said that he doesn’t really know about what community there is in the Mission, saying that he’s not really in touch with that. However, he then went on to talk about what he perceives to be a very strong community that he helped create. This is the community that is organized around the Free Farm Stand, an urban farming and gardening project that provides low-income people with free local, organic produce every Sunday at Parque Niños Unidos in the Mission. While Tom pointed out how the project originally started from his interest in gardening and desire to make organic food available to everyone and especially those on a tight budget, he stressed that the project is about much more than just passing out food to people. It is about building a community where neighbors can grow food, share it with each other, and encourage others to plant their own gardens as well. Each Sunday is like a community event, where families are able to meet up at the children’s park, get some free produce, and interact with friends.

In his interview, Tom pointed out how this is his way of counteracting the erosion of local community that he has seen result from gentrification:

I think it's very transitory too, like people don't stay in one place a long time. And there's people who have lived here a long time, some of them are getting evicted. So I think it's a new world we're creating. We're not as stable. I mean it's really hard for people to be stable when the rents are so high, you know? I think it's creating a world without that
kind of community. So that's partly what we're doing, is trying to show people the possibilities of community and a neighborhood. (Interview with Tom)

As stable neighborhood communities dissolve and new people move in, it is important to create new communities wherein people can interact with and support each other. Thus while Tom has lived in the Mission since 1970 and he is very much grateful for his rent-controlled unit, his sense of belonging in the neighborhood is most strongly connected to this community that he has created around the All in Common Garden and the Free Farm Stand, connecting his home with his passions and the people around him.

The Free Farm Stand is an example of a neighborhood event that brings in residents from all different backgrounds, reminding them that they are all inherently part of the same local community. When speaking about the effective organization of the group, Tom remarked that he is very happy that the event is run completely through volunteers, many of which are women, including members of both the Spanish-speaking and Chinese community. This highlights how he has been able to create a community that transgresses cultural borders and reminds residents what it means to be part of a “neighborhood community” where not only food, but also knowledge and skills can be shared. By gathering residents from different parts of the area in the same place, the Free Farm Stand also shows how everyone can belong within a shared space regardless of differences. This brings us back to the idea of a new community that is not divided but instead connected through communication and mutual interest, which I introduced at the end of the last section.

While many Mission residents are unable to speak of a strong community that connects everyone in the neighborhood and instead focus on the smaller networks that they find themselves part of, I suggest that there is also value in the mere existence of shared spaces such
as these neighborhood parks where it is possible for residents to interact with one another without their differences getting in the way. As noted during my observations at Parque Niños Unidos on two separate occasions, during both a normal Saturday morning and during a Free Farm Stand event, these interactions can take on the form of children playing on the same structures, parents making small talk with one another while chasing after their kids, seniors with rolling carts chatting with one another after getting fruit, and even a child helping an organizer of the Free Farm Stand call out numbers for people to get in line for produce (Parque Niños Unidos Q&A 1.2.16, Participant Observation of Free Farm Stand 1.10.16). While gentrification has immensely altered the landscape and population of the Mission within the past decade, leading to the dissolution of the idea of a more united local community, perhaps the preservation of free and shared spaces in the area still allows for a wider and more diverse neighborhood community to exist.

**Nostalgia and attachment: belonging through memory**

So as we have seen, new and old residents living in the Mission experience a complicated process of reconciling their identities and negotiating their sense of belonging within the changes in the neighborhood, but what about the residents who have lived in the neighborhood for decades or generations and have since moved out? As the landscape changes and the people change, are they no longer connected with the neighborhood at all and do they no longer have a place in this space that used to be called home? Using anecdotes from interviews with two different residents in the Mission, I suggest that perhaps it is still possible for residents who have since moved out of the neighborhood to maintain a sense of belonging in the area through the power of nostalgia, memory, and attachment.
Case 1: Discolandia, La Palma, and the preservation of memory

During our interview, Alejandra first introduced this idea of nostalgia and memory when she mentioned two specific landmarks that have been preserved in the Mission despite all of the changes in the area: the sign for the vinyl record store Discolandia (See Figure 8) and the sign for the New Mission Theater. According to Alejandra, Discolandia was a store that was extremely beloved by locals during the 1970’s and 1980’s, and which has since been replaced by a restaurant called Pig & Pie. Similarly, the sign for the New Mission Theater has been up since the time when there was a large Irish population in the neighborhood, and has been preserved despite the closing of the theater and its recent reopening by Alamo Drafthouse Cinema.

Figure 9. Discolandia sign outside Pig & Pie restaurant (Winnie Vien)
During our interview, Alejandra spoke on the importance of preserving these cultural symbols in the community as a way of upholding both the history and the memory of the older communities that might have since moved out of the neighborhood:

I actually think it's super nostalgic to just want to keep up the Discolandia sign. I think it's cool, but we might just end up with another tourist attraction right? Or protect the murals, that kind of thing. Okay, so you protect all of that, and then you end up with a decimated Latino community, like you're no longer... does that have value? Does that have value still to the Latino community to come back in? That's... is that a reason to keep it? Might be, because it's a place of belonging. It's an acceptance of a community, history that will not... fall into this amnesia pit of like it never happened. (Interview with Alejandra)

In this discussion, Alejandra raises two important questions that must be taken into consideration in regards to the preservation of these cultural and historical artifacts in the community: (1) Are these symbols still meaningful when they are viewed as yet another tourist attraction? and (2) Do these symbols still have value when the community that they were originally connected to have been increasingly pushed out or no longer exist? To both of these questions, she suggests that yes, it is still important to preserve these landmarks within the Mission because it not only preserves the memory of the community that they were part of, but it also celebrates this history, connecting the past and the present. As a result, this could also be understood as the preservation of a historical space for residents who have moved out of the neighborhood, allowing them to maintain a sense of belonging that transgresses time and place.
Furthermore, when past residents return to the neighborhood and frequent the same businesses that they did before moving away, this is another opportunity for them to relive their connection to the neighborhood. This is the case with La Palma Mexicatessen, a popular shop selling Mexican and Central American food and groceries on 24th Street. According to Alejandra, “I think a lot people who used to live in the Mission traditionally come by and shop here… It sells tortillas and salsa and carnitas, and people come down on Sundays just to get their food there” (Interview with Alejandra). This shows how as long as there are old spaces that are preserved within the neighborhood, it is still possible for ex-residents to be drawn back into the area and experience a sense of belonging based on memories of past encounters, nostalgia, or even just attachment to places that were at one point extremely familiar. This is a sentiment that
is echoed in Lisa’s description of her connection to the Mission now after moving out two years ago.

Case 2: Close re-encounters in the familiar place that used to be home

In the following excerpt, Lisa tells the story of her recent experience back in the Mission:

I actually... yesterday, last night, I went to Asiento, which is on 21st and Bryant. It’s a friends bar and I really like it. It's one of my favorite places in the Mission, but I stopped in Atlas Café... It’s on either Bryant and Florida or 25th, and that was a cafe that I really frequented all the time, went with my dog. It has a really cool back patio, and I went by and was like hmm I haven't been in there in years. I just wanted to see if it's changed. It totally hadn't changed. And it was the same owner who is a person I know. I actually ran into him in Italy one time. And by chance, I had a friend who was in the back with her new baby boy who I hadn't met. And she was sitting with my friend who was my old hairdresser and I was like... I was kind of like... It made me feel really good... (Interview with Lisa)

Lisa’s account shows how despite facing an eviction and eventually choosing to take a buyout and move out of the Mission, she is still able to return to the neighborhood often and visit many of the places that she became familiar with after living in the neighborhood for over twenty years. While Lisa’s ability to frequent many of the bars and restaurants in the neighborhood can be attributed to a certain degree of socioeconomic capital that other lower-income folks might not have, the point here is more so on the ease at which she is able to fit right into the neighborhood and feel at home when she enters the same places that she used to go to and sees old friends and neighbors. In this way, she is still connected to the space because of the experiences that she has had in the area, the people that she knows, and the places that she is so familiar with.

More than anything, Lisa’s sense of belonging in the Mission can be attributed to her experiences and connections to the neighborhood. Despite having a negative impression of the Mission when she first moved into San Francisco and thinking that she would never live there,
the twenty plus years that she stayed in the neighborhood allowed her to become extremely familiar with the area and form a community there. Yet as she thinks back to her experience living in the neighborhood, she decides that she actually doesn’t miss it. She doesn’t miss the harsh living environment that she had to be in, or the “battlefield” that it was. She doesn’t miss the worn-out condition of her old unit.

What she does miss is the “flavor” of what the neighborhood used to be. She misses walking down the street and seeing the familiar faces of the people that she knows. She misses building up a community and getting to know all of her neighbors and the storeowners. While she is still able to return to the neighborhood and enjoy the spaces and businesses that she likes in the area, she is now also much more aware of her place in the neighborhood, as not a resident but someone so familiar with the area. Working in nonprofit organizations for much of her life, witnessing all of the changes in the neighborhood that occurred as a result of gentrification, and now being a tech worker herself, Lisa is especially cognizant of what separates herself from other residents in the area. Yet perhaps because she has such a twisted history living the Mission, there could still be many instances where she experiences a sense of belonging because of the strength of the connection that she has with the changing community.

Thus regardless of whether Mission residents have had positive or negative experiences with gentrification in the neighborhood, and whether they have moved out of the area or continue to remain in their homes, it is evident that their sense of belonging is directly shaped by a combination of factors, including an understanding of their own identity, their positionality within a specific community, and their overall connection with the place.
CHAPTER 5

Theoretical Implications: Understanding the Multiple Dimensions of Change and Community Belonging within the Mission

Drawing from data gathered through interviews with 5 recent and long-time residents of the Mission, short question and answer sessions at two neighborhood kid parks, and online blog and forum posts about residents’ experiences living in the Mission, the last three chapters have detailed the unique processes in which many Mission residents came to live in the neighborhood and the ways that they have negotiated their own identities within different communities in the area amidst all of the changes with gentrification in the area. In this chapter, I return to my overarching question of how residents’ experiences with gentrification have shaped their sense of belonging in the neighborhood, and connect my findings with the existing literature on gentrification and local belonging. I show how the responses of many of the Mission residents that I talked to about their experience with change in the neighborhood at once support and broaden our understanding of existing theories on the effects of gentrification. In connecting gentrification theory with understandings of multiple forms of belonging on the local scale, I suggest that there are multiple processes of meaning making that occur at the same time as residents navigate changes within their local networks and surroundings. Thus because all residents each have their own unique experience with gentrification and change, it is not so clear-cut that gentrification will lead old residents to feel like they no longer belong and new residents to feel like they fit in more, or vice versa.

In line with much of the existing quantitative data on demographic changes in the Mission over the past few decades, many of the interviewed residents discussed either the decline in the Latino community, the loss of families in the neighborhood, or their own
experience with eviction. This supports John Betancur’s (2002) theory that gentrification inherently results in the destruction of community by causing displacement, class conflict, and other similar struggles. While some interviewed residents acknowledged that they have been able to remain in the neighborhood and continue living in the Mission (some because of their successful fight against eviction and others because of their own socioeconomic capital), they also recognized that the “community” is changing, as people who have lived in the neighborhood for many years are displaced and tensions exist between some of the new and long-time residents, especially along the lines of class. When asked about what they liked about the Mission, many residents (even relatively newer residents) mentioned that they liked the way it used to be when they moved in, pointing to the cultural diversity, the families, and the affordability. Thus in the most basic sense, the experiences of Mission residents with gentrification do point to the destruction of community in the process of change, at least the local “community” as what it was when residents first encountered it when moving in.

Yet at the same time, the results of this study also show how gentrification has allowed for the formation of new communities in the Mission, backing up David Harvey’s (2000) argument that gentrification can be a catalyst for the mobilization and organization of people for a social cause amidst changes in the neighborhood. In particular, some interviewed residents suggested that perhaps the increasing gentrification in the Mission also resulted in the growth of community organizations and resources to support residents in their fight against eviction. To expand upon this theory, residents’ discussions of their community group involvement suggest that perhaps even participation in groups that are not directly related to fighting displacement can be beneficial in shaping their sense of belonging while the neighborhood changes around them. While this is not to say that residents are completely at ease with gentrification because of their
participation within a strong community against the change, their new sense of belonging within a community of people equally against the process of gentrification does provide them with a sense of hope amidst all the instability.

Finally, almost all of the residents interviewed and many of the people surveyed at two kid parks in the Mission described a changing landscape in the area that reflected the flow of income and capital into the neighborhood. While not completely proving his point, these testaments to the change in the Mission uphold certain parts of J. P. Byrne’s (2003) neoliberal argument in his essay “Two Cheers for Gentrification” that an influx of more affluent people into the neighborhood would result in them bringing along resources that would boost the economic and political position of the district and bring the low-income urban population out of social isolation. In assessing this argument, it is important to look at what exactly investors and new people moving into the Mission are bringing into the neighborhood.

Discussing the landscape changes in the area, most residents cited the new restaurants, bars, and coffee shops opening in the neighborhood, the streets such as Valencia that have a completely new look to them, and an increased sense of safety in the area. The increasing safety in the area is one clear positive effect of gentrification. Corner lots that have been converted into new businesses, streets that are generally much cleaner and see less gang violence, and parks that are more inviting of families and children—these are all benefits from gentrification that residents can appreciate regardless of how they feel about other effects of the change in the area. This increased safety, coupled with the opening of new businesses in the neighborhood further serve to enhance the image of the district within the city. Yet just how beneficial these changes are for residents in the Mission requires more thought.
Assessing these changes in the Mission, it is evident that there has indeed been an increase of capital and investment in the neighborhood. When J. P. Byrne (2003) conceived of this influx of capital as a benefit of gentrification, he thought of it as an increased spending potential to maintain local businesses in the neighborhood and to open up new businesses that would generate more employment opportunities for residents in the area. While this may be true, I was not able to get data on this particular point from interviewing just residents and no business owners. However, what is also true is that there has indeed been an increase in new local businesses in the Mission. Yet perhaps because of the money entering the Mission, many of the new businesses also reflect the taste and consumption practices of the new people moving in, with higher prices and targeted customers that don’t include older residents with lower spending potentials. For many of the residents interviewed, both new and old, the continued gentrification in the area, even just within the last 5 years, has made it increasingly hard for them to frequent the new places opening up in the Mission.

Furthermore, comments by multiple interviewees and forum posters suggest that there is a process of mutual policing or judgment that occurs on the streets. While many long-time Latino residents are judged for being homeboys/homegirls and are viewed as dangerous within the place that they have known to be home, many newer residents who fit the “gentrifier” mold also point to an internalized gaze and judgment for their assumed positionality in the neighborhood. The descriptions of new and old residents being both extremely aware of their being seen by the other and also lacking in direct communication suggest that gentrification really hasn’t resulted in as much social interaction and tolerance as Caulfield (1994) argued that it would lead to.

Perhaps a point of difference lies in the experience of earlier waves of gentrification in comparison to more recent waves of gentrification. As long-time resident Lisa discussed her
experience with the different stages of gentrification during the 20+ years that she lived in the Mission, she described a group of pioneer gentrifiers who were much more interested in learning about the people who were already in the neighborhood at the time that they moved in, while some of the people moving in more recently appeared to be only interested in homogenizing the area. Thus perhaps Caulfield’s theory on increased social interaction and appreciation for cultural diversity can be applied much more readily to the early stages of gentrification, when pioneer gentrifiers were a minority in the community and thus more invested in finding their place within their new surroundings.

What I hope this study has done is not only provide more empirical support for existing literature on gentrification, but also nuance some of the theories on the effects of gentrification, calling into question the distinctions of each idea as clearly in support of or against the process of gentrification. By providing examples from the experiences of residents from various different backgrounds (both newer residents and long-time residents) to support parts of each theory, I show that every resident in the Mission has a unique experience with the gentrification process that can not necessarily be simplified to his/her stance on whether they support or oppose gentrification efforts in the neighborhood. The results of this study are even more significant in light of the way that the research was set up—where “new” and “old” residents were assumed to have different experiences with and different opinions on gentrification.

Thus I suggest that labels such as “new resident” and “old resident” are not sufficient categorizations for understanding the unique and varied experiences of residents living within a neighborhood that is being gentrified. While some residents who are new to the Mission might be able to enjoy the new changes in the neighborhood, not all who are relatively new might afford the same luxuries. Although increasing gentrification might make it easier for relatively
new residents to feel like they fit in since there are more people of a similar class and experience, these new residents might still feel a sense of estrangement when facing the people who are seen as locals on the streets. Thus while new residents with greater socioeconomic status might indeed experience what Savage, Bagnall and Longhurst (2005) refer to as “elective belonging”, the extent of this sense of belonging might still be bounded by the situations and people that they encounter while on the streets and in the neighborhood.

Similarly, at the same time that some long-time residents might not be able to afford the new places opening up the in the neighborhood, there are also some old-timers who are intrigued and like to try out the new restaurants and coffee shops; and it is still possible for them to appreciate the development and increased safety in the area. Even though some long-time residents might feel like they no longer belong in the Mission as they see neighbors being displaced and feel themselves being judged as dangerous on the streets, they might also be able to forge new alliances and support systems in the face of the change. So perhaps there shouldn’t be categorizations at all, at least within the context of negotiating one’s identity and making sense of the change in one’s environment. This is because each individual has many different parts of his/her identity; and even when people share the same qualities, they don’t necessarily have the same experiences. With this, we see a “subcultural sense of belonging” that has become more fragmented with the onset of gentrification.

It would be a mistake to assume that all long-time residents think that all of the changes resulting from gentrification are bad, and all new residents think that all of the changes from gentrification are good. While there can be general trends pointing in this direction based on stereotypical categorizations of residents, their socio-economic capital, and thus their ability to enjoy the effects of gentrification, each resident still has a unique experience with the change that
is largely shaped by his/her personal relationships, social groups, and connections to the neighborhood. Thus what can be concluded is that one’s experience with change in the Mission can occur on multiple dimensions, including a change in both the physical landscape and in one’s perception of his/her own position within a changing neighborhood.

Finally, this is not to say that the discussions on the effects of gentrification and the political debates on policies that favor one side or the other are not important, because they very much are. While I have spent much of this paper highlighting the importance of recognizing the differences in residents’ experiences with gentrification beyond their positionality in the gentrification debates, these experiences are still more or less marked by patterns of privilege and power along the lines of race, class, and gender. Moreover, an understanding of the patterns that can be gathered from residents’ experiences is even more important in drawing out the issues that are most important within policy considerations for mixed-income housing, business development, historical preservation, and community building.
CONCLUSION

At the start of this study, there was an underlying assumption that there is a cohesive “Mission community” based on place. This understanding of community operates under the belief that residents will feel like they are part of the community just from physically living in that place for a long period of them. Thus when the process of gentrification is added to the equation, there is the assumption that new residents will want to fit into the existing community; and if the differences are too wide, there will be two opposing communities—the newcomers and the long-time residents. However, what this study has shown is that there actually isn’t one big “community” that unifies all of the residents in the Mission, but rather that people can belong in many different communities in the neighborhood. These different co-existing communities can be identified as: (1) racial/ethnic communities, (2) communities united under a specific cause or mission, and (3) one’s personal networks, including neighbors, friends, and colleagues. Participation in one or more of these communities can be a major force in shaping one’s sense of belonging within the neighborhood as a whole.

While ethnic groups and social activist groups have the potential to bring people together through shared lived experiences, perhaps the type of community that is most powerful in grounding residents within the Mission is their own personal network. By having neighbors, friends, and colleagues who live together within the same area, residents are able to feel a connection to the place from not only residing there, but also having this connection grounded by specific shared experiences and memories. Since these are the most personal connections that residents can have within a place, they provide a supportive network that allow residents to call the place their community, perhaps even after they no longer live there. Furthermore, belonging within a personal network or community is even more powerful because it can also bring
together people from different backgrounds, regardless of whether they are new residents or long-time residents. Thus instead of conceiving of new and old residents as competing with each other for belonging within the Mission, perhaps it is more useful to see it as a process where each individual resident strives to find his/her own place within the area and amidst the changes in the neighborhood.

Coming out of this study, it is important to distinguish the difference between residents’ experiences with gentrification and their political position in favor or against the change in the neighborhood. When discussing the politics on the gentrification debate, categories can certainly be useful, especially in bringing groups of people of shared experiences, culture, or class, together for a specific cause. However, within the discussion of one’s own personal experiences with change, it is not as easy to group people together because each resident is affected by gentrification in his/her own way, depending on his/her living situation and personal relationships.

A study of residents’ experiences with change in the neighborhood is extremely useful because it allows us to see which aspects of gentrification most directly affect the daily lives of residents and how they see themselves fitting in within the neighborhood. Within my research, I identified residents’ living situation, their personal connections, and level of communication with other residents in the Mission as the most constructive in helping them feel like they are part of a community and belong in the Mission. Thus applying these findings to the politics of gentrification, it suggests that while it is still possible for urban development to occur and since there appears to be no stop to this, situations to consider might be ways to alleviate the problem of forced evictions, displacement, and the need for more mixed-income housing. On the part of residents who experience these changes on a day-to-day basis, it also points to the importance of
increased communication and understanding between long-time residents and new people moving in. With this, I suggest that a deeper analysis of residents’ experiences with gentrification can also be extremely useful in a larger political context.

At the same time, I am also well aware that my study has been limited by time; and 5 interviews, 4 participant observation sessions (2 with short Q&A), 3 blog posts, and responses from 3 Quora forums are not enough to represent the experiences of all residents experiencing the changes of gentrification within the Mission. Since I only had 4 weeks with I was back in the Bay Area during winter break to gather all of this data, I also didn’t have the opportunity to do participant observations at large community events such as Carnaval that are such a big part of the Mission culture and tradition. Yet within the limited time frame that I had, I was still able to speak to and hear the stories of an incredibly diverse group of individuals, including long-time residents, relatively new residents, past residents, activists, Latinx, Asians, Whites, seniors, middle-age individuals, and young professionals.

Further research would involve interviews with an even larger group of individuals of different backgrounds living in the Mission and observations. While doing my ethnographic research in the Mission, I thankfully received the support of the Anti-Eviction Mapping Project, which helped me identify residents to interview for my project. In future research, the A(E)MP also has over 100 of their own oral history interviews with current or past residents in San Francisco (many from the Mission), telling the story of their experience living in the city, seeing the changes in the area, and either being displaced themselves or seeing their neighbors forced out, which can be analyzed for themes and patterns in relation to identity, community, and belonging.
It would also be extremely productive to collect more interviews with: (1) residents who might typically be silent within the gentrification debates, such as the Asian community that makes up much of the ownership of local grocery stores and “trading companies” in the Mission, and (2) tech workers or other young people living in the new hacker hostels within the Mission. The collection of more interviews with a more diverse group of residents in the Mission would not only allow us to get a greater sense of the array of experiences of people with change, but it would also be useful in the identification of more themes for analysis, especially in relation to the idea of place as home, personal networks as supportive communities, and meaningful connections within the neighborhood.

In addition to conducting participant observations at more large community events such as Carnaval, a significant finding from this study regarding how communities can inhabit both space and time, points to how more research can be conducted at landmark local places within the community. Alejandra first introduced this idea at the end of our interview when she discusses the preservation of memory and nostalgia, suggesting how it might be interesting to talk to people who might have moved out of the Mission but still go back to specific stores such as La Palma Mexicatessen and La Victoria Mexican Bakery and Café on 24th Street. Continuous surveys and studies at locations like these that have remained in the neighborhood for decades can provide further insight on how it might be possible for communities to be preserved even amidst all the changes that come with gentrification. What does this preservation of neighborhood landmarks and the creation of a cultural district mean for the people living in the Mission and for the people who have moved out? Does it also have meaning for the people who are continuously drawn to and elect to move into the neighborhood?

23 Lining Mission Street are many Chinese stores with storefronts named as “trading companies”. Most of these stores are like small gift shops that sell a wide range of home goods and clothing, such as bowls, suitcases, socks, t-shirts, etc.
To conclude, I reinforce that idea that residents’ experiences and stories are meaningful in highlighting what exactly is most important when thinking about gentrification, urban development, and change within a neighborhood like the Mission. Understanding the ways that residents make sense of the changes and negotiate their sense of belonging in the neighborhood can be extremely useful within political discussions and community efforts to continue developing the neighborhood. At the end of all this, residents’ experiences of gentrification and their sense of belonging in the Mission can be connected back to one main idea: their communication with one another. While it is inevitable that the gentrification will continue and change will keep occurring within the Mission, communication and personal connections with one another are what allow residents to continue thinking of the place as home, to feel like there is a supportive network for them, whether they continue to live there or whether they have moved out.
## APPENDIX

### Data on Residents from Formal Interviews

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Race</th>
<th>Class/Education/Occupation</th>
<th>Connection to Mission</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alejandra</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Latinx</td>
<td>Law degree from Stanford; legal consultant in U.S. and Mexico, community advocate, activist, and author</td>
<td>Current resident (2008-present), Rent-controlled unit, Successfully fought off eviction in 2015</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tom</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Founder of the Free Farm Stand and takes care of the All in Common Garden</td>
<td>Current resident (1970-present), Rent-controlled unit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marcel</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>SF City College, SF State University; special ed teacher with SF Unified School District; dance and music teacher at local community organizations, tenants’ rights activist</td>
<td>Current resident (1977-present) in Duboce Triangle, on edge of Mission, Rent-controlled unit, Successfully fought off eviction in 2014</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lisa</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Ithaca College, Sociology major, Social Work minor; mainly worked in nonprofits throughout life, currently works at Salesforce after move to Emeryville</td>
<td>Past resident (25 years) in rent-controlled unit, Accepted buyout and moved to Emeryville in 2013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Katherine</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Both her and husband-postdocs at UCSF, currently Assistant Professor at Texas A&amp;M Health Science Center</td>
<td>Past resident (2009-2015), Owned unit through tenancy-in-common option, Sold unit to skateboarder and sister in 2015</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Data on People Interviewed at Parque Niños Unidos During Short Q&A Sessions (1/2/16)

These were merely short Q&A sessions with people at a local kid’s park. All questions and answers were anonymous and no official data on the individuals was collected. The following information is based mainly on observations and information said during the course of our talk.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Race</th>
<th>Alone or With Kids</th>
<th>Class/Education/Occupation</th>
<th>Connection to Mission</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>With kid</td>
<td>Used to work as a director of the rec center at Parque Niños Unidos</td>
<td>Lived for 5 years in Outer Mission; likes how it used to be more affordable, diversity, likes new restaurants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>With kid</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>Has lived in Mission for 3 years, partner has lived there for 10 years; likes how it is family oriented, partner doesn’t like the change- used to be affordable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>With kids</td>
<td>Has laptop out at the park, owns condo in the Mission</td>
<td>Has lived in the Mission for 5 years, likes diversity- ethnic and socioeconomic, walkability-close to parks and restaurants, “gentrification is great!” Improved price of unit and likes new coffeeshops</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>With wife and kid</td>
<td>Unknown, mentions can’t afford to live in Mission</td>
<td>Doesn’t live in Mission, used to live on 30th and Mission, remembers when park was built in 1997, would love to be close to Mission but can’t afford to live there</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Latinx</td>
<td>With kid</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>Doesn’t live in Mission, grew up in Oakland but brother and parts live here, thinks it is more calm now-better- used to</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>Race</td>
<td>Relationship</td>
<td>Other Details</td>
<td>Comments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------</td>
<td>------</td>
<td>--------------</td>
<td>---------------</td>
<td>----------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>With kid Nanny</td>
<td>says food is great—eating out, rarely ever cooks</td>
<td>Has lived in Mission for 7 months, is a nanny and was tired of commute</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Latinx</td>
<td>With female and kid</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>Has lived in Mission for 10 years; likes how it has everything—neighbors, stores; now stores are a little bit expensive; older people moving out because can’t pay mortgage, maybe I will be the next one</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>With male and kid</td>
<td>Says they have socioeconomic capital to enjoy gentrification</td>
<td>Doesn’t live in Mission, lives in Potrero Hill and just stopped by because saw park out of the car</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>With kids</td>
<td>Unknown, says he has travelled all over the world</td>
<td>Lives in Bernal Heights now, used to love in Mission for 3 years; kids used to go to co-op preschool here so missed this park, says that Mission has always been a place for new people; socioeconomically diverse but hard to have middle class, cultural tension, dichotomy of rich and poor; rather see same people that same buildings in the Mission; will need to build more housing; says tech is like just another gold rush in the Mission</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Data on People Interviewed at Mission Pool and Playground During Short Q&A Sessions (1/3/16)

These were merely short Q&A sessions with people at a local kid’s park. All questions and answers were anonymous and no official data on the individuals was collected. The following information is based mainly on observations and information said during the course of our talk.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Race</th>
<th>Alone or With Kids</th>
<th>Class/Education/Occupation</th>
<th>Connection to Mission</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>With 2 kids</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>Doesn’t live in Mission, lives in Bernal Heights; kids used to play soccer in this field so here sometimes; thinks cities are dynamic and changing all the time—doesn’t have a strong opinion and it doesn’t affect her</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Alone</td>
<td>Unknown, but says he doesn’t really use the new restaurants, bars, etc. because rents are expensive and those places are probably expensive; says he is white and a man, but he doesn’t have a job that pays that much—“like I don’t work in tech”</td>
<td>Lived in Mission for 9+ years; likes how it is central, close to restaurants and bars; not against change but just this kind of change; doesn’t think there is a sense of community, at least in this area</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>Alone</td>
<td>Currently in business school, want to be corporate exec; people tell me, “You can’t be that guy talking about it and then doing it [gentrification]. Pot calling kettle black.” Says then he thinks he would rather move to Oakland, but it is happening there too.</td>
<td>Doesn’t live in Mission but goes there often because wants to buy a house there; likes the Hispanic community that he feels connected to—vibrant, alive, and family oriented; currently lives in Nob Hill; doesn’t like real estate and the way it forces people out; originally from New Orleans which experienced something similar in</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Data on Authors/Contributors to Online Blog and Quora Forum Posts

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sources</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Race</th>
<th>Class/Education/Occupation</th>
<th>Connection to Mission</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Christacy. blogspot.com</td>
<td>Chris Tacy</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>“just your average entrepreneur, ex-chef, ex-corporate exec, consultant, ex-barista, interactive/digital strategy, design, technology business, agency account kind of guy”</td>
<td>Mission resident since 1992</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quora</td>
<td>Leena Prasad</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>Journalism M.A. from Stanford, Computer Science B.S. from Tulane University, author of book about art personality of Mission District</td>
<td>Lived in Mission from 2003-2013 and still visits often; didn’t belong to one homogenous socio-economic “community”-diverse ethnically and socio-economically; thinks that changes affect everyone there but impacts are complex and depend on one’s social and financial resources; sad about erosion of artistic soul of Mission and seeing people kicked out, but thinks soul of the area is still in tact</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quora</td>
<td>Jim Nguyen</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>“yet another hacker in”</td>
<td>Lives in the</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quora</td>
<td>Anonymous</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>Lives in Mission, identifies himself as symbol of change in Mission, discusses the gaze that he receives on the streets</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mission, doesn’t think he gets many glances, thinks Mission is many things, including gigantic gap between rich and poor</td>
<td>the city”</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


